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## **Disruptive communication: How to overcome stigma**

A case study of Kappahl, Tena, Estrid and Deodoc

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# Disruptive communication: How to overcome stigma

## A case study of Kappahl, Tena, Estrid and Deodoc

*Camilla Hallin, Emma Källström, Frida Fransson, Julia Walde*

### Abstract

**Purpose:** In this study, the purpose is to explore how disruptive communication can be used as a means to overcome stigma.

**Methodology:** This paper has analyzed four case studies in order to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon stigma. A literature review is conducted where the concepts ‘stigma’, ‘disruptive communication’ and ‘brand identity’ is applied. The theoretical foundations were based on Simon Sinek’s (2009) *Golden Circle* including Urde’s (2021) addition *by whom*, along with the *Corporate Brand Identity Matrix* by Greyser and Urde (2019). Furthermore, a qualitative document analysis was made to analyze material from the brands’ campaigns, websites, social media, and other relevant media.

**Findings:** The findings of the research showed that brands can use disruptive communication to overcome a stigma. In addition, the results of the study indicate the importance of aligning a brand's identity and disruptive communication to be able to create a successful communication/campaign that can fight a stigma. However, it was also found that some brands who are using disruptive communication rather created a discussion around the topic than overcome a stigma. Due to these findings, a framework guiding companies’ opportunities to overcome stigma through disruptive communication was developed.

**Original/value:** The study has a high originality as it is one of the first studies researching stigma in marketing and disruptive communication. The study contributed with a new framework that can be used to analyze brands' usage of overcoming stigma by disruptive communication.

**Keywords:** Disruptive communication, Stigma, Brand values, Brand identity, Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, The Golden Circle.

**Paper Type:** Research Paper.

### Introduction

Being digital natives, the younger generations are keen to seek the truth and authenticity in the companies they engage with (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The generation truly believes in improving the world and solving conflicts through efficient ways of communicating. Also, they are more prone to question norms and stereotypes in society. For instance, there is an increased expectation among consumers

to take a stand in both social and ethical issues (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

With the younger consumer’s interest in brands taking a stand, it is of interest to research how companies can integrate this into their communication. When looking at brands’ communication and the level of activism, we have caught interest in the phenomenon of disruptive communication related to stigmatized issues. Therefore, the topic we have chosen to research in this paper is the interrelation between stigma and disruptive communication.

To the best of our knowledge, there has been no earlier research about stigma connected to disruptive communication. The earlier studies conducted about stigma have been focused on a health perspective, looking into questions about how stigmatized concepts might affect a person's health and wellbeing (Bos, Pryor, Reeder & Stutterheim, 2013). The concept of stigma has received increased attention lately and has been widely researched, but we have discovered a gap in the literature. The gap relates to the concept of stigma related to the marketing field.

We argue that the research will help brands get a better understanding on how to relate to stigmatized phenomenon's connected to brand values. Moreover, we believe that it is crucial for brands to get an insight in how to use disruptive communication related to a stigmatized phenomenon, and therefore expand and create a more loyal customer base.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how disruptive communication can be used as a means to overcome stigma.

## Literature review

### *Stigma*

The definition of stigma originates from the Greeks, who referred to it as “bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (Goffman, 1986, p. 10). The signs were cut or burn marks, marked on the skin of a criminal, slave, or traitor (Goffman, 1986). In this way, people could easily identify who were immoral, and therefore should be avoided (Goffman, 1986; Bos et al., 2013). Today, stigma is no longer connected to physical marks but to attributes others judge as negatively deviated from what is considered normal. Thereby, a person who possesses this attribute is devalued by the others (Goffman, 1986). People who tend to find themselves in situations where they are stigmatized feel that they are not fully

socially accepted (Smith, 2006). Research has also found that stigma occurs in social interactions. Therefore, the perception of stigma can differ in different social contexts (Bos et al., 2013). Consequently, according to Harmeling, Mende, Scott & Palmatier (2021), stigma suggests a social hierarchy. In the lowest place, the person with a stigmatized attribute can be found, assigned to this position by the dominant social group. This dominant group determines what is deviant, valued, and acceptable (Harmeling et al., 2021).

Recent research about stigma has focused on exploring the connection between the concept and the marketplace. For instance, in an article written by Mirabito, Otnes, Crosby, Wooten, Machin, Pullig, Adkins, Dunnett, Hamilton, Thomas, Yeh, Davis, Gollnhofer, Grover, Matias, Mitchell, Ndichu, Sayarh and Velagaleti (2016), marketplace stigma is defined as “the labeling, stereotyping, and devaluation by and of commercial stakeholders [...] and their offerings (products, services, and experiences)” (p. 171). The concept is still relatively unexplored. However, it is important to understand the concept of marketplace stigma since consumers identify themselves with goods and services that are connected to social status and the desire to fit into social norms (Mirabito et al., 2016).

Moreover, Harmeling et al. (2021) also argue that consumers' consumption can be affected by their personal attributes. The reason is that the personal attributes can assume the characteristics of a stigma, and thereby affect consumption. Furthermore, Harmeling et al. (2021) state that stigma can transform consumers' perception of and response to a company's marketing communication. For instance, an advertisement about a gym chain, containing fit models, can work ineffective if the receiver has stigmatized body weight. Meanwhile, the same advertisement can have a positive effect on a receiver that does not have a stigmatized body weight. Therefore, stigma management is a

dynamic and volatile process, as well as a major obstacle for marketers (Harmeling et al, 2021).

In this paper, we refer to stigma as personal attributes that are viewed as devalued or taboo in social contexts.

### *Disruptive communication*

To the best of our knowledge, there is no academic definition of the concept ‘disruptive communication’. Therefore, it is possible to look at disruptive communication from multiple points of views. One way to look at disruptive communication is simply to look at the meaning of the two words separately. According to the website Lexico (2021b), the word disruptive can be explained as innovative or groundbreaking. The word communication is explained by Lexico (2021b), as “exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium”. When putting the meanings of the two words together, it is possible to interpret disruptive communication as an innovative way of spreading information.

According to communication specialist Jeff Johnson in Disruptive Communication (2018, 00:01:07), communication is an exchange of information using “words, symbols and behaviors”. Johnson (2018) also claims that at this time in history, people are talking more but communicating less which has led the world into “a space of echo chambers” (2018, 00:02:06) where individuals are afraid to speak up about issues. Looking at this information, disruptive communication could be interpreted as talking about issues. Moreover, Johnson (2018) describes the term disruptive communication as “communicating in a way that is more effective to bring impact to all areas in our life” (2018, 00:00:40).

We have chosen to interpret disruptive communication as an innovative or groundbreaking way of communicating issues. For this paper, we look at how

disruptive communication can be used as a tool to overcome stigma.

### *The Golden Circle*

The Golden Circle is a theory about emotional value (Sinek, 2009). The theory is divided into three facets: *why*, *how*, and *what*. The intention of the Golden Circle is to clarify how companies communicate their emotional value to their customers by beginning with explaining *why* they do what they do (Sinek, 2020). Simon Sinek (2009), the founder of the Golden Circle, claims that organizations that know and base their *why* on strong beliefs and values are more likely to become successful. Sinek (2009) also argues that every organization knows *what* they do, while some organizations know *how* they do it, which can be explained as an organization’s unique selling point. However, very few organizations know *why* they do what they do.

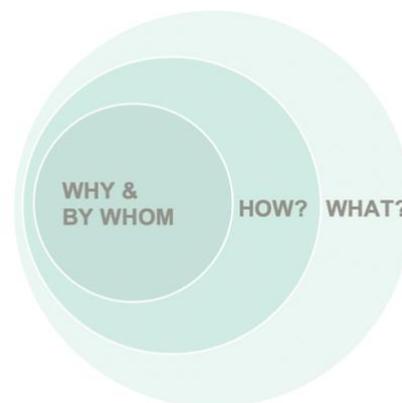


Figure 1: Simon Sinek’s (2009) golden circle modified with Urde’s (2021) by whom.

According to Sinek (2009), most organizations start with an outside-in perspective, going from *what* they do and *how* they do it, followed by their *why*, if they even know their *why*. However, successful organizations look at the Golden Circle with an inside-out perspective, going from *why* they do something to *how* and *what* they do. This is enacted in the way organizations act and communicate (Sinek, 2009).

Urde (2021) argues that a fourth facet should be considered in Simon Sinek's Golden Circle: *by whom* (figure 1). He emphasizes the importance of taking the organization's identity in consideration when discussing the purpose's relevance (Urde, 2021). Since we believe that *by whom* is relevant for this paper, the case studies will be discussed based on all four facets.

*Brand Identity and the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM)*

A relatively new concept within marketing and brand management literature, which is closely connected to Urde's (2021) question of *by whom*, is brand identity, introduced by Kapferer (1992). The concept refers to the unique set of features brands hold, including brands' core values and visions, which permeates all parts of brands' activities (Kapferer, 2012). Defining the brand identity helps brands specify what makes it unique and provides the customers with a coherent image of who the brand is

and what it does. Through this, brands can highlight their unique competences and features, which appeal to similar features in customers' identities. Therefore, the brand identity is an important factor to consider in marketing efforts and advertising. Kapferer (2012) argues that all communication should mediate the brand identity and core values to the customers, answering the question of why the company does what it does, and how it does it.

Greyser and Urde (2019), among others, have elaborated on the brand identity concept and introduced the corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM), which presents nine interrelated components of brand identity (figure 2). The components are divided into three layers of external elements, internal elements and elements that are both internal and external. As portrayed in the CBIM (figure 2) each of these elements hold a set of questions and the authors argue that through answering these questions, companies can build a strong and successful brand identity. Although, Greyser and Urde (2019)



Figure 2: The corporate brand identity matrix by Greyser and Urde (2019)

emphasize that the elements need to be coherent and support each other in order to constitute a successful brand identity. In formulating the CBIM, the authors argue that the answers to the questions need to be concise, straightforward, seek what is characteristic for the specific brand, be authentic and seek what is timeless. To explore the identities of the brands behind the commercials that we will analyze in coming chapters, this matrix will be used to answer the question of *by whom*.

## Methodology

To analyze how disruptive communication can work as a means to overcome stigma, we have chosen to conduct a case study. This is a useful method when the aim is to provide in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon and its function in a social context (Denscombe, 2016). Four advertising campaigns were analyzed launched by four different companies: Estrid, Tena, Kappahl and Deodoc.

A literature review was conducted of the concepts ‘stigma’, ‘disruptive communication’ and ‘brand identity’, to ensure that the concepts correspond to this study. Furthermore, it also included Simon Sinek’s (2009) *Golden Circle* including Urde’s (2021) addition *by whom*, along with the *Corporate Brand Identity Matrix* by Greyser and Urde (2019). This was also the theoretical foundation for the analysis of the cases.

To obtain empirical data, a qualitative document analysis was conducted by analyzing material from the brands’ campaigns, websites, social media as well as other relevant media.

## Presentation of cases

### *Kappahl*

In 1953, Per-Olof Ahl opened his first store in Gothenburg, Sweden. His business idea was to sell high quality-coats to a reasonable price with the aim to give more

people the opportunity to be well dressed. Almost 70 years later, Kappahl has hundreds of stores around Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Poland, and is one of the largest fashion chains in the Nordic (Kappahl, 2021b).

“We exist to celebrate diversity in everyday life” (Kappahl, 2021a), so it reads on Kappahl’s (2021a) website. Kappahl’s promise is to offer fashionable, yet affordable garments for all kinds of people and their way of living, no matter in what way. Moreover, diversity in all kinds of forms makes fashion more fun and interesting, according to Kappahl (2021a). That is why Kappahl cherishes diversity throughout its organization (Kappahl, 2021a) and is a company for women of all shapes and ages (Kappahl, 2020d).

A recent campaign run by Kappahl is the “Confidence for Every Body” campaign that aims to boost women and their daily lives (Kappahl, 2020d). With this campaign, Kappahl wanted to highlight different female shapes and women’s experiences to contribute to that all women feel comfortable and like themselves in their own body (Kappahl, 2020c). Kappahl (2020c) states that the campaign is a movement toward the possibility for all women to be their best selves. The campaign was communicated through billboards, televisions, and social media, showing women in various sizes and ages expressing confidence and pride (appendix 1). It was run three times during 2020 (Kappahl, 2020c).

### *Tena*

Tena is a product brand of Essity Hygiene Products AB, who has over 50 years of experience in providing hygiene and health products to men and women worldwide (Tena, 2021a). Through the brand Tena, Essity provides with a broad range of absorbent articles to facilitate the everyday life of men and women suffering from incontinence. Tena has defined its mission as “To improve the lives of people living or

working with incontinence around the world.” (Tena, 2021b), and are working to improve the quality of life for people suffering from incontinence. A big part of Tena’s marketing efforts has focused on normalizing society’s vision of incontinence and to tackle taboos related to this condition.

In 2019, Tena launched the “I Will Be Me” campaign (appendix 2) which received huge attention in the media as it used a rather unconventional way of marketing. In the campaign, Tena advertised its new black Silhouette Noir, an incontinence protection shaped like regular black underwear, by mimicking a Victoria’s Secret ad (Tena, n.d.). The point of the campaign was to spread awareness about the fact that one in three women over 35 suffer from incontinence and that it should not have to affect your ability to live a normal life and feel sexy and feminine (Tena, n.d.).

### *Estrid*

Estrid is Scandinavia's first brand to produce razors and shaving products focusing on the female body (Ahmedi, 2019). The brand launched in 2019 and it only took 18 months for the brand to reach a record-breaking billion valuation (Ek, 2020). The company aims to increase women’s ability to take care of their body and body hair in accordance with their own wishes (Estrid, 2020a). One of the founders, Amanda Westerbom, said in an interview “We do not place any value on how, where, when or if you shave. Estrid is our way of taking back the right to our own body hair without set ideals” (Ahmedi, 2019). Among other projects, Estrid is working against the price discrimination called ‘pink tax’. This means that the products produced for women are more expensive than products produced for men. Therefore, the prices of Estrid’s products are low but retain high quality (Estrid, 2020b).

Estrid is also known for using its marketing to challenge norms in the society. In its launching campaign, “Shave and

misbehave” (appendix 3), Estrid used several scenes where women discuss taboo subjects such as body hair and shaving (Alberts, 2019). Like many other marketing efforts by Estrid, the campaign aimed to strengthen the message about women's right to decide over their own body hair. The creative director of the company, Nadia Kandil, explained in an interview that “We are not afraid to show women with hair unlike other razor brands, we want to tribute it and show what reality actually looks like” (Ahmedi, 2019). The company’s way of advertising has been so successful that other competitors have started to market razors aimed for women in a similar way (appendix 4).

### *Deodoc*

Founded in 2013 (Nordic 9, n/d), Deodoc, a Swedish intimate skin care company, was created by female doctors for women’s private and sensitive parts (Deodoc, 2021a). The mission behind the company is to offer safe intimate care products, teach women about their anatomy, and to break the taboo around women’s intimate care.

In March 2021, the company launched the campaign “The menstrual cycle with Bianca Ingrosso” (appendix 5) to illustrate the four phases of the menstrual cycle. Whilst the idea of the commercial was to educate and show how powerful the female body is, the video got extensive backlash on social media (Rågsjö Thorell, 2021). The campaign was reported by multiple people who claimed that the video was offensive and that it was sexualizing women. The commercial was dropped by the Swedish advertising ombudsman for being sexist and for breaking the rules of stereotypical gender roles by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). Deodoc responded to some of the comments about the campaign saying that the important thing for the company was to highlight the subject of women’s period and be able to talk about what normally is frowned upon (Hansson & Hermansson, 2021).

## Empirical results and analysis of cases

The following part of the paper will present an analysis of the chosen theoretical frameworks: the Golden Circle and the CBIM, applied on the four marketing campaigns of Kappahl, Tena, Estrid and Deodoc. We will go through the four phases of the Golden Circle, *by whom* will be analyzed and integrated in the CBIM, which then will be followed by an analysis of *why*, *how*, and *what*. The analysis of each case will also discuss how the campaigns bring up stigmas and use disruptive communication.

### Kappahl

When analyzing how a campaign is disruptive, one first has to go to the core of the campaign, in other words, the sender of the message. As Urde (2021) explains, the question of *by whom* is critical for how messages will be perceived. One way to go

about answering the question of *by whom* is to analyze the brand identity of the brand behind the message, which is why Greyser and Urde's (2019) CBIM is used.

Kappahl's external elements are analyzed according to the three top components in the matrix (figure 3). At Kappahl's (2021a) website, there is a consistency about the company's desire to inspire and help customers. For instance, one can read that "Our calling is to inspire you, and to help you find your personal style. We want to give you the confidence to try out new things" (Kappahl, 2021a). Kappahl's key offering is to offer affordable yet fashionable clothing for many people (Kappahl, 2021a). This has been a guiding star for Kappahl since the beginning when Per-Olof Ahl wanted to give more people the opportunity to dress well in coats for a reasonable price (Kappahl, 2021b).

Thereafter, the second layer, focusing on both internal and external elements (figure 3), shows that Kappahl wants to inspire its customers. Furthermore, it wants

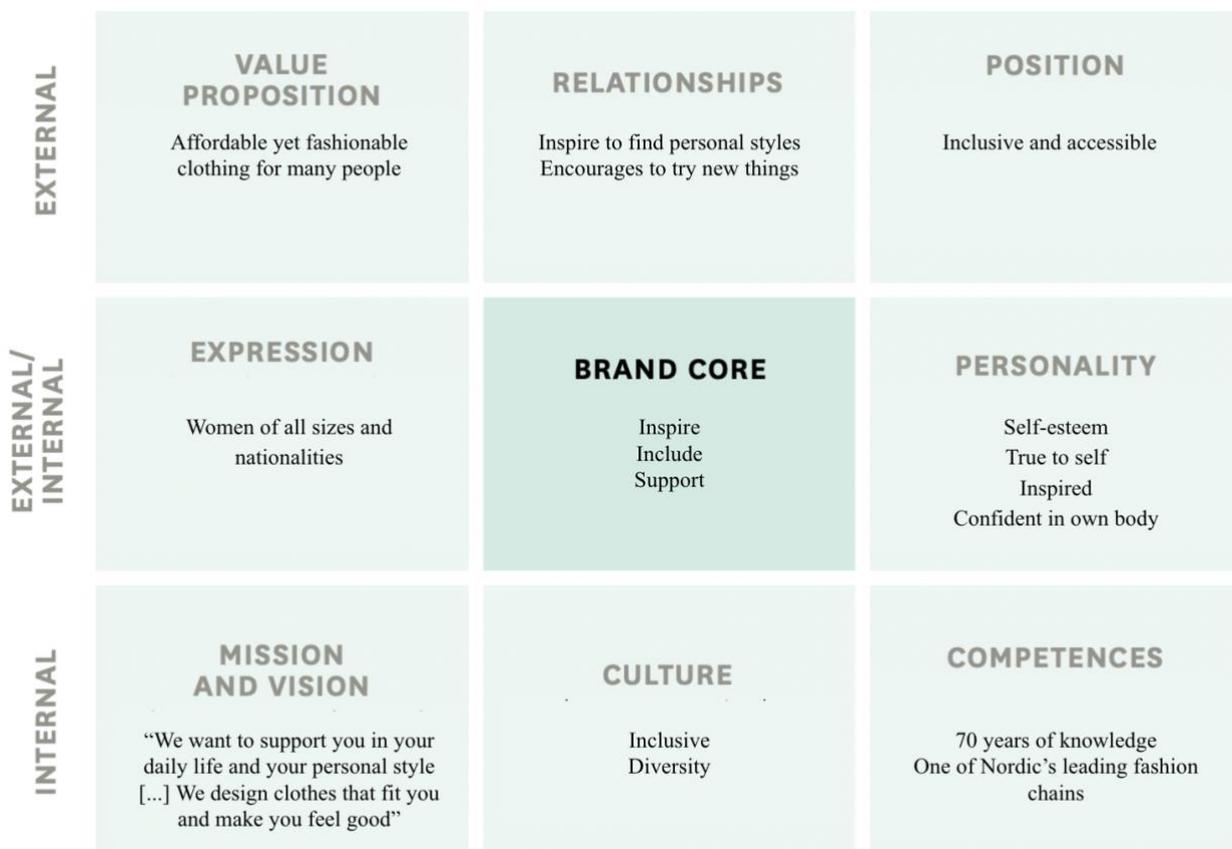


Figure 3: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix for Kappahl

to be an inclusive company as well as support its customers to find their personal style. Nevertheless, Kappahl wants to contribute to the customers feeling confident in their own bodies, no matter size, nationality or look. This is also expressed through Kappahl's communication where the company presents its clothes with women of all ages, sizes, and nationalities.

Lastly, the three components at the bottom of the matrix (figure 3) are Kappahl's internal elements. At Kappahl's website, one can read "We want to support you in your daily life and your personal style [...] We design clothes that fit you and make you feel good" (Kappahl, 2021a). Kappahl has an inclusive and open-minded culture and makes it its mission to design clothes that feel good and comfortable.

The campaign "Confidence for Every Body" by Kappahl aimed at inspiring women (Kappahl, 2020d) by highlighting different female shapes and women's experience (Kappahl, 2020c). Firstly, to understand what emotional driven values are behind Kappahl's campaign, Simon Sinek's (2009) *why* is used as an analyzing tool. The *why* behind the campaign is stated by Kappahl (2020c) as the movement toward making every woman feel confident in her own body, and thus become the best version of herself.

According to Lin and McFerran (2016), both thinner and larger models in advertising can be stigmatized. The authors state that thin models can be stigmatized because they are 'unrealistic', 'problematic' and 'abnormal'. Meanwhile, models with overweight or obesity can be stigmatized due to the increased risk of serious health problems. However, the authors continue by stating that even though advertising is becoming more diverse, most models still possess a very thin body type (Lin & McFerran, 2016). Moreover, Sean Redmond states in his article *Thin White Women in Advertising* (2003) that the ideal representation of femininity is thin, white, and often blond, which in turn only white

women can achieve (Redmond, 2003). This article is quite outdated and not fairly representative today. However, it clearly shows a past stereotype that was widespread before and still features a lot of advertising today.

With this in mind, the stigma Kappahl tries to overcome with this campaign is the stereotype that beauty is about having a thin body size and white skin. In its campaign, the company includes every type of women, every size, nationality, skin color and hair color. Kappahl (202a) even stated "We just kinda had enough. Women, and everyone for that matter, should be able to be themselves and feel comfortable in their own body". After analyzing Sinek's (2009) *why*, it is clear that Kappahl's campaign is in accordance with its brand identity, or *by whom*.

So, *how* (Sinek, 2009) did Kappahl create a disruptive campaign? The company created two advertising videos launched on different occasions during 2020 (Kappahl, 2020c). One of them presents three women with different nationalities, body types and ages getting dressed. At the same time, a female voice is heard in the background saying "You've learned... How to fit in... Blend in. To struggle... But we know... Women come in many shapes... So do we" (Kappahl, 2020a). The other video is created in a similar way but in a different setting. In this video, one can hear a female voice saying "Confidence, is all about comfort... Being comfortable in your own skin... And the shape you're in... We know, women come in many shapes... So do we" (Kappahl, 2020b). In addition, a variety of different campaign photos were released picturing women with different body size, nationalities and age wearing Kappahl's clothes. Johnson (2018) stated that disruptive communication refers to talking about issues, which Kappahl really did. For instance, the statement in the first video about how women have learned to fit is in accordance with the stigma and the issue. Meanwhile, the statement that is included in both videos, "We know, women

come in many shapes... So do we” (Kappahl, 2020a; Kappahl, 2020b), is Kappahl’s way of overcoming the issue in a disruptive manner.

Finally, *what* (Sinek, 2009) Kappahl did was to release the campaign on different social media platforms through the company's account, for instance on Instagram and Facebook, as well as on billboards, and television (appendix 1).

### Tena

To answer the question of *by whom* the CBIM has been applied on Tena. As portrayed in the matrix below (figure 4) Tena puts heavy emphasis on communicating to its customers and stakeholders that the brand is a reliable and innovative source of incontinence products that help facilitate everyday life despite incontinence. This becomes evident throughout its webpage.

The second layer of the matrix shows the brand personality, expression and long-

term core values that overlap the internal and external aspects of the brand (Greyser & Urde, 2019). For the case of Tena, this layer shows that it figures as an important educator in overcoming stigma and taboo related to incontinence. This, while simultaneously realizing the need for discretion and professionalism (Tena, 2016). Tena’s expression promotes a confident and free lifestyle through the safety of discrete products, which is visible throughout several of its commercials and on the web page (Tena, 2019a; Tena, 2019b; Tena, 2016).

In the third and final layer of the matrix, the internal elements of Tena’s brand identity is portrayed. In this part of the identity, Tena strongly highlights its focus on improving the lives of people with incontinence, while taking a stand to question norms. This is also a clearly defined mission on its webpage (Tena, 2021b). Moreover, Tena underlines that this has been in the brand’s DNA for over 50 years.

EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL	<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<b>VALUE PROPOSITION</b> Authentic and well functioning products Innovative	<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b> Trustworthy Encourage to a normal everyday life	<b>POSITION</b> Market leaders and in forefront of innovation
	<b>EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL</b>	<b>EXPRESSION</b> Celebrate femininity Spread awareness	<b>BRAND CORE</b> Facilitating everyday life despite incontinence Working as an educator to prevent stigma	<b>PERSONALITY</b> Professional Honest Reliable
	<b>INTERNAL</b>	<b>MISSION AND VISION</b> “To improve the lives of people living or working with incontinence around the world.”	<b>CULTURE</b> Problem solving Caring Questioning norms	<b>COMPETENCES</b> 50 years of experience in incontinence products Market leaders

Figure 4: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix for Tena

The *why* behind the I Will Be Me-campaign aligns with what permeates all of Tena’s brand identity, namely, to help overcome the taboo and stigma related to the condition and help women suffering from incontinence to lead a normal life (Tena, n.d.). According to Elstad, Taubenberger, Botelho and Tennstedt (n.d.), the stigma related to urinary incontinence is largely associated with the fear of it being visible and noticeable by the surroundings. The authors stress that the fear of being perceived as disgusting or weird may cause psychological distress to the people suffering from the condition. Tena (n.d.) explains that these perceptions are something the company aims to challenge through its campaign, which leads to the question of *how* the launch was performed. The product could be considered to be disruptive due to the innovative way it offers a new way of covering incontinence. Meanwhile, the campaign is especially disruptive since it touches upon the subject in a manner that has never been attempted

before. In doing so, Tena also questions the normative way of talking about incontinence which goes in line with our definition for disruptive communication. *What* Tena did was to broadcast their campaign on big billboards on the attractive addresses in London. The campaign mimicked a Victoria's Secret campaign displaying 40+ women in all shapes and colors, posing in black underwear with the slogan “Secret’s out, 1 in 3 women have incontinence”. The campaign was the start of “I Will Be Me”, which has continued to promote femininity and feeling sexy despite incontinence.

### *Estrid*

As mentioned earlier, the first layer of the matrix consists of the external elements (figure 5). On social media, Estrid explains that an important part of the company is to fight for women's rights, the environment, and animals (Estrid, 2020c). Therefore, customers can perceive the brand’s

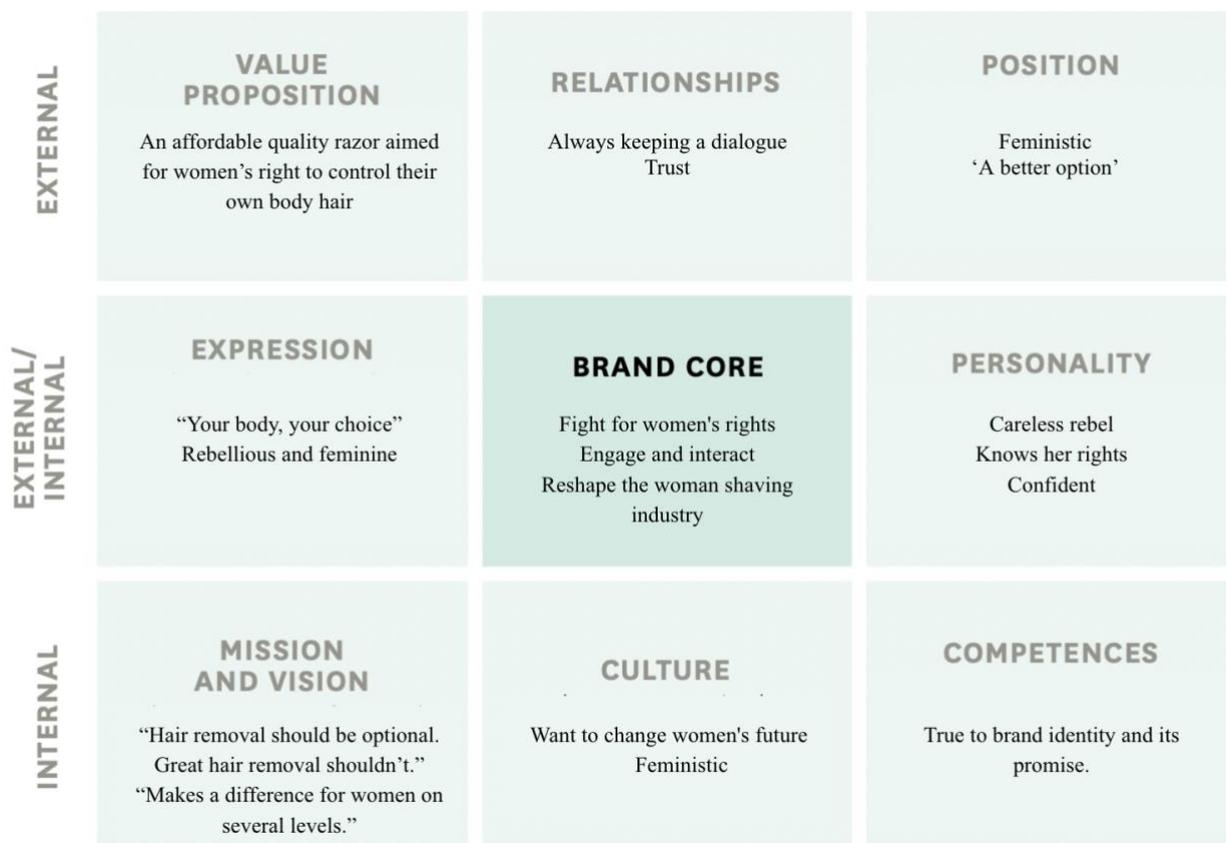


Figure 5: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix for Estrid

positioning as ‘a better option’ compared to competitors. Estrid is offering customers an affordable, cruelty-free, environmentally friendly quality razor that will help females to obtain their right to control their own body hair (Estrid, 2020c). Since it can be observed that Estrid is communicating with women on several platforms on social media (appendix 6) it can be seen that Estrid is keeping a constant dialogue with its customers, building on trust.

The second layer of the matrix consists of both internal and external components. Since changing the view of women's rights to control their own body hair seems to be a repeated topic in Estrid's communication, this topic can be seen as Estrid's core value. The value is expressed on social media and advertisements in a rough and rebellious way by communicating confident, careless women breaking social norms. A woman that knows her rights should therefore express Estrid's personality in a good way (appendix 3).

Finally, the third layer includes the internal elements of Estrid's identity. On Estrid's website, the vision is clearly stated as “Hair removal should be optional. Great hair removal shouldn't” (Estrid, 2020a). Furthermore, the company also strives to influence the world positively as well as fight for gender equality (Estrid, 2020d). With this in mind, the feministic attitude, and the willingness to change women's future is clearly permeating Estrid's organizational culture.

As explained earlier, Estrid's launching campaign “Shave and misbehave” aimed to question the social ideal of women's bodies and body hair. The company wanted to make a statement that women should be able to decide over their own body hair and its potential removal (Ahmedi, 2019). Through the analysis of the brand identity above, the aim with the campaign is clearly supported by Estrid's identity, or *by whom since* the message of the campaign is part of the brand core.

According to Tiggemann & Hodgson (2008), Western society's ideal woman is

hairless. Both genders express that body hair is masculine and that women therefore are seen as less intelligent and sexually attractive if they chose to not remove their body hair (Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008; Smelik, 2015). This can result in many negative social consequences, which demonstrate the power of this specific norm. Women with visible body hair report that they often get comments such as “gross” and “disgusting” (Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008; Smelik, 2015).

Tiggemann & Hodgson (2008) found that there is a strong connection between social media and the trend of women's hair removal. Historically, fashion magazines and television started to promote hairless women as the ideal by creating commercials where women, who were using shaving products, were called “smart girls” (Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008; Smelik, 2015). The shaving trend is still expanding and is becoming more extreme as the social norm of associating body hair to disgust, affects women's health negatively (Smelik, 2015). Therefore, Smelik (2015) argues that “female body hair has become taboo” (p.235), or as we call it, stigmatized. Estrid's identity and campaign is clearly fighting against a stigmatized subject with negative social consequences, which explains *why* the brand wants to overcome the stigma.

Estrid seems to express its viewpoint in its advertisement by using females who do not fit into the society's social norms. In the launching campaign, women can be seen discussing subjects such as saving while doing everyday activities. In the end of the clip, the text “Groom, trim, shave. Or not.” can be seen (Alberts, 2019). This is a good example on *how* Estrid spread awareness, and thereby also created a discussion of the subject. Since Jeff Johnson (2018) argues that disruptive communication is a way to affect and inform people, as well as talking about issues, Estrid's way to communicate can be seen as disruptive.

*What* Estrid did in order to try to overcome the stigma was to create a

launching campaign where the brand, through disruptive communication, created awareness of the subject and tried to normalize the stigma. The company published the campaign on several social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Television.

### Deodoc

Urde’s (2021) fourth aspect *by whom* will be analyzed through the CBIM (figure 6), where the first three components of the matrix are analyzing the external elements of Deodoc’s identity. Deodoc puts heavy focus on letting customers and stakeholders know that the company is safe, trustworthy, and authentic. This is emphasized on the company website when talking about the long experience and multiple insights the founders have from the diversity of women coming to see them for medical appointments (Deodoc, 2021a). In an interview with the two founding sisters Hedieh and Hasti Asadi, they say that Deodoc is a brand within the beauty

industry, and they see their target customers as people who enjoy taking care of themselves and see nothing shameful in also taking care of their vagina (Collins & Thomas, 2018).

For the second layer, the focus of the three components lays on internal and external elements. It is possible to see in the matrix that Deodoc’s core is in educating women about their body anatomy (Deodoc, 2021a). The brand even has a full page on its website called “Get intimate” for customers to read about different aspects of menstruation and the vagina (Deodoc, 2021b). Furthermore, Deodoc is strongly influenced by the feministic culture from their female doctors and founders, who have run the company since the registration in 2013 (Nordic 9, n.d.).

Finally, the last three components that explore the internal elements of Deodoc also focus on educating and informing women and trying to revolutionize the intimate skin care industry. The company is meticulous to mention that it is founded by female doctors, while compared to the rest

EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL	<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<b>VALUE PROPOSITION</b>  Safe and authentic intimate skin care	<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>  Safe Trustworthy	<b>POSITION</b>  Helpful, unique Innovative/trend setters Female founders Beauty brand
	<b>EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL</b>	<b>EXPRESSION</b>  Educating women Colourful Feminine	<b>BRAND CORE</b>  Female doctors for female customers, spread awareness of intimate care, teach women about their own anatomy	<b>PERSONALITY</b>  Genuine Feminine Educated
	<b>INTERNAL</b>	<b>MISSION AND VISION</b>  “To revolutionize intimate skin care”  Inform women to make the right choices for their unique intimate body parts.	<b>CULTURE</b>  Caring Spread awareness and knowledge Feminine	<b>COMPETENCES</b>  Female doctors 50 years of experience and insight within gynecology

Figure 6: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix for Deodoc

of the intimate skin care industry where the founders are usually men or big pharmaceutical companies (Deodoc, 2021a). The brand along with its founders make sure to mention this on both Deodoc's website but also during an interview with Nose Paris (Nose, n.d.).

As earlier mentioned, the purpose and the *why* behind the disruptive campaign "the menstrual cycle with Bianca Ingrosso" was to educate women about periods, and to highlight the subject of menstruation that has been stigmatized since ancient cultures. The message is clearly supported by the brand identity, or *by whom*, of Deodoc since the brand core is about educating women about their own anatomy.

According to obstetrician Tanya Tantry (2020), menstruation "involves the stigma around discussing and caring for menstrual needs". Due to this stigma, women have for decades had to come up with code names for having their periods. Authors, psychologists, and scholars have been trying to explain the stigma around menstruation. However, no matter the reason behind the stigma, the taboos around the subject have resulted in health and safety issues amongst women (Tantry, 2020).

It is important to highlight that menstruation itself might not be a stigma in today's western society, but rather the discussions around it. Gynecologist, and Karolinska Institutet researcher, Lena Marions claims that society does not know how to view the issues around women's periods (Sternudd, 2020). However, Marions argues that one aspect around it is to start normalizing them. This is what Deodoc's campaign with Bianca Ingrosso tried to do and *why* it was a way of overcoming a stigma.

It also explains *how* the campaign was disruptive. As claimed by Johnson (2018), disruptive communication is about communicating in a way that people get affected. Since the campaign was dropped by the Swedish advertising ombudsman, the campaign was not appreciated by the

society. Therefore, it is possible to assume that menstruation is still stigmatized, and the society is still not ready to fight the stigma around it.

*What* the intimate skin care company did was to release a campaign on multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In the video Deodoc highlighted the four different stages of female menstruation and by that shedding light on the stigma of menstruation. This started a discussion that is well needed to ignite the normalization of the phenomenon.

## Discussion & conclusion

From the analysis, a few conclusions can be drawn on how disruptive communication can be used as a means to overcome stigma. Firstly, all four cases have shown examples of successful campaigns that are disruptive. This due to the way they question and challenge the status quo of how products in their respective category have been advertised before. What can be said about the campaigns is that all brands chose to bring up a stigmatized phenomenon in today's Western society. These phenomena were body inclusivity (Kappahl), incontinence (Tena), female body hair (Estrid) and menstruation (Deodoc).

Secondly, the main point we were looking into was how a company can overcome a stigma through disruptive communication. However, as a result of our case studies we came across the question if the companies actually did overcome these stigmas through their disruptive communication or if it only ignited some sort of dialogue about the subject.

As earlier mentioned, and as can be seen in Deodoc's campaign, the stigma that was discussed created such strong reactions amongst Swedish society it had to be dropped by the advertising ombudsman. The dialogue of the stigma of menstruation got started due to the campaign receiving vast amounts of attention. However, society was not yet ready to overcome the stigma of

menstruation and it could be argued that this is the reason the campaign got dropped. Due to this, Deodoc's disruptive campaign did not overcome the stigma, but it did start an important discussion and took the stigma of menstruation one step closer to get destigmatized.

In a similar manner, the marketing campaign by Tena has opened for discussion and brought attention to the fact that many people suffer from incontinence, and the stigma connected to it. The company has received huge attention and credit for the campaign and was awarded for taking a stand. However, the stigma related to the condition remains, which is why Tena realizes the need for discretion for their customers while the brand continues to take a stand.

Moreover, when analyzing Estrid's disruptive campaign, strong identity, and way of questioning norms, it can be discussed that Estrid's communication has changed the female shaving market as well as the marketing of it. Since the company has managed to market itself through disruptive communication that emphasizes the stigma of female body hair, as great as it has, a conclusion can be drawn saying that Estrid did in fact overcome this stigma.

Similarly, to Estrid, Kappahl has overcome its stigma focusing on body inclusivity. Since the launch of the campaign "Confidence for Every Body" it seems as if most of the feedback Kappahl has received has been positive. Today, inclusivity and equality permeate Kappahl's entire communication and organization. As a result, it is concluded that the company continues communicating in the same disruptive way, which shows that Kappahl did overcome the stigma.

Furthermore, what can be seen common throughout all four cases is that the message, i.e., the *why*, the companies sent out through their disruptive marketing campaigns were all strongly aligned with their company brand identity, i.e., *by whom*. By identifying the connection between *why* and *by whom*, we can conclude that to have a strong disruptive communication, and to get an authentic discussion about stigma started, it is important and effective for the sender to in its very core support that message. Through this, a brand has a chance of overcoming stigma or at least starting a discussion around it.

Finally, from this research we have been able to formulate a framework (figure 7) that can be used for connecting brand identity and disruptive communication.

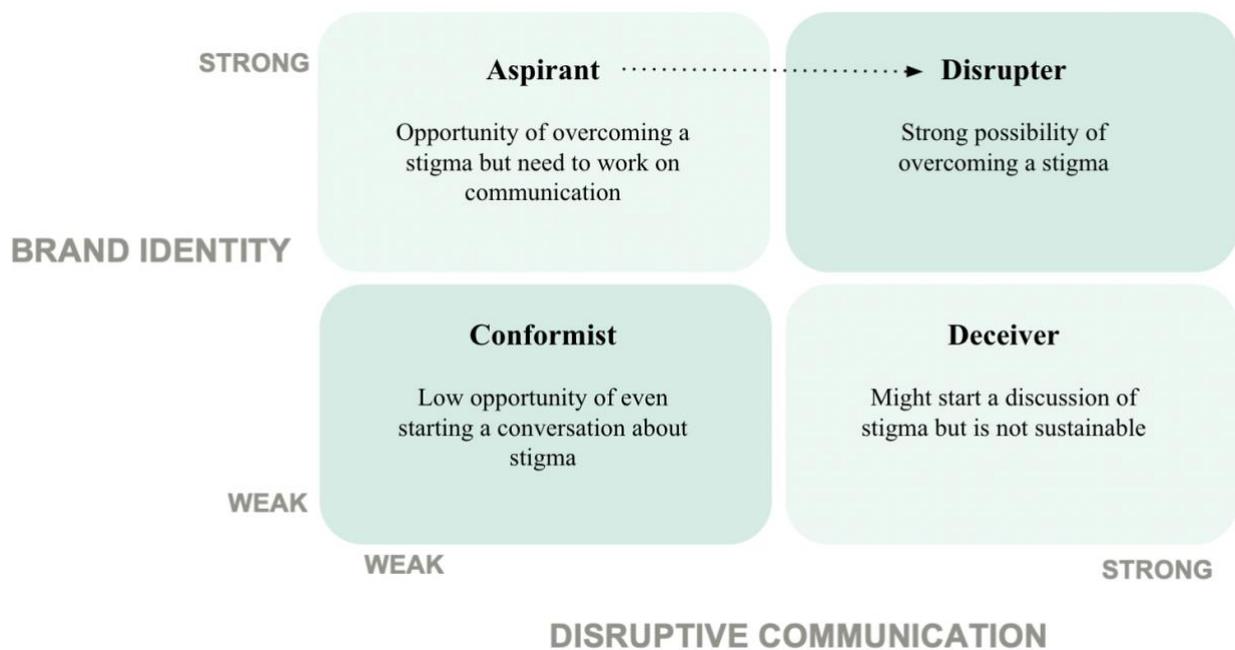


Figure 7: Disruptive Communication Framework

This framework can work as a tool to see what possibilities a company has to launch a successful disruptive campaign connected to a stigmatized subject. The framework (figure 7) divides companies into four categories with different opportunities of succeeding with disruptive communication.

Firstly, the *Disrupter* is a brand with a strong identity and uses its communication to disrupt a market. In this way, the brand can create awareness about a subject and has a strong possibility to overcome a stigma. The four companies analyzed in this research are examples of disrupters. Secondly, the *Deceiver* is a brand with a weak brand identity but who still uses a strong disruptive communication. This strategy might work when creating a campaign but will not be perceived as authentic since the message is not supported by the brand's identity. The brand might get backlash due to not keeping its brand values aligned with the communicated message. Moreover, the third category in our framework is the *Aspirant*, a brand with weak disruptive communication but a strong brand identity. This brand does not currently use disruptive communication but possesses an opportunity to successfully launch a campaign that disrupts the status quo of the market the brand operates in. Finally, the *Conformist* is a brand with weak disruptive communication and weak brand identity. The message of the brand's campaign is weak and the brand values behind the campaign do not align with the values presented in the campaign.

To conclude, to be successful in a disruptive communication, a strong brand identity, that aligns with the message of the campaign, is needed. This study has shown that disruptive communication can be used as a means to overcome stigma, but that a prerequisite for a successful disruptive campaign is that the company behind it has an identity that aligns with the intended message. However, even though a brand has fulfilled the requirements of a disrupter, this study has shown that the brand is not

guaranteed to overcome a stigma but rather to start a conversation about it.

### *Theoretical & Managerial implications*

To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to research the phenomenon of disruptive communication and how it can be used to challenge existing norms of communication in product categories that are associated with stigma. The main theoretical contribution is thereby new insights of the concept of disruptive communication within the brand management research field. Furthermore, this paper also contributes with a framework that links the concept to corporate brand identity.

The results of the study, and the framework presented, also provide important managerial implications. Managers of companies, providing stigmatized products, may find an opportunity to look into their brand identity when considering whether or not to use disruptive communication as a means to challenge the status quo of their products.

### *Limitations & Future research*

A limitation of our study is that it only includes Swedish brands and campaigns. Therefore, the results may be influenced by Western norms and standards, and our framework may thus not be applicable on all markets. Another limitation is that this research only studies how disruptive communication can be used as a means to overcome stigma and thus, our framework is not applicable for other forms of disruptive communication. What is important to highlight is that this study does not complete a guideline of how to overcome a stigma.

For future research, similar case studies should be conducted with other brands to test the validity of the framework. Moreover, since there is vague research regarding stigma in relations to disruptive

communications, this field needs further exploring.

One limitation mentioned above was that this research is Western biased. Therefore, a suggestion for future research is to conduct the same study with brands that originated from other regions or countries.

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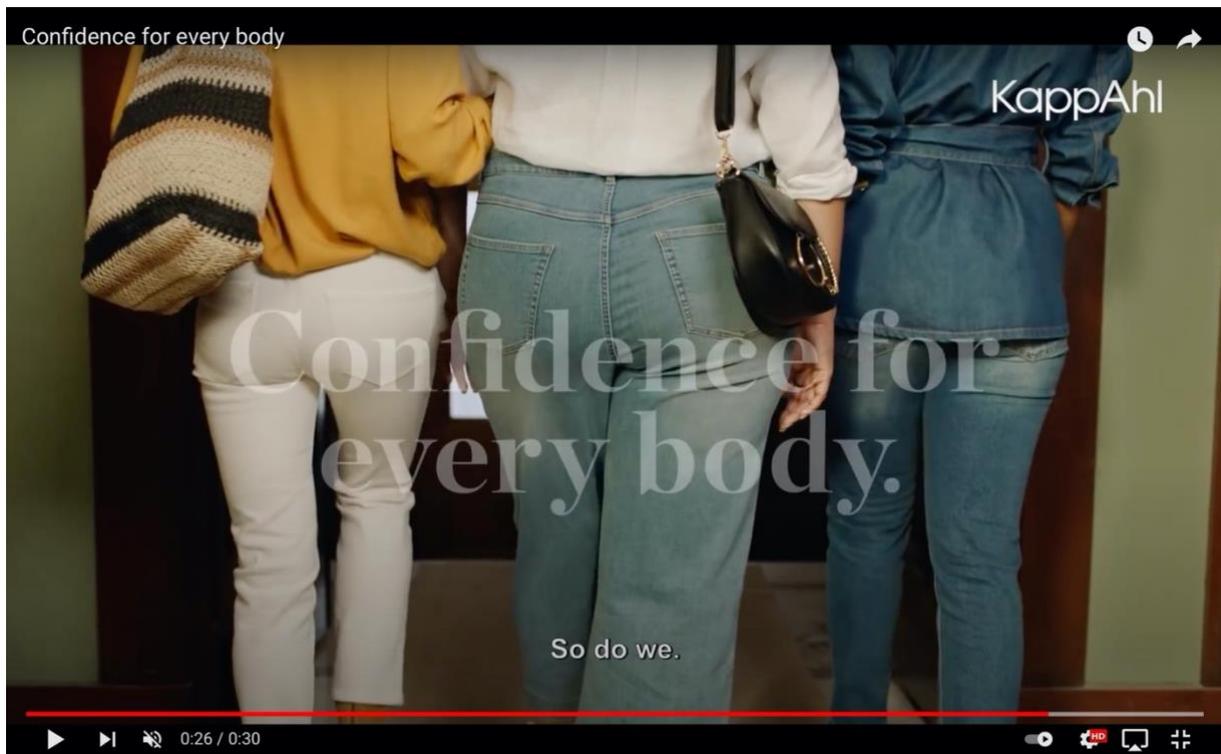
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Overview of “Confidence for every body” by Kappahl



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/kappahl/>



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7uZWfm41Wg>

Appendix 2: Overview of "I Will Be Me" by Tena



Source: [https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/tena\\_i\\_will\\_be\\_me](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/tena_i_will_be_me)



Source: [https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/tena\\_i\\_will\\_be\\_me](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/tena_i_will_be_me)

Appendix 3: Overview of “Shave and Misbehave” by Estrid



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EKaX3Lo6CU>

#### Appendix 4: Gillette Commercials



Source: [https://www.apohem.se/hudvard/rakning-harborttagning/harborttagning/rakhyvlar/gillette-venus-smooth-sensitive-pink-rakhyvel-1-st?gclid=CjwKCAjwk6-LBhBZEiwAOUUDpxMdlHkPSPYOIHQ63whFXVJaJVWRoMGazqaJrEcWoO6tE8ChOzV8mxoCeiAQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.apohem.se/hudvard/rakning-harborttagning/harborttagning/rakhyvlar/gillette-venus-smooth-sensitive-pink-rakhyvel-1-st?gclid=CjwKCAjwk6-LBhBZEiwAOUUDpxMdlHkPSPYOIHQ63whFXVJaJVWRoMGazqaJrEcWoO6tE8ChOzV8mxoCeiAQAvD_BwE) [Accessed: 12 October 2021]



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/gillettevenus/photos/a.278560132949/10157886555167950/?type=3&theater>

*Appendix 5: Overview of “The Menstruation Cycle with Bianca Ingrosso” by Deodoc*



Source: <https://newsbeezzer.com/swedeneng/they-turned-off-the-comments-after-advertising-with-bianca-ingrosso/>

Link to see video: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CL4kG-opmLp/?hl=en>

## Appendix 6: Estrid Social Media



Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_u72tiJ82G/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_u72tiJ82G/)



### Chatt

Vår chatt är öppen under arbetsdagar från 9:00 till 16:30 CET/CEST (Fredagar från 9:00 till 13:30).



### Messenger

Skriv till oss på [Messenger](#).



### Maila oss

Skicka ett e-postmeddelande till [hello@estrid.com](mailto:hello@estrid.com).

Source: <https://estrid.com/se/contact-us/>



### Seriöst

Source: <https://estrid.com/se/press/>