

## Alpha Group Outline Final Project

### **Lingerie Industry History and where it is now (size inclusive vs. Not)**

Lingerie started its early developments in the 18th century. There are two types of concepts for this garment, hard and soft. First, hard lingerie includes corsets, bustles, and structured bras. Soft lingerie consists of slips, nightgowns, and panties. The concept of underwear-as-outerwear is most commonly associated with the 1980s, but the look of lingerie has long served as inspiration for fashion garments. The earliest object on view was a corset made from sky-blue silk. Corsets were essentially made to maintain a woman's figure and modesty, they also held an erotic allure. In the 19th century, many underwear garments were characterized by modest designs and humble materials. However, entering the 20th century, intimate apparel was as beautiful and seductive as it was functional. Over the years, many styles were changing and adapting to new forms. Elasticized girdles had replaced constricting corsets by the 1920s, while bras, slips, and even lounging apparel also took new, modern forms. During the 1980s, there was a return for luxurious underwear garments such as provocative bustiers, inspired by past designs. Moving forward to the 21st century, high-end lingerie labels like La Perla, and Agent Provocateur, among others, were thriving in expanding the lingerie market, offering styles for every woman, from classic to fashion-forward, comfortable to seductive.

Lingerie industry has become a billion dollar industry and is expected to only grow in the future. The garment has changed its style over the centuries. At the turn of the 21st century lingerie has evolved due to modern technology and fabrics that have helped manufacture seamless bras, spandex panties, microfiber molded contour bras with breathable, comfortable materials and daring romantic colors have taken the industry up a notch. Women have worn almost everything as intimate wear. Lingerie has evolved a great deal much like any other type of clothing to reach its current state. Push-up bras, for example, dominated the industry for many years as a tool for sexual attraction. However, that trend has come to an end and has been replaced with sports bras and bralettes. Brands are also noticing that flirty silhouettes are no longer part of the selling point. Up-coming-brands are incorporating and moving into a different direction, mixing comfort with new or traditional styles at affordable prices and inclusive sizing.

American Eagle and Aerie are one of women's favorite brands between 15 and 25 years old because they have featured models of varying body types and ethnicities, including women with visible disabilities and illness. Aerie has gone all the way up to XXL with styles for everyone.

Regarding size inclusivity, it's been harmful to plus-size shoppers, who have been made to think or believe that their weight makes them unlovable or undesirable. Victoria's Secret has played a negative role in this problem because of its lack of inclusive sizing. However, the last few years have changed the undergarment market. Whereas a decade ago, Victoria's Secret held on to a monopoly on intimates, now new brands are dominating the market, introducing size, inclusivity, and diversity. Brands like Parade, Curvy Couture Intimates, ThirdLove, and Savage by Fenty have been making significant changes to provide comfort to women. For the plus-size community, size-inclusive intimate garments have the power to promote self-love by strengthening women's inner confidence. That's not to say intimates shouldn't serve as a means to amplify one's sexuality. The beauty in having an option of undergarments is in choosing how the consumer wants them to make them feel.

Parade, an intimate brand that follows sustainability and size inclusivity, was founded in 2019. Founder Cami Telléz built the brand from inspiration when she visited the mall and felt very out of touch with Victoria's Secret's vision of femininity. She expressed, "I always thought women deserved brands that were just as bold and expressive as they were." With Parade, she hopes to rewrite the American underwear story and become a leading challenger to Victoria's Secret and other similar brands in the market. Their size chart goes up to a 3X, providing options for every body type. The parade started its approach by using influencers on Instagram to showcase how Parade's underwear fits within their personal styles. Ad campaigns featuring Gen Z modeling garments have attracted and increased a following online. Parade stands for great values, they are inspired to remove the stigma surrounding gender and size in fashion. They try to trade the typical idea or sexiness that are perpetuated by brands like Victoria's Secret.

Understanding consumer needs is a big factor that has helped lingerie brands to gain their way to the top. Brands are working to provide personalized experiences to each consumer. True&Co happens to be one such lingerie brand going the extra mile to give every shopper her

perfect bra. The brand has been using its fits quiz to gather data from over 5 million women to make bras that actually fit and provide a pain-free and different shopping experience. Moreover, brands like Adore Me and Brayola are also taking advantage of advancements in technology to provide unparalleled shopping experiences. They have implemented artificial intelligence to get deeper insights on consumer behavior.

The impact of social media, especially Instagram, have flipped the lingerie industry by playing a big role in the way consumers see themselves as well as perceive and define beauty. From changing the meaning of what sexy looks like to creating a channel of communication between consumers and brands, it's safe to say that Instagram has transformed the world of lingerie. Lively, a lingerie brand has built a community among Instagram to inspire them to be passionate, purposeful, and confident. Also, new established brands like The Nude Label and Lonely, are building online communities centering around body positivity. Upcoming lingerie brands will fully be determined by how actively they pay attention and listen to consumer needs, who are demanding greater inclusivity and diversity among its products and image.

## **Victoria's secret history, downfall, where they are now**

### **History**

Victoria's Secret was founded by Roy Raymond, and his wife, Gaye Raymond, on June 12, 1977. The first opened in San Francisco, California. It all started when Raymond felt embarrassed when he bought lingerie for his wife because of how other people looked at him. However, he took this opportunity as a motivation to study the lingerie market for eight years. The success of the brand was rapidly showing in the market. Los Angeles Times even reported that the brand was stealing the market share from department stores, which led to Victoria's Secret becoming the only national chain devoted to lingerie. During the first year, they grossed \$500,000. They were among the bestselling catalog. In 1982, Raymond sold the company to Les Wexner, creator of Limited Stores Inc of Columbus. He wanted the brand image to appeal to women and fulfilled a reachable fantasy of allure and luxury. By 1986, they already had 100 stores around the country. In 1995, the first Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, a show where supermodels dressed as angels wore wings and diamond-studded bras, was launched in New

York; this became their brand image for 23 years. In 1998, they entered the cosmetic and fragrance market by launching Body by Victoria. In 2002, the brand launched PINK, its sister brand that appeals to teenagers. From 2002 till 2018 the brand experienced a huge load of success, opening stores worldwide, partnering with other brands, etc. However, in 2018 everything went downhill when the president of the brand, Ed Razek, stated in a Vogue interview that transgenders shouldn't be part of the fashion show. This receded sales, publications were being made about protecting the models from sexual abuse and harassment, partners were pulling out of deals, and 53 stores were closed down in the US.

## **Downfall**

Victoria's Secret was known as the top lingerie retailer in America; however, in the past years, it's been struggling to keep afloat due to its oppressive attitude toward feminism and beauty standards. Many lingerie brands have employed inclusive marketing strategies which feature non-model women who represent different body types, shapes, and sizes. However, Victoria's Secret has remained with its old strategy, which has driven them to a huge fallout. Their intent to embrace different body types has felt ungentle, while their racial attempts at racial diversification have remained poor. The first major scandal began in 2018 when the brand's Chief Marketing Officer, Ed Razek, told Vogue that he believes transgender models should not be in Victoria's Secret fashion shows (Smith, 2021). While Razek issued a formal apology on Twitter, claiming that it was never about gender and that transgender models just don't make the cut, the damage was already done. Many people felt the apology to be insincere, and the backlash continued (Smith, 2021). After this, the show had its worst ratings in history, and Razek resigned from his position. In August 2019, Victoria's Secret hired its first transgender model, Valentina Sampaio, showing the world that there is a new era coming. However, sexual allegations against the CEO, John Mehas, became prominent later that month. Represented by The Model Alliance - a New York-based non-profit organization - over 100 models signed a petition against Mehas and he was forced to step down a year later (Smith, 2021). In November 2019, after 23 years, Victoria's Secret fashion show was officially canceled. The annual show had been called out and received much backlash because of its lack of inclusivity and diversity. The brand itself has always represented the "perfect model" with the "perfect body," which for years has felt extremely unreliable to its consumers. The brand has had

plenty of fallouts, especially when they introduced the new “plus size” model Barbara Palvin, a size 4.

In the summer of 2022, Hulu produced a three-part documentary, “Victoria’s Secret: Angels and Demons.” This documentary focuses on the former Chief Executive Officer, Leslie Wexner, and his involvement with Jeffrey Epstein - a famously convicted sex offender. The series closely analyzes the relationship between these two men and Wexner’s involvement in Jeffrey Epstein’s sex trafficking - as well as Epstein’s financial involvement in Victoria’s Secret (Carlin, 2022). This resulted in the brand returning to the negative spotlight, even after they announced their rebranding.

### **Where they are now**

Back in August 2021, Victoria's Secret announced its rebranding after years of falling sales and cultural credibility. They drove the message that they would become the lead and champion of female empowerment, replacing the model angels with the VS Collective, which consists of ten women of varying ages and body types. However, many people didn’t like the new look and approach and used Twitter to complain. How the brand went from a psychological rollercoaster for the consumers' feelings and frustrations about what exactly, “sexy” means, and how you break that mindset that has been centuries in the making. Which is why the rebranding has hit such a nerve.

Victoria’s Secret’s most recent campaign “celebrates the Victoria’s Secret of today.” In this campaign, a spokeswoman said, “we see you; we’ve changed.” This campaign features women of all sizes and skin colors in comfortable underwear and bras. However, this was not received well by the public. Much of the backlash of this is that the “new” Victoria’s Secret is too plain and bland - it is not glamorous. What people want is for them to bring back the original wings but put them on everyone - not just skinny, white, and stereotypically beautiful people (Friedman 2022).

Today, Victoria’s Secret’s look is a stark contrast to its past, featuring a diverse range of new faces, an all-inclusive cast of models, and a size range from AA to G. Also on their webpage is a section titled VS Now, where the new brand mission statement “all expressions, no

definitions” is bolded following a list of new sponsors, news articles, and “the new Victoria’s Secret” that is devoted to supporting women and amplifying women’s voices.

## **History of Cancel Culture**

The term “canceled” was first coined in 1991 in the film “New Jack City.” In this movie, a gangster, Nino Brown (played by Wesley Snipes), says, “cancel her” after his girlfriend breaks up with him because of the violence in which he is partaking. This term did not come back until Lil Wayne mentioned it in one of his songs in 2010, where he said “I canceled that girl like Nino.” After this, the term came to fruition in 2014 on a reality television show. From there, the term circled on Twitter and eventually became what it is today (Romano 2019).

## **Gen Z and the Rise of Cancel Culture**

Cancel culture can be defined as “boycotting a brand or person after they have done or said something considered objectionable” (McCrindle 2022). Due to the rise of social media, cancel culture has become prominent among society - especially Gen Z. This is because the internet can create a “mob mentality” through public criticism and creates a collective sentiment because of the large amount of information that is being provided at one time. Millennials and Gen Z favor cancel culture mostly because they have a progressive ideology and believe that it is important to “take on the role of the prosecutor in this online system of punishment” (Ahuja & Kerketta 2021).

Cancel culture is negative for brands because they have to be careful with every post, commercial, quote, and stance that they or do not decide to take. One slip-up and bad press can haunt the brand and damage its reputation significantly. While it is inspiring that Gen Z wants to see brands using their platforms to take a stance and hold them accountable when they do not, it can cause brands to feel the need to take a stance on every social/political aspect and get canceled if they do not. According to a study done in May 2022, consumers are less likely to trust and commit to a brand after it has been canceled (Yousef & Ayari 2022). Furthermore, 64% of consumers around the world said they will buy or boycott a brand solely because of its position on a social or political issue” (Bakhtiari, 2020). This can also be an issue because consumers believe it is hard to tell when brands are actually authentic or just fear being canceled.

In fact, 63% of consumers believe that brands use too many social issues as a marketing tactic (Bakhtiari, 2020).

## **Problem**

When defining the problem with cancel culture and brands, it can be defined as that there is no rhyme or reason for the criteria for cancellation. It is a moving target. When brands are canceled, it becomes a problem because they fail to adapt their branding and brand image to meet modern society standards. Many businesses that have benefited from intensive stereotypes for their naming or representation have had to rethink how they position themselves to a modern audience. In addition to tarnishing a brand's reputation, financial consequences are another negative effect of the cancel culture movement. Cancel culture is not only bad for the brand's online reputation, it is also bad for business and revenues. Cancel culture has spiked in past years, especially during the pandemic. Consumers are paying closer attention to brands now than ever before.

When it comes to this problem, the scale of cancellation it's important to measure. The measuring system used to cancel brands must consider historical references. It is essential to know and consider that many brands that are or have been canceled do not have a history of inappropriate behavior or remarks. As a society, a line of distinction has to be drawn between the first strike of a brand vs. a brand that has been through cancellation before.

In the case of Victoria's Secret, cancel culture is a problem because it affects their brand reputation and sales. As shown in **Figure 1** of the Appendix, Victoria's Secret's net worldwide sales dropped dramatically from 2019 to 2020 (Statista 2022). Furthermore, between 2016 and 2018, its market share dropped from 33% to 24% (Hainbury & Cain 2022). With Victoria's Secret being in the negative limelight beginning in 2018, this is no coincidence.

## **Solutions:**

Apologize and do an act of service:

While Victoria's Secret's Chief Marketing Officer, Ed Razek, initially sent out an apology on Twitter after telling Vogue that Transgender models should not be in the fashion show, many people thought it was insincere (Smith 2021). His apology stated: "My remark regarding the inclusion of transgender models in the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show came across as insensitive. I apologize. To be clear, we absolutely would cast a transgender model for the show. We've had transgender models come to castings.... And like many others, they didn't make it.... But it was never about gender. I admire and respect their journey to embrace who they really are." This apology tweet was responded to by famous people with backlash stating that Razek only apologized after realizing consumers were boycotting the brand. However, if Razek could have done more than apologize - such as following up with an act of service, then people may have believed he actually meant it.

A solution that works is to shift focus, apologize and do an act of service. Instead of focusing on their presence on how to keep their social media, they should do something about what they did that feels genuine. Doing an act of service could drive back consumers to buy their products again. Let's say that a brand got canceled for making an unethical comment about a societal problem, sustainability, for example. The brand could take advantage of the opportunity, donate to a sustainability foundation and talk properly about the problem, which could gain back consumer loyalty. If the consumer sees that the brand is apologizing and supporting the cause, it can help the brand gain back their respect. Following this example of sustainability, the brand can even start to shift and implement sustainable practices in their production, supply chain, retail, etc. This could be an essential aspect and impact on the brand. It sends the message that after posting an apologetic post, they're actually doing something about the situation and are very much in regret after their actions. It's a genuine way to tell their consumers they care about the situation, not just making money. Implementing this solution can bring back the brand's customer loyalty, increase its community and recover credibility.



Make it about the product again:

At the end of the day, consumers enjoy brands because of their products. When a brand gets canceled, they can remind consumers why they are relevant in the first place - because of their product. One way to substantiate this is that 85% of consumers say they care about sustainability, but only 15% of them make their purchasing decisions based on whether or not the product is sustainable (D'Arpizio, 2022). This proves that although consumers say that they want to do the right thing and take a harsh stance publicly, they do not always uphold that opinion when it comes to their shopping habits. When a company gets canceled, they can switch the focus to “why us” and “why this product” in order to retain those customers that care more about the products they buy than the brands’ reputation. One way to do this can be promoting their products on social media, coming up with a campaign that features positive reviews from real customers, advertise where they get their products from and the uses of their clothes.

Regardless of its endless list of controversies, Victoria’s Secret is lucky to have some of the most iconic lingerie products in the market under their name. Notable collections include Body by Victoria, Very Sexy, and Dream Angels. When separated from Victoria’s Secret name, these products are still loved by consumers who are the main drivers to the brand’s success. While the new Victoria’s Secret campaign may not appeal to everyone, making it about the product again will retain those loyal customers that buy from the brand regardless of its public eye controversies. One example of a product-based campaign would be to research the top styles from previous years and bring them back for a limited time. This drives customers with nostalgia and a sense of exclusivity while simultaneously swerving attention away from past controversies and current ad campaigns.

Switch attention to another societal problem:

In order to further drive attention away from the previous controversies, the brand can dedicate their new campaigns to a different societal problem so that consumers see that the brand is working toward another equally important goal. If successful, the brand can slowly develop a positive public eye again by shifting the focus of viewers to the brand's new mission and goals.

A great example would be that Victoria's Secret can dedicate its latest sportswear collection to raising awareness of the Special Olympics

Create a new campaign:

Create a campaign that brings back the old iconic models. The name of the campaign will be “How is your life after Victoria's Secret?” Emphasizing that models have had a natural change in their bodies as many are mothers, have gone through situations or have simply aged. Bringing them back could promote the feeling and message that it is normal and natural for a woman's body to go through physical changes. These changes do not mean that they do not have the same potential or the same beauty standards as before, on the contrary, it shows that beauty is timeless regardless of the changes their body goes through. Promoting this message can make the consumer identify back again with the brand in a more real and genuine way, which can change the brand's perspective and image. Focusing on body positivity by embracing the natural woman's body will be the main message and mission of the campaign. A way it will make noise on social media can be by creating a hashtag #BeautyIsTimeless. Influencers can be used for the campaign, as well as user-generated content, among others. This tactic could help the brand to spark a new message to change the perspective and come across to consumers as a brand that is truly changing its image and products to become genuinely size inclusive and promote true body positivity.

## **Conclusion**

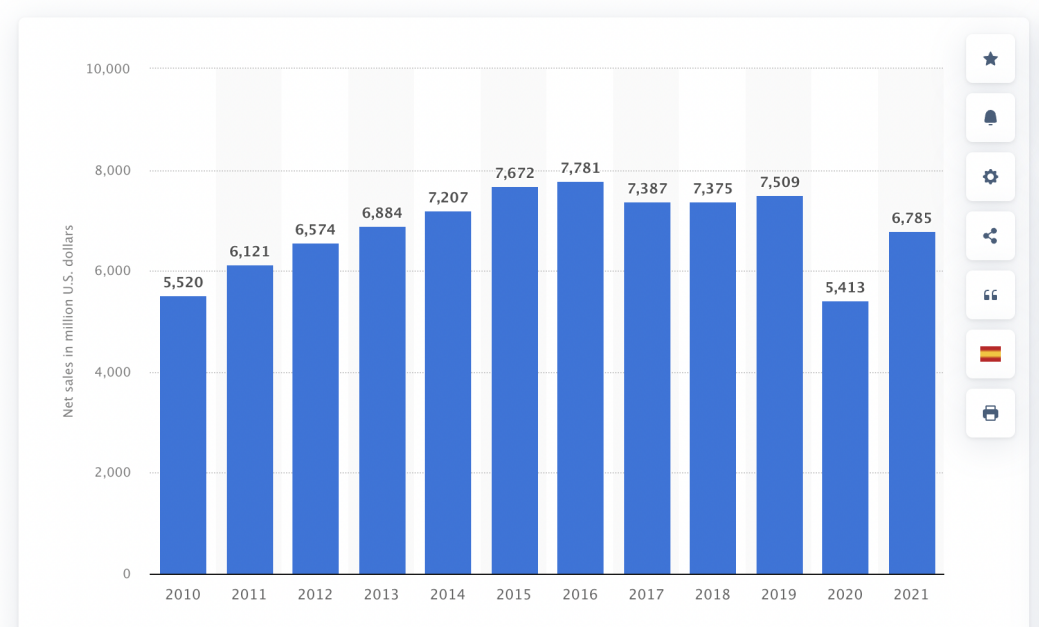
It is difficult for a brand to come back after being canceled. However, as mentioned, some potential strategies can help a brand gain back the trust from consumers. When it comes to Victoria's Secret, they have the opportunity to genuinely change their message and brand image to gain back the respect of their customers. It is important for the brand to listen to the wants and needs of consumers. It may also be helpful for the brand to engage with its audience and gather feedback to better understand their preferences. Focusing on size inclusivity, brands could conduct market research to understand the input of customers who have previously been underserved by the brand and use this information to develop new products that cater to a wider range of sizes. As mentioned for one of our solutions, the brand could also consider

implementing inclusive marketing and advertising campaigns that showcase a diverse range of body types, in order to better connect with and serve their customers. Additionally, the brand may need to address any negative perceptions that have arisen due to its lack of size and inclusivity, and work to rebuild trust with its audience.

## Appendix

Figure 1

Net sales of Victoria's Secret worldwide from 2010 to 2021  
*(in million U.S. dollars)*



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