

AI Representation in the Context of the Spanish Global Fashion Retailer Mango

A work in progress

Rosario Torres

Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Division
Penn State University (Berks College)
Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, USA
rzt1@psu.edu

Abstract—Global fast-fashion clothing brands like Mango are embracing Artificial Intelligence-generated imagery. A three-month analysis of Mango’s Teen Girl campaigns shows that approximately 20% of the female models included are AI-generated and that they are not identified as such; they are, instead, mixed seamlessly with pictures of human models. The ideal of beauty portrayed is notably thin, flawless and, also, diverse. This use of unlabeled AI models is concerning because these campaigns target children. Hyper realistic AI models contribute to creating false beauty standards that negatively impact the self-esteem of their young advertising audience. This study balances quantitative data analysis and qualitative image theory. Its framework is multidisciplinary and it combines History, Economy, Ideology, Semiotics, and micro-level analysis of images. This project aims at identifying which ideal of beauty the Mango Teen Girl’s partially AI-generated advertising campaigns convey and its relation to sociodemographic stereotypes and codified conventions.

Keywords-AI; fashion; advertisements; representation; beauty ideal.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the ideal of beauty promoted in Mango Teen Girl’s partially AI-generated advertising campaigns, exploring its relation to sociodemographic stereotypes and codified conventions. Spain is at the forefront of AI adoption within advertising [1], as well as of academic research [2] and related policy making [3]. It is estimated that approximately 75% of Spanish high industry marketers are proactively experimenting with AI [4] by, for instance, designing entire campaigns via artificial intelligence and by trying to predict trends to map consumer behavior and anticipate demand. Two of the country’s most global fast-fashion clothing brands (Mango and Zara) are openly embracing imagery generated synthetically, recently integrating it into their editorial and advertising content.

In this extended abstract the expression “generated synthetically” is used interchangeably with “AI-generated” to refer to digital models and to advertising assets created using generative AI - such as diffusion models and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) - with the goal of producing artificial human likenesses (rather than capturing real human subjects through traditional photography).

Mango regularly uses AI-generated model imagery for certain lines, like Teen Girl, with the purpose of speeding up production. Since advertisements influence the way that consumers view themselves and encourage them to associate

certain identities with their products and to embrace specific ideals of beauty, it is important to establish how AI adoption is impacting all of the above.

This extended abstract refers to a work in progress. It introduces the theoretical/methodological approach while the data collection and final textual analysis are currently in progress.

II. RESEARCH RATIONALE

AI can be used to produce ideals of beauty generated synthetically that are even harder to imitate than traditional models. This research aims at identifying how women are represented specifically in the Mango Teen Girl campaigns, the ideal of beauty that they convey, and its relation to sociodemographic stereotypes and codified conventions.

Some of the questions to address are:

- Is AI adoption diversifying beauty standards or, on the other hand, reinforcing impossible to achieve stereotypes? This is particularly concerning in the context of campaigns such as Mango Teen Girl, which are targeting children, who are particularly vulnerable to digital manipulation.
- What are the ethical costs of AI models?
- How do these algorithmic media changes impact culture?
- Who is left out of this type of representation? Is it diverse?

This is a work in progress, based on innovative ideas, which tries to contribute to filling a major gap within communication research, which has barely addressed the impact of AI-generated models in the consumer.

III. THEORETICAL/METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

My methodological approach involves a multidisciplinary framework that combines:

- Historical contextualization (around the lines of researchers like Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen [5] and Gerhard Maletzke [6]) to situate advertising within capitalism and social trends.
- Economic perspective to understand the role of advertising in demand generation and capitalist reproduction.
- Semiotic analysis (around the lines of Roland Barthes [7]) to decode media signs and expose cultural naturalization, mystification and invisible, automated

"mythologies" hardcoded into our daily digital existence.

- Macro-level studies of the social functions and ideological impacts of the campaigns studied, understanding how media and advertising shape consumer identities and social realities (in the manner of Lou Charnon-Deutsch [8]).
- Micro-level analysis of images.

IV. DATA SOURCES

Mango releases two global collections per year. However, they release new trend-focused fashion-focused "capsules" fortnightly. The sources of this study are these Mango Teen Girl photographs (approximately 134) that Mango releases every two weeks. Once it is identified which of these images are synthetic, they are analyzed based on the type of ideal of beauty that they convey.

Data collection started in April 2026. Starting May 2026 Mango stopped identifying AI images as such. Since then, I am using software such as HIVE with the purpose of being able to distinguish synthetic models from human models. In addition, my study includes industry reports.

This project strives to balance quantitative data analysis and qualitative discourse theory.

V. ANALYSIS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Approximately 20% of the female models included in the Mango Teen Girl advertising campaigns are synthetic.
- Currently there is a lack of transparency and acknowledgement of AI-generated imagery. Mango started using AI-generated models in 2024 with their "Sunset Dream" Teen Girl campaign, which displayed real garments, but artificial models and backgrounds. Initially Mango acknowledged its use of AI on their website through specific disclaimers. They also used to place the notice "These images have been generated by AI" in the bottom corner of images in their e-commerce store. Still, the images were quite photorealistic, and the disclaimers were minute and almost transparent, difficult to see unless actively looking for them. Mango also displayed corporate disclosures by officially announcing that campaigns like "Sunset dream" collection had been created completely using generative AI.

Starting May 2026, however, Mango has notably modified their approach and the images with AI-generated models are not acknowledged whatsoever as synthetic. These pictures appear in their online catalogue seamlessly mixed with those photographs that include human models.

- The ideal of beauty portrayed is distinctly thin. This is consistent with Mango historical predilection for very thin models. In 2024 the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) banned a Mango ad because the model appeared "unhealthily thin." Mango's tendency seems to align with how the current Ozempic boom is changing the narrative in terms of beauty ideals, leaving behind the general body positivity movement of the last decade, and resetting back to 90s.

On the other hand, Mango's synthetic models embrace ideals of beauty other than conventionally Caucasian.

- Regulation of AI-generated images seems highly desirable and, the final implementation of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), very pertinent. This legal framework aims to ensure that AI systems are safe, transparent, and respect fundamental human rights across the European Union. Starting August 2026, transparency obligations (such as watermarking and identifying deepfakes/synthetic content) will become enforceable.

VI. CURRENT PROGRESS AND FUTURE WORK

As this is a work in progress, the framework has been laid out in the context of my case study. Currently the analysis of the successive fortnightly capsules continues.

Full analysis, scheduled for completion by September 2026, will determine how Mango uses AI-generated models for their campaigns targeting teenagers as well as the idea of beauty displacement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author gratefully acknowledges Penn State University (Berks College) for providing the travel funding that makes participation in this Conference possible.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Pino-Romero, S. Asenjo McCabe, and S. Herrera Damas, "The use of AI in the advertising industry in Spain: interest, knowledge and use," *Revista ICONO* 14, 23 (2), September 2025. <https://icono14.net/ojs/index.php/icono14/article/view/2223/2507>.
- [2] L. Cervi, M. Catanzaro, J. F. Jiménez Jacinto, and S. Tejedor, "Deconstructing the Hype: A Critical Literature Review on AI Journalism," *Review of Communication Research*, 14, 32-53, January 2026. <https://rcommunicationr.org/index.php/rcr/article/view/297>.
- [3] Spain. 2023. "Real Decreto 729/2023, de 22 de agosto, por el que se aprueba el Estatuto de la Agencia Española de Supervisión de Inteligencia Artificial" [Royal Decree 729/2023, of August 22, approving the Statute of the Spanish Agency for Artificial Intelligence Supervision]. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, no. 202 (August 23): 119421-119441. boe.es.
- [4] Artificial Intelligence in Europe. Spain. Outlook for 2019 and beyond. EY LLP, 2019.
- [5] S. Ewen and E. Ewen, *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009.
- [6] G. Maletzke, *Sicología de La Comunicación Social*. Quito, Ecuador: Editorial Quipus, 1992.
- [7] R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage Classics, 1981.
- [8] L. Charnon-Deutsch, *Narratives of Desire: Nineteenth-Century Spanish Fiction by Women*. State College: Penn State University Press, 1994.