JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
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How sustainable fast fashion and body inclusivity are shaped by class affiliation

A multimodal critical discourse analysis of class and health discourses in H&M's communication

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates how body positivity and sustainability are discursively constructed by fast fashion brands. The brand chosen as a case study is H&M, as it describes itself as being both environmentally and socially involved. Yet, despite H&M's claims, during our preliminary research we were able to detect the lack of accessibility of sustainable collections to plus size customers. In this essay, we analyze how H&M communicates body inclusivity in its sustainability reports, website, and YouTube campaigns promoting conscious lines. Drawing on theories of representation, biopolitics, and post-feminism, we sought to critically analyze the previously mentioned material through a multimodal critical analysis. The results show how H&M discursively constructs health communication in different ways depending on which clothing line the brand is promoting and to which consumers it is being advertised. Class discourses were recognized, leading to exclusive access to sustainable clothing for higher income shoppers. We believe this work is relevant to opening up the discussion about democratization and making sustainable items fully accessible to everyone.

Keywords: sustainable fashion, body positivity, body inclusivity, H&M, multimodal critical discourse analysis, health communication, class discourse analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Writing thesis in pair *1*

Introduction *2*

Aim & Research question *4*

Literature Review *5*

Theory *9*

Methods and Material *13*

Analysis *18*

Discussion *27*

Conclusion *31*

TABLE OF PICTURES

Picture 1 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2017, Inclusivity and Diversity chapter *34*
Picture 2 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2018, Inclusivity & Diversity chapter *34*
Picture 3 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2019, Inclusivity & Diversity chapter, "My body, My image" campaign *35*
Picture 4 – H&M website environmental and social sustainability page *35*
Picture 5 – H&M "Let's be for All" website page *36*
Picture 6 – H&M YouTube campaign 2019 "Conscious Collection: Dress for a sustainable future" . *37*
Picture 7 – H&M YouTube campaign 2019 "Conscious Collection: Dress for a sustainable future" . *37*
Picture 8 – H&M YouTube campaign 2021 "Conscious Points" *38*
Picture 9 – H&M YouTube campaign "Let's change. In every detail." *38*
Picture 10 – H&M YouTube campaign 2016 "She's a Lady" *39*
Picture 11 – H&M YouTube campaign 2016 "She's a Lady" *39*

Writing thesis in pair

The thesis work was evenly divided between the authors. The aim and research questions were formulated together after conducting together the preliminary research collecteing our ideas and objectives.
Once the objective of the thesis were defined, we researched relevant literature separately and discussed it together to give each other feedback.
Theories were chosen together with the help and guidance of our supervisor as well as the method chosen for the analysis.

The whole analysis and discussion process were conducted together to have a broader perspective on the topic, confronting and discussing our outcomes.
During the whole process we made sure to split the work evenly but always checking and improving each other's work. We finally critically discussed our outcomes in order to create a relevant conclusion and outline the further purposes of the thesis.

Introduction

Fast fashion, a segment of fashion industry (Neumann, Martinez & Martinez, 2020, p. 5), is characterised by quick response, frequent change of supply, affordable fashion design and as a result of it a short life cycle and excessive consumption followed by a disposal of textile before the end of this cycle (Muthu, 2019, p. 2). This type of production leads to a constant turnover of garments at a very low price, which provides considerable profits for the fashion industry (Muthu, 2019, p.2), but has a very negative environmental and social impact (Muthu, 2019, p.2).

When it comes to the latter, the social aspect of sustainability in fashion is usually associated and identified with inclusivity and body image. Oftentimes, the industry neglects and marginalizes plus sized consumers. Garments designed for plus-size bodies have historically been seen as less fashionable or as "designed to cover up and hide the body" (Peters, 2014, p.48), therefore supporting and promoting a standardized idea of what is beautiful and making plus-size bodies not suitable to be publicly displayed (Peters, 2014, p.48). Body positivity movement aims to change the definition of beauty through the promotion of acceptance of all body types and sizes (Cohen et. Al, 2020, p.4). In the context of western countries, the idea that social change can be achieved through consumerism is growing and appealing (Luck, 2016 p.1). Oftentimes, body positivity is serving marketing and advertising to help in selling products whose values are actually opposite to body positivity messages (Luck, 2016 p.1). For example, Luck points out to the incompatibility of marketing and the body positivity movement (Luck, 2016 pp. 2-4). Advertisement campaigns oftentimes relate and refer to body positivity: these campaigns should serve to empower women by telling them that they are *"*beautiful, sexy, and more than their appearance*"* (Luck, 2016 p. 6), but meanwhile they are also telling them that in some ways they still need the product in question. Selling is still the final goal and for this reason it is hard to think of marketing as a valid medium to enact social change. V. E. Drake explains that there is a correlation between the offensive perception of some female role representation in advertising and the purchase intentions for that product, linking how

stereotypes can have a negative impact on a company's profitability (Drake, 2017, p.593). Considered the issues over mentioned on the intersection of body positivity and sustainability, this thesis is built.

Sustainability is composed of three intersected aspects: the environmental, the social and the economic (The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, p.5). What we aim to analyze is in fact how fashion brands promote and discursively construct sustainability, and which are the social and economic elements that influence the process. For instance, we will discuss the discourses regarding what health is in the context of fast fashion, which will allow us to get some understanding of the construction of brands sustainability strategy.

The body positive movement for instance can be seen as socially sustainable because of the positive psychological impact it brings to consumers, especially women, helping them to face problems with their body image (Papadopoulou et al., 2019, p. 16). The purpose of the movement is to, eventually, achieve no discrimination in describing *"*some body types as plus-size, 'curvy' or 'straight', rather there will be 'beautiful unique bodies*'"* (Papadopoulou et al., 2019, p. 15). Body positivity on social media uses the promotion of diverse body sizes and looks as a challenge to the traditional standards of beauty (Lazuka et al., 2020, p.85) and it has become very popular especially on Instagram, which is a very visual and picture-based social network (Cohen et al., 2019 p. 70). On the other hand, environmental sustainability has become increasingly important for fashion brands due to consumers' growing awareness of the topic (Shen, 2014, p.5). Due to fashion industry impacts on the environment, the request to minimize this pollution comes also from consumers (Shen, 2014, pp.6-7) fashion consumers' perspective, consumers are growing to have social and environmental awareness and a result, for brands, sustainability has become a way to promote their social and environmental efforts in order be competitive in the market (Shen, 2014, p.4-6).

Many big companies have responded by developing sustainable clothing lines and initiating sustainable communication strategies, including the Swedish brand Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) that promotes sustainable clothing lines as well as social inclusivity. According to H&M sustainability report, they stated that it's a current goal to achieve circular fashion (H&M Group, 2017); after a website analysis we although noticed that only around 160 sustainable

garments appear to be available for plus size women on H&M's website, not delivering the promise for inclusivity and environmental sustainability before mentioned. This thesis, aims to investigate what are the reasons behind these limited options for plus size fashion. The lack for plus size women of sufficient sustainable choices might hide intrinsic class motivations, suggesting different discourses based on size. Thus, from a critical perspective, it is fair to investigate what are the reasons behind limited accessibility to sustainable lines for plus size.

By analyzing H&M's sustainability reports, its website and YouTube advertising campaigns (mainly the *Conscious Collection 2019* campaign*)*, we want to show the two different approaches that are perceived in H&M strategy: encouraging the middle/upper class audience to live an active and sustainable lifestyle and promoting body-inclusive and positive communication for plus sizes audiences. The first approach is used to promote the conscious and more expensive line, while the latter belongs to the communication of the unsustainable and therefore cheaper clothing line. For this reason, the messages constructed to promote health seem to be different from target to target. When health is communicated with sustainable products and lifestyles, in fact, it seems to be linked to eating and exercise habits. In contrast, when considering body positivity messages, being healthy is most often represented from the perspective of psychological well-being. We want to also investigate how health is discursively constructed depending on the context, product and target audience.

Aim & Research question

This thesis has the objective of analyzing the discourses around body positivity and sustainable clothing. There is a knowledge gap in literature regarding the discursive meanings behind communication of body inclusivity and sustainability issues by fast fashion brands. Specifically, H&M has been chosen as the analytical case study because it positions itself as one of the leading companies in the field of social and environmental sustainability. In fact, H&M claims of both being engaged in the quality and sourcing of their materials, as well as promoting equality and inclusivity. However, during a preliminary look at the website's offerings, we found contradictions. Despite the company's efforts in promotion and advertisement, the H&M's conscious line, which is advertised to be sustainably sourced, is not

fully accessible to plus size customers, offering only 162 plus size garments for this segment of clients. Considering body positivity as the social issue taken into consideration, we aim to analyze how discourses regarding it are constructed in relation to sustainable clothing in H&M's advertisement campaigns and on the website. What we aim to explore with our thesis are the reasons behind H&M's choice to make sustainable clothing accessible mainly to specific segments of its customers.

Through the critical analysis of the campaign "*Conscious Collection (2019)*" uploaded by H&M YouTube channel on April 9th 2019 and with the support of other YouTube campaigns and the "plus size" and "sustainability" pages on the company's website and on the H&M group sustainability reports, discourses related to class can be brought to light. In the context of sustainability and inclusivity of the body, health messages also play an important part of the discourses. What can be seen through an examination of the reports, website and advertising campaigns, in fact, is that the angle from which health is defined and approached is also linked to class discourses.

Through the use of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, our goal is to delineate the class ideologies and representation of power that explain discourses behind the accessibility of sustainable garments lines only to a certain type of bodies, with associated communication strategies aimed at promoting healthy and active lifestyles; similarly, body positivity messages are associated to more accessible clothing lines in term of price. Furthermore, from the messages promoted through a sustainable and inclusive body communication strategy, an important element of inquiry will focus on delineating how health is discursively constructed and adopted in relation to target audiences. Therefore, the research questions of this thesis are:

- *How does H&M discursively construct body positivity and sustainability in its advertising campaigns and how are these messages directed at consumers using class discourse?*
- *How do these discourses also influence the construction of health discourses relative to the target audience?*

Literature Review

Sustainable development and inclusivity

Sustainability in the context of fast fashion retailers is constantly questioned and challenged, but the demand for sustainable clothing is rapidly increasing, and internationally known brands such as H&M and Zara have already responded and developed their own sustainable fashion collections. Neumann, Martinez, and Martinez's (2020) publication outlines that "sustainability must be integrated across mass market brands, as these brands reach a wider audience than luxury brands" (Neumann, Martinez & Martinez, 2020, p. 5). In support of this notion, Professor Niinimaki highlights (2015) that large fast fashion companies hold the most power to bring sustainability into industry values and corresponding business behaviors (Niinimaki, 2015, p. 3). However, the authenticity of these types of companies' sustainability efforts is often questioned by the public, especially due to the fast-paced nature of their supply chains. In order to gain customer trust, companies must develop honest Corporate Social Responsibility strategies, otherwise they end up greenwashing (Niinimaki, 2015, p. 3).

Corporate Social Responsibility is the response of industry and business to sustainable development. Corporations and brands have obligations towards society that go beyond profit (Kent & Taylor, 2015, p.61) and not making it at the expense of society and the environment (Zhang et al., 2018, p.8).

Social capital can be considered as the “social relationships that involve the exchange of resources and benefits to individuals and societies” (Kent & Taylor, 2015, p.61). Social responsibility includes a large variety of goals such as issue management, minimization of internal harm or simply efforts to make society actually a better place (Kent & Taylor, 2015, p.62).

Greenwashing, social sustainability and the “means-end” theory

Greenwashing is used to promote sustainable benefits instead of really investing into meaningful projects that can reduce the environmental impact. This practice is used by industrial companies such as the ones specialized in chemicals or automotive in order to promote and sell their products as eco-friendly (Pimonenko et al., 2020, p. 3). Even though greenwashing usually covers ecological aspects of businesses such as levels of pollution, material choices and natural sources employment, there is also a social aspect to this practice, which usually involves the theme of workers exploitation in order to produce garments. Means-end approach affirms that consumers use means to achieve ends, being in this case product

(means) to achieve states of being (ends) (Gutman 1982, p.62). This theory proposes an attributes/consequences process claiming that consumers, in order to achieve values and results (being in this case part of the sustainable development process), use their preferences on products (they choose garments because they are sustainable) based on the psychological benefits they will have (motivations, consequences, in this case gratification of helping to build a sustainable world) (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988, pp. 11-32).

Sustainable fashion and body positivity

Sustainable fashion implies ethics, durability and reuse of products. It refers to the set of attempts to highlight and then correct the injustices perceived in the fashion industry; to name a few, animal cruelty, environmental damage and exploitation of workers (Shen, 2014 p. 6238). The fashion industry is in fact one of the larger polluting industries: it is enough to think that it takes eleven tanks full of water to produce a cotton t-shirt (H&M Sustainability Report 2015, p.18). In order to facilitate the growth of sustainable fashion, is important to change the attitude of consumers and encourage them to buy high quality garments more seldomly, to ensure a longer life cycle to items and finally to facilitate a type of production that doesn't exploit human and environmental resources in order to speed up the production (Jung et al., 2014 pp.512-514). In the past decade companies have started to realize the importance of ethical conduct in the fashion industry: fast, profitable fashion in fact, also raises lots of ethical issues.

Fast fashion is a "fast-response system that encourages disposability" (Joy et al., 2012, p.277). The fashion industry cycle - from the catwalk to the consumer - has been reduced to now just weeks, while before it took six month or more to be completed*"* (Joy et al., 2012, p.276). Fast fashion has been called "McFashion," because of the immediate sense of gratification that it provides to the clients (Joy et al., 2012, p.276). More and more consumers are now disappointed or cynical about this careless kind of consumption and are aware that individual consumption raises the levels of business production, creating a vicious cycle that is hard to stop (Joy et al., 2012, p.277). This is the reason why it is important for every consumer to have access to sustainable (or more sustainable) garments in order to reduce and stop the polluting logic of fast fashion.

In recent years, fashion brands have started to try and meet other social requirements in order to be fair and sustainable, one of these being inclusivity. Although consumer activism has led to some openness in market offerings, discrimination and exclusion caused by body size and

race are endemic processes in the fashion industry and its media (Lewis, 2019, p. 243). Specifically, when it comes to body size, fashion promotes excessively an ideal of thinness that often leads from a very young age to body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, eating disorders, mood swings and even depression (Christel, 2018 p. 45). According to the objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, pp.173-176) women are encouraged to self-objectify themselves when existing in a society that sexually objectifies the female body. By self-objectification it is intended the view of the self as objects that are evaluated by peers and other actors in society by their appearance, leading to several psychological consequences like eating disorders, body and appearance anxiety (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, pp.173-176). A response is the body positivity movement that is now largely spread on social media. The body positivity movement emerged in the 1960s as the "fat acceptance" movement together with other identitarian movements. According to scholar Charlotte Cooper (2016), it is possible to talk about body positive movement only with the advent of the internet; in fact, it emerged from other different movements that characterized the previous decades, such as women's liberation movement in the Seventies and the "Black is beautiful" movement that promoted inclusivity and positive body image for black people (Darwin & Miller, 2020, pp. 3,4).

Lastly, a 2016 study conducted by Han et al., based on Heider's balance theory explains the importance of inclusivity online to promote sustainable fashion practices. Heider's theory, in fact, states that "a state of psychological imbalance causes the attitude–behavior gap between sustainable fashion and sustainable fashion products consumption behaviors" (Han et al., 2016 p. 163).

Han's study demonstrates that the development of consumer-centered online experiences helps to achieve a positive psychological attitude in relation to the attitude-behavior gap between sustainability concerns and sustainable fashion practice behaviors (SFPC). For this reason, we believe it is important to have inclusive consumer-centered experiences when it comes to sustainable online fashion.

An important finding that emerges from analyzing the previous research is that there is a lack of studies regarding the body inclusivity in sustainable fashion, and what this division between them means. This knowledge gap is relevant because different communication strategies involve different target groups with different hidden discursive meanings.

Theory

Representation Theory

Representation theory describes the process of meaning-making in people's minds. Stuart Hall describes representation as the principle that "links meaning and language to culture" (Stuart, 1997, p. 1), depicting this process “system of representation” and portraying it in two stages. These two systems consist, first, of mental representation and then of language. What is significant to note is that systems of representation are believed to be deeply intertwined with the concept of culture. In fact, according to the theory, mental representations among people of the same culture lead to the creation of a shared interpretation of the world. This shared interpretation subsequently results in the formation of “cultural concept maps”, which means that people with similar cultural backgrounds decode and communicate objects, events, and people in similar ways (Stuart, 1997, p. 4).

At this point, the second system of representation – language – comes into play to translate these cultural maps into common meanings. Here, it is necessary to clarify that the representation theory identifies as language any word, image, and sound able to carry meaning, also calling these elements “signs” (Stuart, 1997, p.5). In fact, as Stuart Hall states, "any sound, word, image, or object that functions as a sign and is organized with other signs in a system capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, a language" (Stuart, 1997, p.5). This theoretical framework of meaning creation is relevant for us in order to identify the meanings behind H&M's written/spoken and visual content, called *indexical signs* and *iconic signs* respectively.

Moreover, one of the most relevant approaches to representation theory consists of the constructionist one. This approach focuses on the social aspect of languages, stating that "things do not mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems - concepts and signs" (Stuart, 1997, p. 11). In this sense, the process of constructing meaning is seen as a combination of the cultural and social spheres. The relevance of this approach lies in the fact that when individuals are exposed to a concept, the meaning is given to it by cultural systems. In the words of Hall, “constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make

the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Stuart, 1997, p. 11).

The theoretical background provided by representation theory is relevant to the thesis since we aim to dissect the meanings behind the indexical and iconic signs proposed by H&M. Indeed, this theory provides us with the theoretical framework to understand the underlying meanings behind communication processes. From the lesson learned from representation theory, in fact, advertising content, as part of a brand conversation, is a bearer of meaning. The idea that significations are shaped by cultural aspects is also relevant for us to study how H&M advertises its products to Western audiences.

Post-feminism

The fourth wave of feminism, or post-feminism, is very complex and divided within itself. The body positive movement is considered being part and expression of this wave of feminism developed in the 2010s thanks to the digital expansion.

Gill affirms that post-feminism is most of all a cultural phenomenon which discourses are characterized by a contradictory nature that includes in it both feminist and anti-feminist themes (Gill, 2003, p.101). In fact, post-feminism incorporates both feminism and neoliberal views. For this reason, scholars argue that in this way, feminism will lose its meaning and become vulnerable to patriarchal manipulation (Kinser, 2004, pp.124-153). If post-feminism has been defined as a backlash against feminism before, McRobbie (2009) defines post-feminism as a new kind of anti-feminism. The scholar believes that pop culture turned feminism into "something unpalatable and non-transmissible, a social movement of which there is little likelihood of it being revived or renewed" (McRobbie, 2009 p.150).

Post-feminism is been criticized for being apolitical and for implying that feminist action is not needed anymore since women – arguably – have access to employment education and public functions (Aronson, 2003, p. 904). Post-feminism has been defined as part of the consumer culture and that women's perception of being empowered "have been commodified in the marketing of goods" (McRobbie, 2008, pp. 539-542). McRobbie emphasizes the lacking of critical consciousness that post feminism logics have brought into young women, claiming that women empowerment is now often associated with purchases and economic power accelerating consumerism and neglecting the political sphere of feminism (McRobbie, 2008, pp. 539-542) "(…) to ignore the force field within which these cultural forms circulate is to

abandon the ethical and the political underpinning of feminist media and cultural studies scholarship" (McRobbie, 2008, p.544).

Post-feminism becomes for this reason interconnected to neoliberalism and consumerism (Evans and Riley, 2013, p.270). McRobbie takes distance from other feminist scholars that see as positive the increasing focus of popular culture on young girls, claiming that this new "popular feminism" (McRobbie, 2008, p.532) has the effect of dismantling feminism (McRobbie, 2008, p.532). Consumerism culture adopts the interests and needs of young women, acquiring the power to speak on their behalf and for that creates the idea that feminist struggle has no longer the need to be involved in the political dialogue (McRobbie, 2008, pp.532-533). McRobbie explores the media representation of women that incarnates post-feminism's consumeristic aspects and argues that are mostly white, rich, skinny and heterosexual (McRobbie, 2008, p.540). This is interesting if considering that the body positivity movement is considered an expression of feminism, developed as a reaction to media standards promoting unrealistic body and figure ideals (Cohen et al., 2020, p.2-3). Moreover, Darwin and Miller (2020) analyzed online articles on body positivism and figured out there are 4 waves of it: Mainstream Body Positivity, Fat Positivity=Body Positivity, Radical body positivity and Body Neutrality, picturing a very divided movement within itself. This study shows a deep division within the Body Positivity movement, in which the mainstream wave is accused of lacking in inclusivity and of helping a mediatic view of what an "imperfect body" should look like, still excluding a lot of people (Darwin and Miller, 2020, p.8).

These considerations show how consumerism, body positivity, and the post-feminist movement are deeply connected and intertwined, and how consumerism and media representation are seen as a form of liberation and recognition by younger generations.

Biopolitics

Biopolitics consists in providing a theoretical framework capable of making sense of the phenomena related to the growing implications between politics and human life, understood from a purely biological perspective (Esposito, 2012, p. 69). Political actions have always been related to life and, reciprocally, life has always constituted the reference framework of socio-political dynamics. However, as Roberto Esposito states (2012), never before the contemporary age was human life breaking into the political agenda with the force it holds now (Esposito,

2012, p. 70). In the 21st century, in fact, we have entered what Esposito calls *second modernity*, where the conservation and preservation of life has never been a higher priority than it is today (Esposito, 2012, p. 69). In this context, “politics itself begins to be shaped according to biological and especially medical models” (Esposito, 2012, p. 71).

Additionally, in his publication focusing on digital biopolitics, F. J. Colman (2015) explores the ideology of human bodies as politically constructed through digital technologies. Here, body image is seen as a tool of capitalism as it is shaped by culture and ideologies (Colman, 2015, p. 189). Furthermore, biopolitics is seen as embedded in the digital age, where human bodies are described as visual identifications that create aesthetic domains (Colman, 2015, p. 196). The accessibility of technologies and communication tools holds political power, where discourses about life are visualized through filters to disseminate specific messages (Colman, 2015, p. 197). In this sense, human bodies are described as living capital bodies, where body images are seen as "an object ontologically formed and durationally determined within contemporary late capitalist cultures" (Colman, 2015, p. 189). Biopolitical bodies are then necessarily connected to the cultures and communication channels in which they are displayed. Here, the discipline of the body and related discourses clearly appear as carriers of aesthetic domains constructed by the beauty standards of the surrounding capitalist social environment. It is important to realize that the theme of human bodies has deeper meanings and that these meanings are politically built and shared through digital tools.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of biopolitics has been widely adopted to explain the phenomena of social standards of female appearance. This is significant to our thesis because it allows us to theoretically outline how women are discursively constructed. The theory outlines how marketing is adopted to stereotype women by drawing the viewer's attention to certain female characteristics (breasts, legs, flat stomach, etc.) (King, 2004, p. 34). These types of discourses are part of what Anna King refers to as the "manipulation of the female flesh" (King, 2004, p. 35) and includes the discipline of the body in any possible sense (fitness care, skin care, hair care, choice of clothes and so on). Furthermore, the biopolitical lesson teaches us how female human bodies are objectified in contemporary society, reaching the point where "only bodies that are young or have the appearance of youth are considered beautiful and valued in our society" (King, 2004, p. 35). Thus, modern society discursively constructs the ideology of what a woman should look like in order to be valued, and marketing is seen as one of the tools where these ideologies are shared.

Recognizing how marketing and communication channels are adopted to spread messages about women's bodies provides us with an important understanding of hidden aesthetic domains in communication content. Moreover, this theoretical background allows us to clearly delineate the issue of body expectations in contemporary society and the life-related discourses hidden in corporate communication. Understanding how discourses today are shaped by the inherent desire to preserve the well-being of human life opens up many possibilities for inquiry. The biopolitical lesson can be employed to understand the real meanings of advertising campaigns, knowing that life issues are inherently part of corporate policies. Therefore, this theoretical framework will allow us to outline how the theme of body image and related discourses are addressed in the context of H&M's sustainable clothing lines and corresponding advertisements. Discourse analysis, placed in a corporate communication context whose ultimate goal is to sell clothes, will allow us to highlight how messages are shaped according to specific target audiences.

Methods and Material

To gain a deeper understanding of the project, it is necessary to consider the relevant method of inquiry, which is believed to be the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the forms of discourse analysis, specifically the one "interested in tying language to politically, socially, or culturally contentious issues and intervening in these issues in some way" (Gee & Handford, 2012, p. 5) and the multimodal approach, which is considered an expansion of discourse parameters to include images and their discourses (Peeples, 2015, p.42), will help us exploring and investigating on the topic also by analyzing the visual elements. We are going to investigate the discourses around the communication of body positivity and health practices in relation to sustainable fashion. To do so, marketing and communication content channeled through the chosen YouTube video, sustainability reports and website will be examined.

This analysis will comprehend *lexical analysis* of the chosen YouTube campaign's caption and video copy, as well as the Inclusivity & Diversity chapter of the H&M group sustainability reports between 2016 and 2019 (and briefly review also the 2020 report) and the website chosen pages' content, layout, picture and offer. In addition, another level of analysis will be on

modality and abstraction which are indicators of the level of commitment to the truth of a sentence. Syntax Elements such as *over-lexicality, presupposition*, and *recontextualization* will be considered to understand the overall content. Furthermore, *social actor analysis* will be performed, which is a linguistic tool adopted to investigate how people are valued through the way they are named, identified, and presented (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 31). In terms of visual elements, *iconographic* analysis will be implemented, which is by definition the visual equivalent of lexical analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 49). The visual elements of the website and the sustainability reports, as well as the videos, will be described to discover what discourses, values, and ideas are being communicated. As stated by scholars Machin and Mayr "both text and image can be thought of as being composed of communicative choices by authors that seek to do certain kinds of work for them" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 9).

Data collection will be conducted in three phases. First, we will read H&M's sustainability reports, considered important to the thesis because they allow us to see the development of social sustainability issues and their relevance over the years for H&M. During this initial phase, our focus will be on the content representation of body inclusivity (understood as both visual and written), to see its development within the sustainability reports over the years. We will analyze by using MCDA the body inclusivity section of sustainability reports from 2016 to 2019, briefly considering the 2020 report as well. The latter, however, will be only briefly touched upon due to its greater focus on COVID19. This report, in fact, does not address body-related topics. Furthermore, the choice to start with the 2016 report has been made because it is the first one in which social sustainability includes body inclusivity themes.

Next, we will proceed to the analysis of the website considering the general sustainability page and the "Let be for All" page, which is the one dedicated to inclusivity issues. Again, both visual and textual content will be examined, and then compared to the offerings page. In addition, the results of the report analysis will also be considered at this stage. This comparison and the relative contradiction between brand statements and actual actions is why there is a need for an investigation. The very partial accessibility of plus size women to sustainable garments (only 162, compared to 2339 items available for other sizes), compared to H&M's claims of constantly working to be accessible to all, may signify hidden ideologies behind their messages.

At this point, we will move on to analyze YouTube ad campaigns. Here, videos will be examined and MCDA will be fully adopted to break apart the videos and analyze both the spoken and visual aspects. Both environmental and social sustainability related YouTube content will be considered to understand the hidden class discourses in these campaigns.

Through the analysis of the material mentioned in the methods section, we examined how discourses of body inclusivity are constructed in the context of sustainability.

To begin the analysis, we chose to start with the sustainability reports. This choice was made because these reports provide us with information on how H&M positions itself on the topic of body inclusion. In addition, we also wanted to detect how the company has evolved over the years on the topic. In fact, *The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016* is the first in which the topic of body positivity is touched upon. From 2016 to 2019, H&M has worked to position itself as a promoter of body rights. Because of the type of statements found within the reports, we believed it made sense to start by analyzing how the brand's conversation on body issues has changed over the years. The goal at this point is to compare what we learned from H&M's reports with the content of the website and its actual plus size clothing offerings.

Moving on to the analysis of the website, firstly, we checked the plus size shopping options on the website and we immediately understood the need of an analysis through MCDA. On the plus size sustainable items offerings, in fact, only 162 are available. This is very interesting data especially after viewing the website section where H&M positions itself regarding the body positivity issue. H&M's website in fact, presents a page - *Let's be for All* - entirely dedicated to equality themes, among which is body inclusivity. This page also covers gender and women's rights, as stated in the text, and racial equality promotion, as one can read from the images. What's interesting to note is that although this webpage covers so many issues, it doesn't delve into any of them. The website states that H&M stands up for all the previously mentioned values, claiming that the company works to be accessible to everyone, which is in deep contrast to the few choices plus size women have for shopping in the conscious line. Also, what is not visually present on the page is a plus size model to support the statement that body inclusivity is fundamental to H&M. All of the images, in fact, depict skinny figures. In addition, a deeper analysis of the lexical choices will be conducted to describe the power relations and

discourses hidden in the connotations of the words. From the perspective of the visual aspect, the images will be studied keeping in mind the elements of MCDA such as, for instance, the *gaze* (see chart 1).

Finally, we analysed H&M's YouTube campaign "*Conscious Collection (2019) Dress for a sustainable future"* (published on YouTube on April 9, 2019) which is dedicated to promoting H&M sustainable clothing line. This campaign was chosen because it is recent, as it was released in April 2019; it is short (lasting 30 seconds) and this allows us to deconstruct the video into its components; this video also features a lot of spoken and written content; finally, one of the women in the video is a larger size than the stereotypical models, which is interesting for us to witness how H&M presents body inclusivity in relation to other issues. The analysis of this video will be supported by taking into consideration other H&M advertising videos available on YouTube regarding sustainability and their conscious line. What we will use these campaigns for is to delineate what messages H&M spreads, both from a visual and a spoken point of view, which is how we will be able to detect discourses through MCDA. Through the videos we will detect how plus size women are represented (if they are) in the context of sustainable fashion and how H&M advertises itself to sell the garments to specific target groups. MDCA, in fact, explains language and its meaning as created by visual elements and words. Furthermore, language is seen as neutral in itself, gaining meaning through textual and visual choices. This constructed meaning hides power relations and ideologies that we are aiming to outline and examine. The aim of this analysis is to use the MCDA method to detect social, class and economic discourses behind H&M marketing and selling choices. A critical analysis will be conducted in order to understand H&M communication strategies regarding social and environmental sustainability.

Discursive strategy - text	**Definition**	**Example from H&M's analyzed material**

Abstraction	When the level of information or details about an event are reduced and/or generalized	"Values diversity" "promote everyone's right to be"
Ideology	Representation of the world, views	"use of natural elements to state H&M commitment to sustainability"
Lexical analysis	Analysis of the word choices	Use of the word "Let's"
Modality	Commitment or necessity. Use of modal verbs such as "will" "might" "must". Deontic modality specifically refers to the level of necessity a sentence express	The use of "let's" create a sense of communal engagement and cooperativity
Moral panic	Technique that aims to makes society worry that its values might be in danger because of a specific situation or group of people	"Let's" also creates a sense of alarmism on what we must do for the environment
Overlexicalization	A word or a similar one is over-repeated in a paragraph or text in order to persuade.	Repetition of words like "different" or "women" to stress some concepts
Recontextualization	A way of transform or simplify events by using language	Use of verbs in the website in order to over-simplify sustainability practices
Salience	Specific features or element that can have a particular importance	Use of certain elements and objects in the sustainability page on the website to emphasize a concept
Signification	The set of different meanings that a word can have	Some elements of a specific phrase and picture have a great importance

		for H&M sustainability strategy (showing a fierce plus size model)
Discursive strategy - images	**Definition**	**Example from H&M's analyzed material**
Connotation	The association of a word to a image	The dissonance between H&M stances and their offer on body positivity based on their YouTube campaigns, and online material
Gaze	Where a person look and how can underline some specific significations	"the girl stares straight at the viewer"
Iconography	"Analysis of the visual elements and features of any image, layout, picture or photograph"(Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 220)	"the plus-size girl picture is central and shows a full body portrait of the model"
Iconology	Symbolic analysis of visual elements	"green and pastel colors reminds of nature, earth and sustainable elements"

Table 1 - MCDA elements of analysis considered for the development of the analysis. The first column lists all the discursive strategies we will take in consideration with the correlated definition in the second column (definitions from Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 219-223). The third part of the table is an exemplification of how a discursive strategy applies in our research analysis.

Analysis

Sustainability Reports

2016 was the first year in which H&M addressed body positivity in their report. The report states that the H&M group "values diversity" and wants to promote "everyone's right to be" (The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016, 2016, p. 83). It is fair to point out that this report represents H&M's first approach to body image concerns, as they were not even mentioned previously. However, lexical analysis of the *100% Fair & Equal* section reveals the adoption of *abstraction* (see table 1) techniques regarding body positivity content. In fact, there is a lack of information pertaining to the problem itself and the brand action. In language, abstraction involves avoiding providing detailed information about an issue using generalized content (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 2012).

As we move on to the 2017 sustainability report (see figure 1), it becomes clear from the outset that the topic of body image has gained more space and relevance in the H&M group's social sustainability efforts. Here, in fact, the first element that catches the eye is *iconographic* (see table 1). The largest image on the page shows four girls of different ethnicities in their undergarments; one of the four girls one is less skinny than the others. From MCDA's perspective, it is important to point out a few elements. First, while the three skinniest girls are depicted in their underwear and bra, the bigger sized one is presented in a tank top. In addition, the gaze also provides us with important elements of understanding. Gaze analysis consists of studying whether the person(s) depicted in the image is looking at the viewer, or whether the gaze is directed elsewhere (upward, downward, or sideways) (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 70). In the case of H&M, the three skinny girls are depicted looking at the viewer. These three women are only presented wearing their lingerie and are portrayed as confident and strong, not being afraid of their bodies, showing them off, and the opinions of others. In contrast, the last girl, the bigger sized one, is presented wearing a different dress (covering her body much more than in the case of the other three) and looking sideways in the direction of the other girls. As stated by Machin and Mayr “where a person does not look out at the viewer there is a different kind of effect. There is no demand made on the viewer. No response is expected” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 71). The contrast between the three girls looking straight ahead and the last one looking back at them suggests a sense of insecurity on the part of the latter that is at odds with the text on the page. Moving on to analysing the written content, the main focus of the text is on Monki, a brand of the H&M group, and its #NoFilter campaign. Here it states that "the core belief of the H&M group is to celebrate diversity and inclusivity" and that Monki's mission is

"to make girls feel great about themselves just the way they are" (H&M Group Sustainability Report 2017, 2017, p. 71). Image and text should support each other in their communication, but in this case they ended up sending two different messages. While the written portion aims to empower and inspire women, the image paints the plus size girl as different and insecure compared to the others.

In the 2018 Sustainability Report, the Inclusion & Diversity section covers a variety of topics such as LGBT+ rights, mental health, refugee charity efforts, breast cancer, disability rights, and body inclusivity issues. Of course, because this section covers so many different topics, it does not provide the reader with complete information on any of them. When considering only the body image portion, both the written and visual pieces revolve around another H&M group brand - Weekday - and its "My Body, My Image" campaign (see figure 2). From a lexical point of view, in a few lines the word "women" appears four times, emphasizing the concept of the campaign "created by women for women" (H&M Sustainability Report 2018, 2018, p. 86). This lexical strategy is called overlexicalization (see table 1), and can be seen as the author's attempt to emphasize a concept, which can sometimes be used to hide reality (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 222). In this particular case, the deployment of this campaign could be seen as a tool to hide the true accessibility of the entire line of clothing for plus size women. Once again, a strategy of abstraction could be in motion here. From the perspective of our analysis, it is also of great importance to note that there are no examples of efforts by H&M itself regarding issues of body inclusivity.

Additionally, the iconography once again is presented and is relevant. The image is still tied to the "My Body, My Image" campaign (see figure 3). This time, the overall image and the message it carries is much stronger and more recognizable than the image from the previous year's report. Here, the plus size girl is shown looking directly at the viewer, which immediately signifies confidence. In addition, *salience* (see table 1) techniques are also adopted. Salience involves manipulating an image to draw attention to certain elements of it (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 223). In this case, the woman is presented in brighter colors than the surrounding forest she is in. In addition, she is dressed in a bright blue bikini, which draws attention to her body. Overall, from the choice of dress, to the colors, to her pose and look, she is depicted as confident and authentic in spreading messages of body positivity. The photo is also accompanied by a statement from Nadine Schmidt, head of marketing for the “My Body, My Image” campaign, which further reinforces the message of body inclusivity. From 2015 to

2018, we can already see a change in both the way body image issues are addressed and the importance placed on them. What is not present at this point, however, is a full section dedicated to this topic and on the actions H&M itself is taking. Also, there is no mention of efforts to make eco-friendly clothes accessible to plus size customers.

Moving on to analyse the 2019 Sustainability Report, the Inclusion & Diversity chapter now covers more space than before, which means that the H&M Group prioritizes these topics more than it has in the past. Once again, the topics covered here are varied and do not go into detail. The topic of body inclusivity is found under the paragraph called "2019 progress & highlights: Promoting diversity." However, although social sustainability issues seem to have gained more space in the sustainability report, the body inclusivity section is drastically reduced in size, having only five lines dedicated to it. Here, the focus is still on Weekeday's My Body, My Image campaign (see figure 3). Aside from a brief description of the 2019 continuation of the aforementioned campaign, no concrete information is given about the H&M group's efforts on body inclusion. The abstraction strategy is clearly adopted, in fact, only broad information about the 2019 My Body, My Image campaign is provided, without showing any details about the campaign's previous results and desired goals. Other elements of abstraction can also be found in the fact that numbers and percentages are stated regarding other topics of inclusivity, such as employee training, gender equality results, quality of work, and so on. In addition, this time there are no images to support the written content. In general, in the entirety of the Inclusion & Diversity chapter, very little space is devoted to body image.

Finally, the H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020 has been considered. Last year's report is interesting because the issue of body inclusivity is not even mentioned. Obviously, this can be traced back to the fact that COVID-19 was the main issue addressed in the report and the company focused on other elements related to it, such as working conditions during COVID-19, sales review and environmental sustainability practices during the pandemic.

Website's pages

Taking in account H&M sustainability's general page, what is clear to see is the massive use of pictures that have clear reminders of nature and simplicity (see figure 4). The page is divided into squares that frame the different sustainability topics that the brand covers up. H&M sustainability strategy is in fact divided into themes and topics, and they are all preceded by the

word “Let’s”; so “Let’s innovate”, “Let’s clean up”, “Let’s change”, “Let’s be for all”, “Let’s be conscious”, “Let’s be transparent”, “Let’s be fair”, “Let’s close the loop” and “Let’s take care” are the boxes that H&M uses to organize the communication of its sustainability efforts. Conducting a lexical analysis (see table 1) of this strategy, it is noticeable the importance of the first verb “Let’s”. It is a strategic verb because of its abstract nature, that implies the “use of ambiguous concepts (…) that distract from the actual micro-processes that took place” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 219). This abstraction process generalizes on broad concepts to hide some aspects and emphasize others. Also, on a lexical point of view, “Let’s” build a sense of cooperation, dynamicity and underlines the attempt to give a positive outcome to the problems that affect the fashion industry and to create a space of possibility and hope. This verb also underlines a *deontic modality* (see table 1), which implies the necessity to act in a constructive and cooperative way as “we must go there” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 221); these verbs connotate a sense of urgency, almost a *moral panic* technique (see table 1) in order to alarm society that “the values and principles it upholds may be in jeopardy” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 221). The verb, used in all of the nine categories that H&M provides to explain their sustainability process, shows an over lexicalization process as an “attempt to over-persuade” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 222).

All the verbs and the actions used to describe the brand sustainability effort are full of *signification* and *recontextualization* (see table 1): verbs and the language are in fact used in order to over-simplify practices that reconducts to sustainability in the common imagination. These actions described are abstract and lack in giving concrete details about the processes that H&M uses to reach better sustainable practices; it is noticeable by the absence of description of the operations or participants as well as the “ use of ambiguous concepts" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 219) to define the actions.

All the images used in the sustainability front page are characterized by common elements, denoting a strong salience of items. The iconology and ideology analysis (see table 1) suggest a wide use of light and pastel colors as well as green, which are a clear reminder to the natural world, and as a consequence, to the sphere of sustainability and environment. In three boxes out of nine, pictures of natural elements are used, such as green leaves, grapes and flowers. Two pictures clearly show clothes worn by models: they all are in pastel or green colors and the fabric seems to be natural, reminiscent of cotton and linen.

Focusing on the “Let’s be for all” page (see figure 5), the one dedicated to social sustainability, inclusivity and equality, there are three models represented in the picture: they are all three turned on the other side of the camera, showing their backs and wearing natural fabric and light colors clothes; the model on the left is clearly of a bigger size if compared to the other two. The *signification* (see table 1) of this element would suggest an important focus of H&M on size inclusivity and body positivity. Models also have different skin tones, gender and haircut, underlining some of the issues that the “Let’s be for all” section covers. There is no specific iconographic element suggesting a focus on the LGBTQ+ inclusivity and all the models are clearly still young, not addressing the ageism issue.

Diving into the “Let’s be for all” page, the first element that is noticeable is that the same picture just described is re-proposed in a much bigger size, occupying most of the page; it is also cut, compared to the former version, above the waste of the models: this hides the body differences between them, that now seem to wear more or less all the same size, not emphasizing the body inclusivity element anymore, but still allowing to have a reference to the other social issues before mentioned.
Observing the rest of the page, there is a brief six lines text, preceded by a catching headline that claims “At H&M, we welcome everyone. Come exactly as you are.” (H&M, n.d.).
The headline has a high level of abstraction and generalization; the word “everyone” can be found twice in the text, together with other words and phrases that emphasize H&M's effort to be inclusive, such as “embrace the diversity”, “feel good about yourself” (H&M, n.d.).

When it comes to issues addressed, the tone and content is very generalist, limiting to say “we believe in gender equality, women's rights and body positivity” (H&M, n.d.). This is also the only reference of body positivity that can be found in terms of text in the whole website. Regarding H&M concrete support on these causes, the only mentioned one is the support to “Pride festivals campaigns around the world” (H&M, n.d.), without any specific detail and cutting out all the references to commitment to other issues.

The website then proposes two black and white pictures, one of a white girl and one of a black boy, and the focus is on their faces. Their gaze is both in front of them, right at the camera.

They are both young and based on their haircut and skin tone, it is noticeable that they are the same two represented in the previous head picture, this time without the bigger sized model at all. This shows and addresses gender and skin color equality issues but cuts off the only element that was representative of body positivity and inclusivity effort in the whole section.
The page ends with other seven text lines, in which other words connected to social sustainability are used such as “diverse bunch” (H&M, n.d.); the adjective “different” is reiterated three times throughout the brief text, referring to “people", “ideas” “feel” and creating an over lexicalization, as an “attempt to over-persuade” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 222) on the brand efforts. Ageism issue is also addressed in these lines, as well as LGBTQ+ discrimination, racial discrimination and gender equality, leaving out the body positivity issue, and without giving any concrete evidence of supporting any of the aforementioned issues.

YouTube advertising campaign(s)

For this part of the analysis, we mainly focused on the video "H&M Conscious Collection 2019: Dress for a sustainable future". This campaign was chosen for a few reasons. The first reason is because it is recent, as it was released in April 2019. In addition, its length also played a role in our choice process, since with its 30 seconds it really allows us to deconstruct it into its components. In addition, another decision point was the fact that the video also features a lot of spoken and written content. Finally, one of the women in the video is a larger size than the stereotypical models (see figure 6), which is interesting for us to witness how H&M presents body inclusivity in relation to other issues. With the analysis of this campaign, we want to show how body inclusion messages are integrated into the promotion of sustainable clothing. To achieve a better understanding, the analysis of the campaign is supported by other content posted on YouTube by H&M. Videos regarding body positivity itself and sustainability will be considered, to fully recognize how plus size women are portrayed by H&M and what kind of class discourses can be found in these campaigns.

The brief video portrays several women in nature; some parts of the video are shot in a field, some in woods, some in the proximity of a lake and others by a bonfire. The women are all wearing summer dresses, with natural colors or floral prints, they are all young and belong to different ethnicities. The whole video is accompanied by a background sound that is gentle and emotional and helps evoking summertime and closeness to nature. There is a narrating voice

belonging to a woman, probably young, that can be reconducted to one of the models of the video, the most recurring one: she has long black hair, light brown skin and a slim and elegant figure. The copy of the video reads:

“I dress for love, love for life and love for today, love that grows, love that fades. I even dress for broken love. Love can come in different shapes, but never let it be a stranger because on this planet of ours, a little love won’t hurt” (H&M, 2019).

The word “love” is reiterated eight times out of forty-seven words, being the salient element of the body of text and referring to people, to life, and to the planet; it is emphasized that love mutates and has different shapes, referring to the different types of body and the different kind of love that H&M support. It is mentioned the love for the planet since this video is the campaign for the 2019 conscious collection. The video has overall warm and natural colors, such as the pale yellow of wheat fields, the shades of the sky at sunset, the warm brown of a forest path. The colors of the dresses shown are as well light and natural, all in the shades of pink and warm red with flowery patterns.

As already mentioned, the campaign features a girl who can be considered plus size. What is relevant to our analysis is that she is not as present as the other girls. In fact, there is only a brief moment when she is shown as a full figure, otherwise she appears at the beginning and end of the video with a close-up of her face. The dress she is wearing does not highlight her body: the other girls have tight dresses that emphasize the waist, while she's wearing a pale pink dress that's rather loose and doesn't enhance the shape of her body (see figure 6). This girl is overall not fully integrated with the others as the video proceeds. In fact, her character is predominant in the beginning of the video, with her gaze being directed straight at the viewer signifying confidence. However, as the video proceeds, she is not given as much air space as the other girls. The powerful message that her gaze sends at the beginning gets eventually lost when she is not fully included in the rest of the video. A very interesting element is the following: when the voiceover says “love comes in different shapes**”** (H&M, 2019) the video shows three slim and athletic girls running, while the plus sized one is not there (see figure 7). The text sends a significant message regarding H&M support for body inclusivity but visually this message is not supported since there is only one shape represented in that part of the video. At this point, a reflection on *connotation* can be made. By connotation we intend the “association a word or visual element can bring” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 219) and can be “deeply ideological” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 219). What does the dissonance between the

voiceover and the video suppose? Although the voiceover promotes inclusiveness when it comes to body shapes, the image supports the ideal of beauty to be represented by tall, athletic and slim figures, and that makes us question on H&M real stance on the body positivity issue.

To gain a well-rounded understanding of how H&M portrays plus size women in its sustainability campaigns, other videos were selected for investigation. During our preliminary research, we discovered that the previously mentioned YouTube campaign is not the only one where a dissonance between H&M's claims on the website and the outcomes of their advertisement can be identified: a clear example of unmatched environmental and social sustainability can be found in the 2021 video called "Conscious points" where a rewarding system for conscious H&M shopping choices is explained. Like the previously analysed video, also in this one there is only one plus size girl, this time portaited in the bathroom of her home, talking and drinking with a friend (see figure 8). Her whole body figure is visible only in one shot, and her body is more covered than the rest of the people starring in the advertisement. Also, she is depicted at home, while all the other models are outside, playing on rooftops or walking with their dog. The other scene where someone is represented at home, involves two slim figured people dancing, with little clothes on. This leads to a reflection on the perception that emerges from H&M's YouTube campaigns regarding plus-size women, creating a common set of actions and environments in which she is portrayed.

If we move on from another 2020 video about H&M sustainable line called "Let's change. In every detail", a lot of innovative conscious and environmentally friendly clothes and items are shown, from colorful jackets, to shoes made with recycled glass beads and clutches made of pineapple leather. Despite the general vibrant color scheme of the clothing, the chosen garment for the only plus size girl featured in the video are black recycled nylon stockings, which she wears in what appears to be a restaurant bathroom (see figure 9). In addition, other H&M videos regarding conscious and sustainable lines were viewed, but no plus size women were found, confirming the dissonance between H&M's claims and actual offering regarding sustainable clothings.

In other videos it is possible to see plus size figures, for instance the 2016 "She is a lady", an advertisement about women empowerment where, even if briefly, a plus size model appears in her underwear in three different moments of the video (see figures 10 and 11). The voiceover is the "She is a lady" song by the duo Lion Babe, whose lyrics are about women power and empowerment; in the video sequence, every individual beauty is praised, and it is probably the

H&M video in which plus size bodies are celebrated the most. This is, though, not a sustainability related video, keeping the body positivity issue separated from the environmental consciousness one. This element reflects the actual H&M offers that can be found on the website, in which, as we previously mentioned, only 162 sustainable items are available in bigger sizes than the 2339 of the standard ones (as of May 2021).

At this point, it is clear that H&M fails in combining body positivity and sustainability, even though in the website the brand states to be engaged in sustainability "for all". Knowing this, we are led to believe that there is a class discourse behind this found that we intend to further discuss.

Discussion

This study aims to provide a critical analysis of H&M's body inclusivity communication in content across the brand's platforms. In line with our open research questions on the lack of body inclusivity in sustainable fast fashion, the analysis conducted showed that H&M's conscious lines exclude plus size customers. As we have learned from representation theory, the meanings we construct are deeply tied to our culture. This is clearly relevant when considering H&M's meaning-making process and the messages they spread. In our society, female bodies are bound by rigid standards of beauty (King, 2004). In the last decade, this has led to the formation of movements against this stereotypical objectification of the female body. In this context, as we have already mentioned, H&M positions itself as a promoter of both environmental sustainability and inclusivity. This could be seen as a direct response to the demands of contemporary society. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that any message spread by the brand must be considered relative to the target groups to which it is directed and the culture in which it is embedded. Western culture has been trying to implement social sustainability in the past ten years, but at the same time, body inclusion has been a topic of struggle due to the strong and eradicated beauty standards around female bodies. In contemporary capitalist society, we believe this can be exemplified by the example of H&M.

Body positivity is a widely discussed topic in the media; the press points out body positivity movement for encouraging unhealthy habits, also supported by scientific press claiming that the normalization of plus size bodies contributes to the spread of obesity and diseases to it

connected (Cohen et al., 2020, p.5). Cohen also underlines how these claims tend to create an image of correlation, in the public opinion, of body acceptance with self-neglect behaviors even though there is no empirical evidence supporting this (Cohen et al., 2020, p.5). The media also spread messages according to which health is related to thin ideals, promoting larger size bodies stigmatisation and exclusion (Cohen et al., 2020, p.5). On the other hand, body positivity movement can be a different definition of health, since it promotes self-acceptance and appreciation for the functions of the body (Sastre, 2014, p.932), reliving "of the pressures and anxieties" (Sastre, 2014, p.936) that the other communication of what health is can bring. We can deduct that there is not an unique definition of what health is, since it relies on physical fitness and thinness for some, on mental health and self-acceptance for others.

H&M claims, as found in the analysis, to be "inclusive", "for all", "welcoming everyone, (…) exactly as you are" (H&M, n.d.). This set of words and meanings are proper of the body positivity movement and H&M statements that we found in their reports and website and we analyzed, seem to underline the importance that H&M reserves to make everyone feel good and accepted, avoid discrimination of any kind, also the ones dictated by body size. Regarding inclusivity, what is significant to point out is that there seems to be a drastic division between social sustainability and environmental sustainability. In fact, it appears that it is also very important for the brand to underline its commitment to be environmentally friendly, but clearly failing at offering environmentally sustainable items for everyone.

From a critical standpoint, H&M's statement "everyone's right to be" (H&M, n.d.) seems to be unsupported by the actual accessibility of its products by everyone: not only the garments available for plus sized bodies are a very limited number in the whole "conscious line", but our analysis showed the deep discrepancy in the way sustainably sourced garments are advertised.

Plus size figures hardly appear in video commercials of sustainable lines, and when they do, they never are the central actor or a widely portrait one, showing instead predominantly athletic, thin women and failing at demonstrating that H&M sustainable line is *"for all"*.

Considering our findings, the first noticeable element is that environmentally sustainable garments seem to be related to some specific body features.

From this observation, and from what emerges from previous research, such as Cohen (2020) on the portrait of health and body positivity aforementioned, we want to investigate the discourses on class, income and health that we believe move H&M in their online sustainability communication strategy. The online messages that support thin ideals and shame and stigmatize larger figures, oftentimes spread in the media as "thinspiration" and "fitspiration" (Cohen et al., 2020, pp. 3-5) promote expensive dieting solutions, substitutive meals and exercise (Cohen et al., 2020, p.2) and overall a very expensive lifestyle, which is consequentially available only to people who dispose of a solid income. This kind of stigma on larger bodies, pressures people that can afford expensive lifestyles, to be thin and fit, portraying that as healthy. In fact, if "thinspiration" promotes an expensive lifestyle as a solution, body positivity doesn't require any form of money or product to be healthy, being consequently accessible also for lower income people.

On a price standpoint, H&M conscious line and sustainably sourced products are more expensive: for instance, comparing the cost of basic, mono-color, short sleeve white t-shirts on the H&M website, the regular one costs 5,99 Euro per piece while the same garment, sustainably sourced costs between 12 and 15 Euro per piece (prices as May 2021, on H&M.com). Considering the observations on health we brought to light before, it is consequential to believe that a class discourse can be made considering H&M sustainability stances.

We believe H&M fails in portraying plus size bodies in their sustainably sourced, hence more expensive line. This is not casual but rather supported by health discourses. As previously mentioned, thin ideals of health require exercise, clean food and so, larger availability of money. Following this observation, it is consequential to say that thin and fit people have more money to spend on long lasting, sustainably sourced and environmentally friendly clothes, which also are part of the overall image and aesthetic that social media portray of a healthy lifestyle by "growing consumer awareness of sustainability" (Kong et al., 2021 p. 640). This finds support also in the stance of McRobbie (2008) on post-feminist, which she considers deeply intertwined with consumerism and neoliberism, supporting a mediatic representation of a successful woman as "(…) rich and skinny" (McRobbie, 2008, p.540).

As we stated before, body positivism promotes self-acceptance and doesn't advertise expensive lifestyle practices (Cohen et al., 2020, pp. 2-5), supporting the thesis that would associate larger figures with lower incomes (Kim, Von Dem Knesebeck, 2018, pp. 4-6). According to Kim and Von Dem Knesebeck, income restricts access to healthy food and is also "linked to higher health literacy which, in turn, is positively related to health-promoting behaviours (ie, healthy nutrition, physical activity)" (Kim, Von Dem Knesebeck, 2018, p.2).

Plus size figures are not commonly represented in H&M's content about environmentally sustainable garments, and when they are, the brand portrays them in a very specific way: to start, their air time is very little compared to the other thinner girls, depicting them briefly for only a few seconds; they usually are only one per content (video or picture) and, based on our findings, their body is either very covered up or hidden somehow. From a critical point of view, we can argue that this choice, instead of "normalizing" every female body, induces the opposite effect. In fact, showing plus size girls differently from the others accentuates the distinction between her and the other girls. As previously mentioned, plus size figures are not commonly present in H&M's sustainable clothing advertisement. In the analyzed material, plus size girls are always pictured inside home, sitting down, or being overall very static, supporting the stereotype that sees plus size figures having unhealthy behaviors, being lazy and self-neglecting (Cohen et al., 2020, p.5).

The stance the brand adopts in their plus size section though, is completely different. In this section, H&M fully supports body positivity movement, promotes self-love and inclusion in the perspective of self-acceptance. In the not-environmental sustainability-related videos, H&M praises larger bodies, portrays them in movement and doing activities, showing them solely in underwear items and actually confirming what the brand stance is on inclusivity *"for all"* (see picture 10 & 11). As we pointed out before, the "regular", not sustainably sourced line is much cheaper than the "conscious line" where plus size bodies are poorly portrayed. H&M seems to associate plus size to lower income and for this reason, promotes the cheapest line to the people the brand recognizes as lower income.

This creates a dual strategy when it comes to sustainability, influenced by income availability and expressed by the different clothing offer proposed. Income influences the strategy adopted

to market specific garments. This, at the same time, influences the definition of health that the targeted segments perceive.

Income	**Line promoted**	**Definition of health**
High	Conscious line, sustainable sourced garments	Thin ideal, athletic and slim body
Low	Regular, not sustainably sourced line	Body positivity, acceptance and inclusivity

Table 2- correlation of H&M clothing offer with consumer's income through different definitions of health. This table shows the correlation between the kind of clothing lines promoted through a specific definition of health and targeted to a specific segment's income.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analytically address discourses of body inclusivity in sustainable fast fashion. The idea of the thesis revolves around bringing to light some of the discourses that can potentially be detected by looking at H&M's website, sustainability reports and YouTube campaigns. In fact, during the preliminary research phase, we found a discrepancy between H&M's claims of prioritizing body inclusivity and the concrete accessibility of the conscious lines by plus size customers. Furthermore, the objective of adopting MCDA to dissect the material is to provide new perspectives on marketing content that conceals a reflection on contemporary society.

The investigation led to findings related to the class discourses behind the accessibility of some H&M collections. Sustainability reports from 2016 to 2019 disclose several brand statements about their stance on inclusivity, but at the same time they don't provide enough visual and

written information to back up these claims. H&M's "conscious line", because of its higher price, seems to target wealthier consumers, while non-sustainable, cheaper lines target lower-income consumers. These findings shed light on how class affiliance plays a role in determining who can access the sustainably sourced clothing lines. Moreover, class discourses appear to be tied to body appearance, since plus size consumers are not given full accessibility to the environmentally sustainable garments.

From the analysis of YouTube advertising campaigns, we obtained valuable insights. Low number of plus size representations and a set of recurring features portraying them, led us to answering our first research question. In the context of its advertisement campaigns, H&M constructs body image in different ways according to which social and economic class a specific line is targeted to. Hence, H&M turns out to discursively construct body positivity as an important issue when the target audience is part of the low-income class while in the context of sustainable fashion, the body image promoted is that of lean and fit bodies.

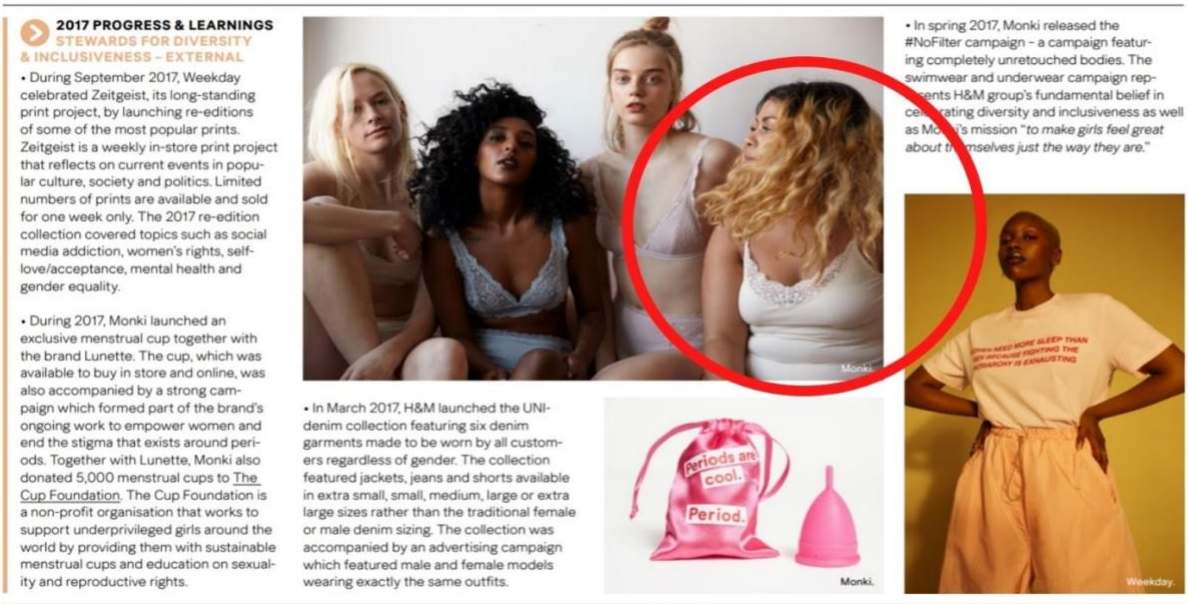
This finding helped us answer our second research question, focusing on the role of health discourses relatively to the targeted audience. The way that H&M communicates and promotes health depends in fact on the target audience. When targeting the middle and upper classes with sustainable lines, the brand portrays in their campaigns active and athletic bodies, supporting a view of health that focuses on being lean and fit, through a typically expensive lifestyle. On the other hand, when considering non-sustainable lines, health messages are shaped around body acceptance and self-love, prioritizing mental health and inclusivity for all.

Limitations and further research

We aknowledge some limitation that this thesis presents; when speaking of body inclusivity and sustainable fashion, we are in this work exclusively talking about female fashion, excluding from the discussion male fashion, as well as not considering the availability of gender neutral fashion, which could potentially open an interesting research on sustainable fashion availability for people that identifies as non-binary and prefer to purchase gender neutral fashion.
Also, the methodology used in our work, has been criticized for its qualitative nature and for "not sufficiently consulting with producers" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.211) and for assuming that "the kinds of meanings and interpretations offered by the analyst are to some extent imposed through his or her analysis" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.211)

Our research intends to be a starting point for open discussions on the study of class discourses in the context of fast fashion brands. In fact, this study unlocks many possibilities for future research. Other brands may be included and confronted with our case study and other communication tools may be considered, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Table of images



2017 PROGRESS & LEARNINGS
STEWARDS FOR DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVENESS – EXTERNAL

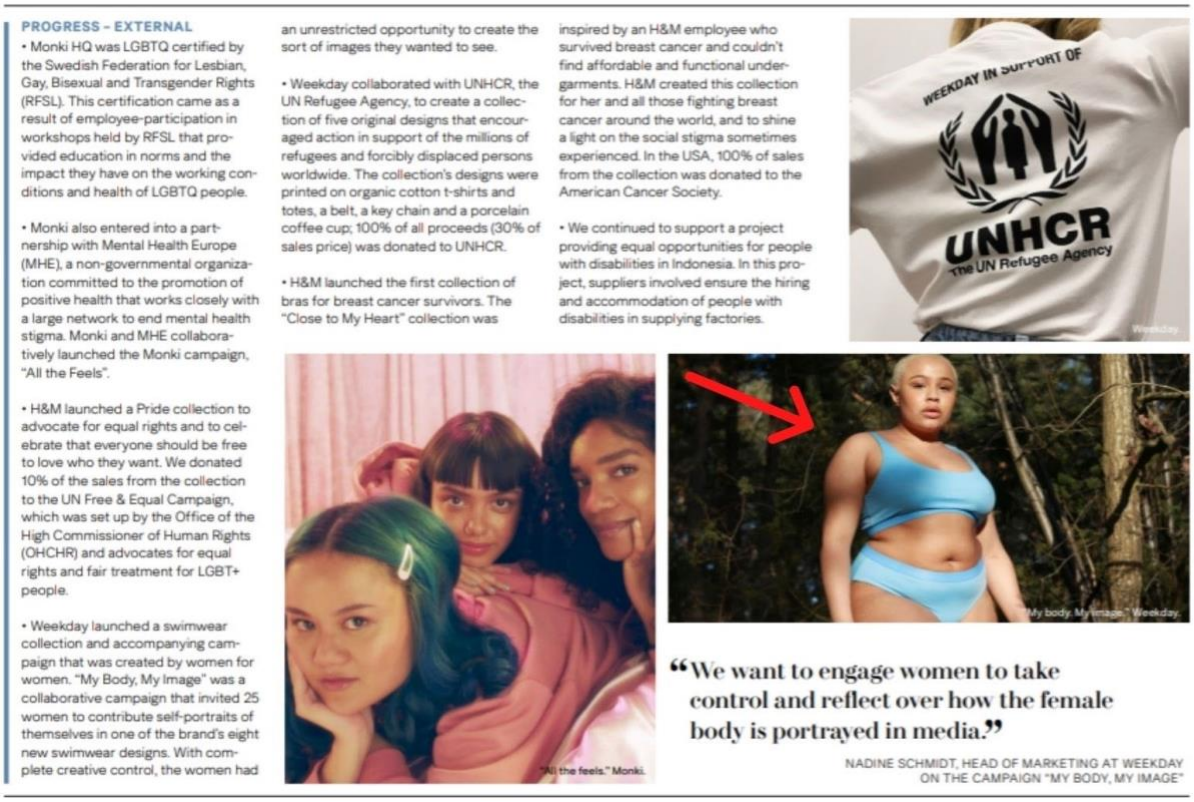
• During September 2017, Weekday celebrated Zeitgeist, its long-standing print project, by launching re-editions of some of the most popular prints. Zeitgeist is a weekly in-store print project that reflects on current events in popular culture, society and politics. Limited numbers of prints are available and sold for one week only. The 2017 re-edition collection covered topics such as social media addiction, women's rights, self-love/acceptance, mental health and gender equality.

• During 2017, Monki launched an exclusive menstrual cup together with the brand Lunette. The cup, which was available to buy in store and online, was also accompanied by a strong campaign which formed part of the brand's ongoing work to empower women and end the stigma that exists around periods. Together with Lunette, Monki also donated 5,000 menstrual cups to The Cup Foundation. The Cup Foundation is a non-profit organisation that works to support underprivileged girls around the world by providing them with sustainable menstrual cups and education on sexuality and reproductive rights.

• In March 2017, H&M launched the UNI-denim collection featuring six denim garments made to be worn by all customers regardless of gender. The collection featured jackets, jeans and shorts available in extra small, small, medium, large or extra large sizes rather than the traditional female or male denim sizing. The collection was accompanied by an advertising campaign which featured male and female models wearing exactly the same outfits.

• In spring 2017, Monki released the #NoFilter campaign – a campaign featuring completely unretouched bodies. The swimwear and underwear campaign represents H&M group's fundamental belief in celebrating diversity and inclusiveness as well as Monki's mission "*to make girls feel great about themselves just the way they are.*"

Picture 1 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2017, Inclusivity and Diversity chapter



PROGRESS – EXTERNAL

• Monki HQ was LGBTQ certified by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL). This certification came as a result of employee-participation in workshops held by RFSL that provided education in norms and the impact they have on the working conditions and health of LGBTQ people.

• Monki also entered into a partnership with Mental Health Europe (MHE), a non-governmental organization committed to the promotion of positive health that works closely with a large network to end mental health stigma. Monki and MHE collaboratively launched the Monki campaign, "All the Feels".

• H&M launched a Pride collection to advocate for equal rights and to celebrate that everyone should be free to love who they want. We donated 10% of the sales from the collection to the UN Free & Equal Campaign, which was set up by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) and advocates for equal rights and fair treatment for LGBT+ people.

• Weekday launched a swimwear collection and accompanying campaign that was created by women for women. "My Body, My Image" was a collaborative campaign that invited 25 women to contribute self-portraits of themselves in one of the brand's eight new swimwear designs. With complete creative control, the women had an unrestricted opportunity to create the sort of images they wanted to see.

• Weekday collaborated with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to create a collection of five original designs that encouraged action in support of the millions of refugees and forcibly displaced persons worldwide. The collection's designs were printed on organic cotton t-shirts and totes, a belt, a key chain and a porcelain coffee cup; 100% of all proceeds (30% of sales price) was donated to UNHCR.

• H&M launched the first collection of bras for breast cancer survivors. The "Close to My Heart" collection was inspired by an H&M employee who survived breast cancer and couldn't find affordable and functional undergarments. H&M created this collection for her and all those fighting breast cancer around the world, and to shine a light on the social stigma sometimes experienced. In the USA, 100% of sales from the collection was donated to the American Cancer Society.

• We continued to support a project providing equal opportunities for people with disabilities in Indonesia. In this project, suppliers involved ensure the hiring and accommodation of people with disabilities in supplying factories.

"We want to engage women to take control and reflect over how the female body is portrayed in media."

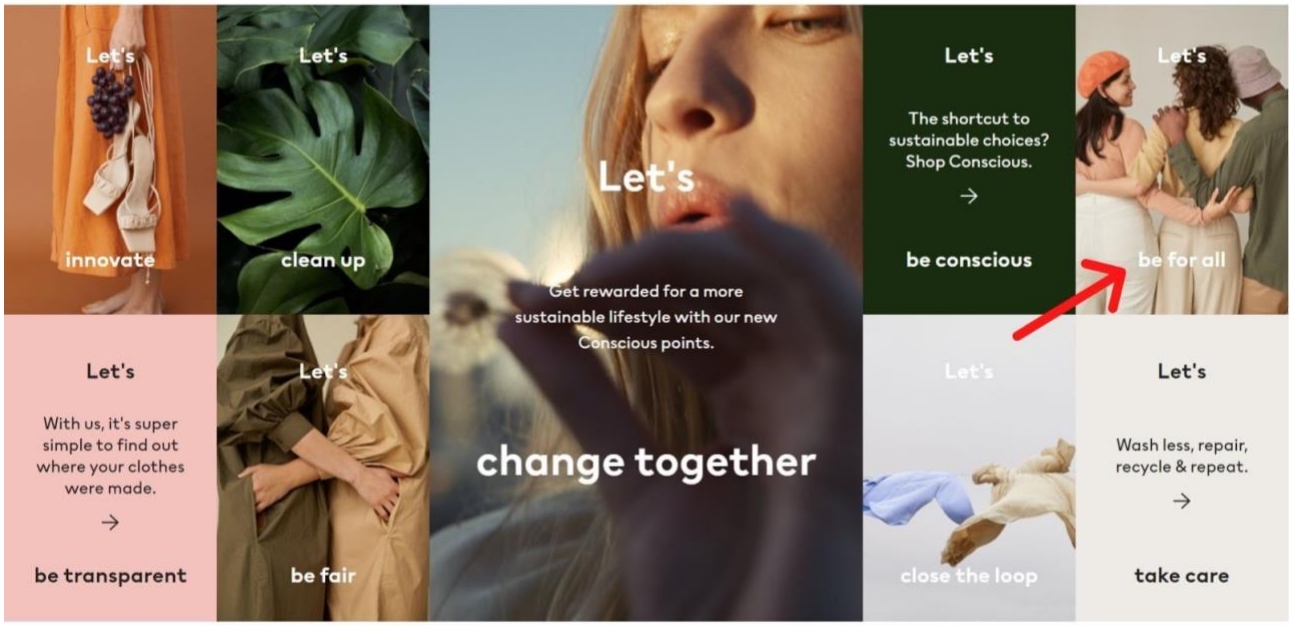
NADINE SCHMIDT, HEAD OF MARKETING AT WEEKDAY ON THE CAMPAIGN "MY BODY, MY IMAGE"

Picture 2 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2018, Inclusivity & Diversity chapter

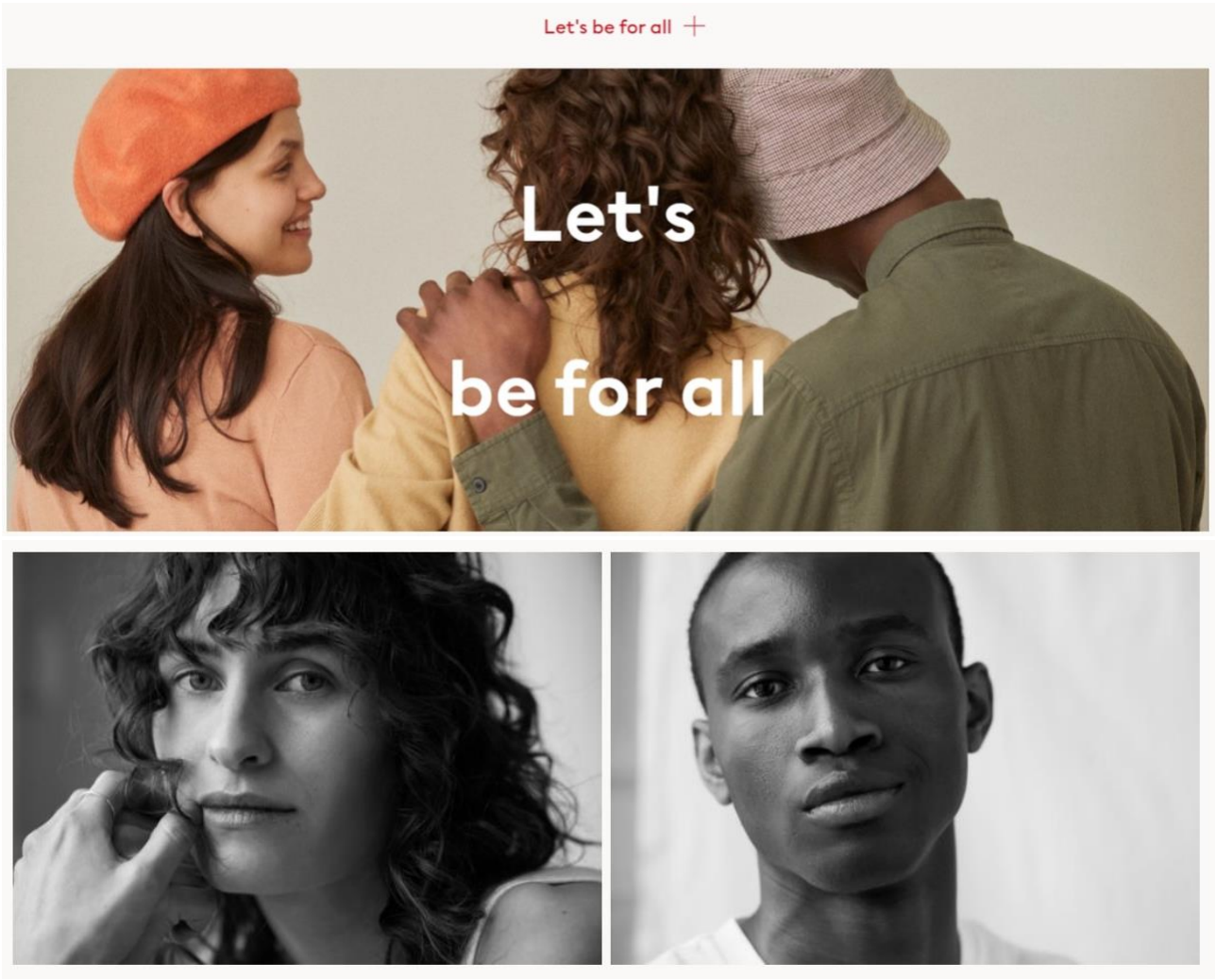
"We want to engage women to take control and reflect over how the female body is portrayed in media."

NADINE SCHMIDT, HEAD OF MARKETING AT WEEKDAY
ON THE CAMPAIGN "MY BODY, MY IMAGE"

Picture 3 – H&M Group Sustainability Report 2019, Inclusivity & Diversity chapter, "My body, My image" campaign



Picture 4 – H&M website environmental and social sustainability page

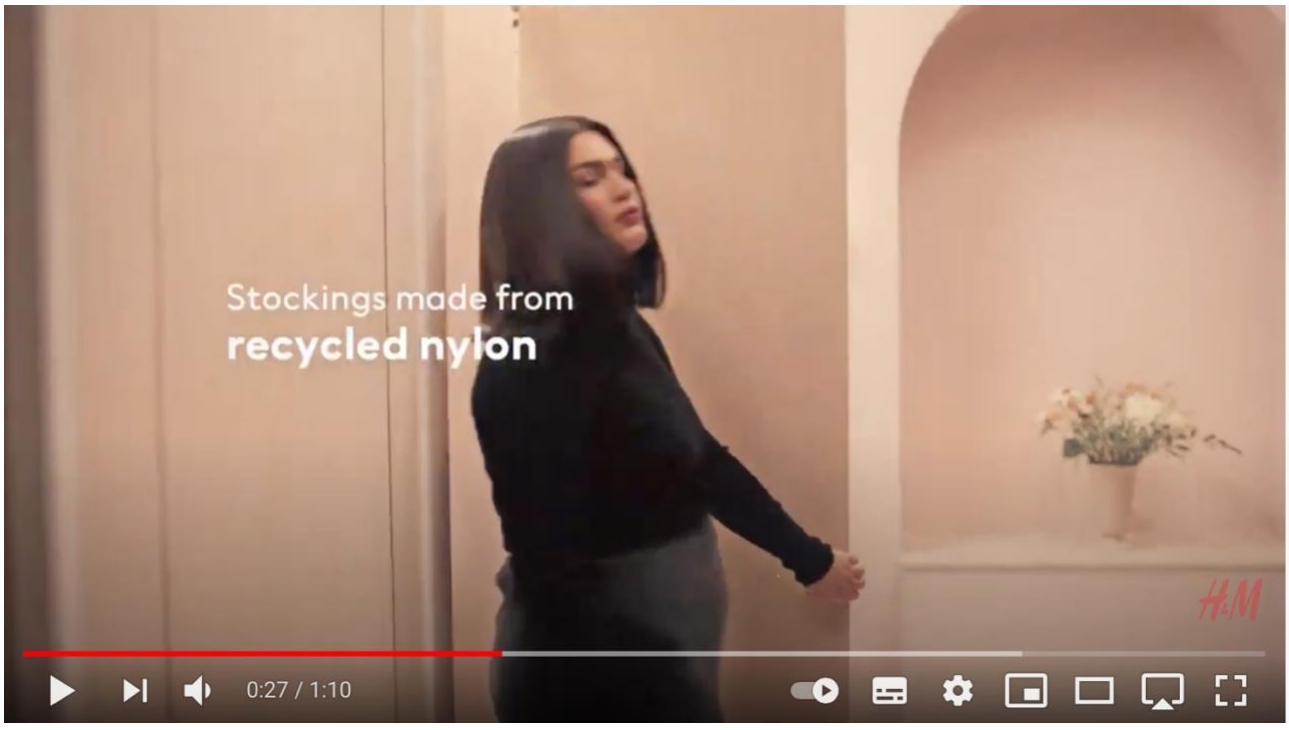


Picture 5 – H&M "Let's be for All" website page

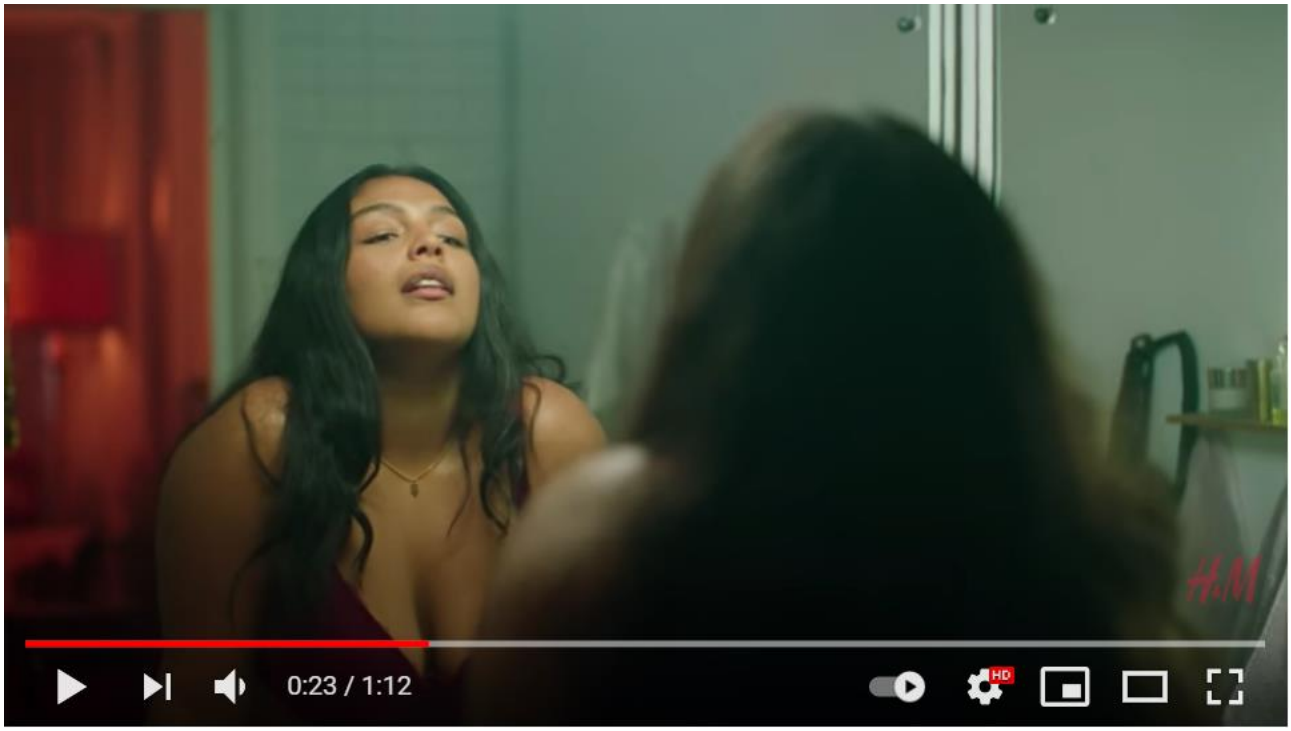
Picture 6 – H&M YouTube campaign 2019 "Conscious Collection: Dress for a sustainable future"

Picture 7 – H&M YouTube campaign 2019 "Conscious Collection: Dress for a sustainable future"

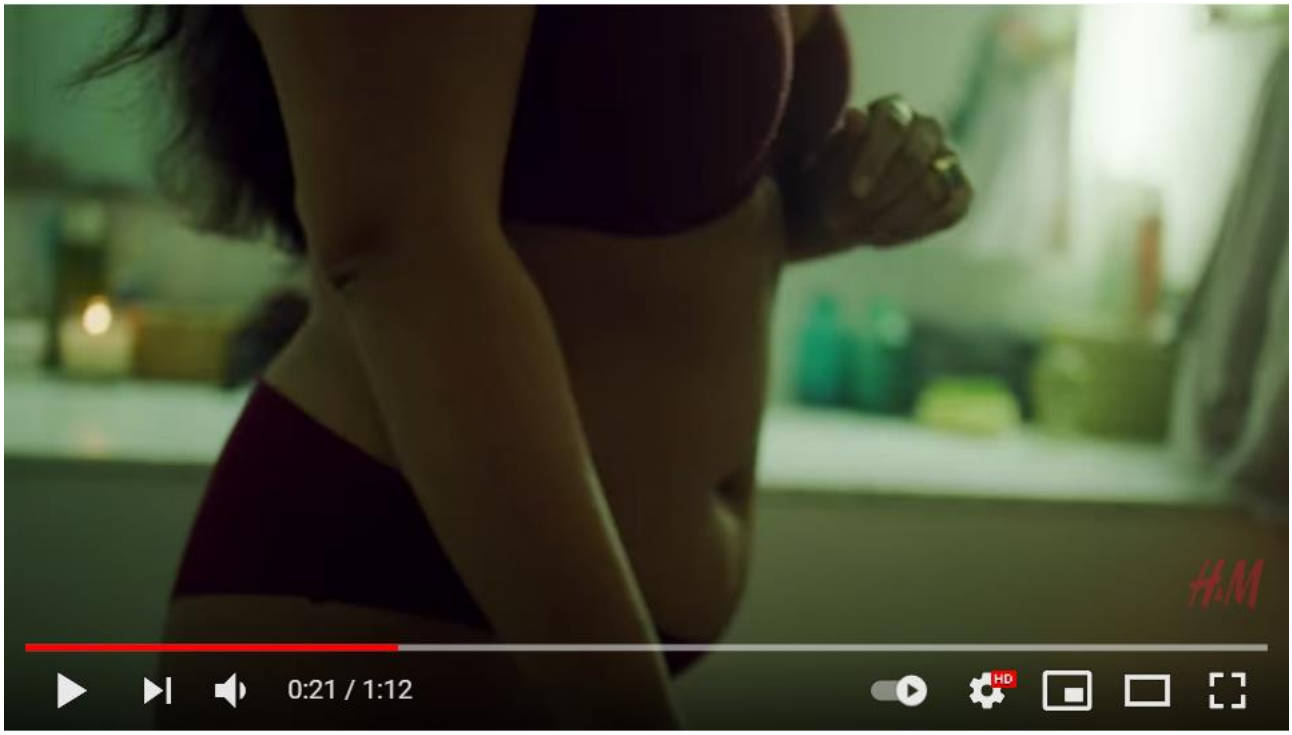
Picture 8 – H&M YouTube campaign 2021 "Conscious Points"



Picture 9 – H&M YouTube campaign "Let's change. In every detail."



Picture 10 – H&M YouTube campaign 2016 "She's a Lady"



Picture 11 – H&M YouTube campaign 2016 "She's a Lady"

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