

How Calvin Klein's Digital Marketing Campaigns Attract A New Consumer Market

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Abstract

The rise of social media in the last decade has led brands to establish a strong digital presence to attract a growing, highly influential audience – Millennials. This research studied three digital marketing campaigns by Calvin Klein, an American fashion company, and the tactics used to attract a sub-set group of Millennials, those between the ages of 18 and 25. The research concluded that Calvin Klein succeeded in appealing to young Millennials through underlying themes found in each campaign (self-expression, sexuality, digital generation/ social media, and pop culture) as well as consumer engagement techniques employed on the brand's social media platforms.

I. Introduction

The rise of social media in the last decade has led brands to establish a digital presence to attract a growing, highly influential audience—Millennials. By the year 2030, nearly 80 million Millennials in the United States will control the retail market, and much of their decision-making about spending habits will directly come from their social media usage. Millennials are the most active generation on social media, interacting with brands on a daily basis; a poll conducted by the Boston Consulting Group found that 52% of Millennials “like” a brand on a social network, and 39% post product reviews on their social channels (Barton, Koslow, & Beauchamp, 2014). It is imperative today for brands to monitor and actively engage with Millennials via social media, as their opinions could make or break the reputation of a brand with just one negative post on their social networks.

Calvin Klein, an \$8.4 billion global company, has been marketing to audiences with simplistic, often provocative marketing campaigns for the last 50 years. Its most famous campaign was released in 1980; only thirty seconds long, it featured a 15-year-old Brooke Shields, who flirtatiously looked into the camera and asked, “You wanna know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing.” Since that controversial campaign, Calvin Klein has not only continued to shock audiences, but also has maintained a strong following that has seen the brand enter the digital age gracefully. As the global brand seeks to increase its sales in the next few years, it also plans to “increase its engagement with youth-minded consumers. . . [to] create an opportunity to build loyalty over the long-term” (“Calvin Klein,” n.d.). Millennials are the future of the Calvin Klein empire, and through engagement with this audience via digital marketing, the brand will continue to stay relevant as a top lifestyle company.

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This research paper examined how Calvin Klein has used social media to attract the Millennial market. It conducted a content analysis of three recent Calvin Klein digital marketing campaigns, focusing on the imagery and messaging of the campaigns and analyzing its attempts to generate Millennial buzz.

II. Literature Review

To gain a better understanding of the research topic, the author examined literature on digital marketing, the importance of consumer engagement and Millennials, and Millennials' interaction with brands on social media.

Who are the Millennials?

The Millennial Generation, also referred to as Generation Y, is defined in many ways, but this study defines the generation as individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 (Fry, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 83.1 million Millennials currently reside in the United States ("Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers," 2015). This study focused on a sub-set of Millennials—those between the ages of 18 and 25.

What is Digital Marketing?

To attract certain customers in the greater Millennial market, brands are increasing their digital marketing presence. According to the *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, digital marketing is "the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels" and includes "digital or online advertising, which delivers marketing messages to customers" (Smith, 2011, p. 489).

The Reciprocity Principle

According to the Boston Consulting Group, the Millennial Generation is the future of the retail market; currently, Millennials are spending an estimated \$1.3 trillion annually, and this number will increase as members of the younger end of the Millennial demographic enter the workforce and begin to earn their own income (Barton et al., 2014). Millennials have distinct shopping habits from older generations. According to a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, "57% of Millennials agree that ease of access and frugality" are more important than "the prestige of ownership" (as cited in Stahl, 2017). Millennials are more concerned about getting information quickly from brands, whether through social media or other modes of communication, and not spending a lot in the process, while simultaneously avoiding the buildup of debt. Their method of engaging with brands can be explained through the reciprocity principle: Millennials "expect a two-way mutual relationship" with companies. Not only are brands interacting with Millennials on social media, simultaneously, Millennials are influencing other potential consumers by posting their opinions on products and brand experiences (Barton et al., 2014).

Millennial-Brand Interaction on Social Media

In today's competitive digital retail market, brands face a crucial need to have an online presence. Millennials are on social media for hours a day, exposed to countless products and companies that—with an effective digital marketing team—could sway this demographic to purchase their products right on their iPhones and smartphones. Millennials, more than any other generation, are spending more money on social media networks, and they are following companies' social accounts to keep up with the latest news, products, and campaigns (Nelson, 2015).

Social media has been particularly adopted by fashion brands, which feature celebrities and social media influencers to endorse their products. Millennials often follow these influencers on social media to "feel closer" to them or "imitate their behavior" as an ego booster (Ressel, 2016, p. 20). Just as Millennials can like and comment on their friends' accounts, they can do the same with the likes of celebrities Kendall Jenner and Justin Bieber. Social influencers are an important tool for brands to employ on their social media platforms; influencers will post sponsored content on their social channels, generating revenue for themselves and for

the companies that they partner with. According to Malcolm Carfrae, former executive vice president of global communications at Calvin Klein, influencers “help develop content on both sides of the creative process” by creating unique content for their platform, but also “incentivizing fans to participate” by interacting with their content on social media (Nelson, 2015, p. 16).

Social media gives Millennials the opportunity to communicate directly with brands, sending out messages or tagging a brand in their post on Instagram, for example. Brands can track these posts, viewing consumer content and analyzing trends and data they might find from their audience, and by pinpointing any concerns that consumers express. Through interaction with brands on social media, Millennials are changing the way that brands communicate with their audiences. Millennials have the power to influence their social media followers with the content that they post about brands—whether positive or negative. Brands know that their consumers could potentially make or break their reputation; with the possibility of a negative product review going viral, companies must constantly track their hashtags and tagged posts to ensure that the image that they have crafted for themselves is being positively maintained.

Research Questions

RQ1: What social media techniques have Calvin Klein adopted to reach the 18-25-year-old Millennials?

RQ2: What themes did Calvin Klein use in its campaigns to attract 18-25-year-old Millennials?

III. Methods

This study conducted a content analysis of three major digital campaigns by Calvin Klein between 2014 and 2016. Content analysis is defined by the Pew Research Center as “a tool that allows us to look at the way messages change over time and vary across mediums and outlets” (“Content Analysis,” 2017). In conducting content analysis, formulating a research question or goal is the first step in the process. Then, a researcher needs to select an appropriate sample and systematically code it for its important traits (“Content Analysis,” 2017).

To answer the research questions, the study analyzed three digital campaigns by Calvin Klein: CK One, released in 2014; ck2, released in 2015; and #MyCalvins, released in 2015. The campaigns were examined for their written text, imagery, and consumer engagement tools used to attract a Millennial audience. This study used a research method similar to the one adopted by Ashley and Tuten (2014). Their study examined social media content by top brands through content analysis, finding that brands were most successful on social media through frequent posting on their various platforms and creative strategies “associated with customer engagement” (Ashley & Tuten, 2014, p. 15).

The current study used a code sheet based on the creative strategy code sheet created by Ashley and Tuten to analyze how Calvin Klein has used social media to attract the Millennial market. Their code sheet analyzed social media content with three categories: “message strategies,” “sales promotions” and “user-generated content;” message strategies and user-generated content were analyzed for this study (Ashley & Tuten, 2014, p. 20). This current study only analyzed two categories: message strategies and user-generated content.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) define user-generated content, or UGC, as “the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users.” To be considered UGC, the media has to “be published on a publicly accessible website or . . . social networking site; show a certain amount of creative effort; and it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009, p. 61). To answer the second research question, this study analyzed major themes seen in each Calvin Klein digital campaign, including sexuality, self-expression, digital generation/social media, and pop culture, and how the themes appealed to the Millennial market. The author looked for these themes within each campaign by following these definitions:

- Sexuality: According to the World Health Organization, sexuality is defined as a combination of “thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. . . sexuality can include all of these dimensions, [but] not all of them are always experienced or expressed” (“Defining sexual health,” n.d.).
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- Self-Expression: According to the American Psychological Association, self-expression is associated with “positive concepts, such as freedom, creativity, style, courage, self-assurance, and even healing and spirituality” (Kim, 2010).
- Digital Generation/Social Media: According to a WIRED article, the digital generation is the younger end of the Millennials, “the first generation born into a world that has never not known digital life. . . technology has shaped not just how they navigate the world but how they see themselves” (Adler, 2013). According to Investopedia, social media is defined as “internet-based software and interfaces that allow individuals to interact with one another, exchanging details about their lives such as biographical data, professional information, personal photos, and up-to-the-minute thoughts” (“Social media,” n.d.).
- Pop Culture: According to ThoughtCo.com, popular culture is defined as “the accumulation of cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, cyber culture, television, and radio that are consumed by the majority of a society’s population” (Crossman, 2017).

IV. Findings

This section is organized based on the analysis of the three campaigns in chronological order.

CK One: 20th Anniversary Campaign

Calvin Klein released a video campaign for the 20th anniversary of its fragrance, CK One, on YouTube on June 30, 2014, followed by a television advertisement. A print version of the campaign was also released, featuring a selfie collage of the influencers who starred in the campaign. The video did not include text, until the final shot, where the hashtag #ckmeforme and a Tumblr page for the campaign, ckmeforme.tumblr.com, is shown. The video features male and female social influencers and targets the young Millennial demographic, 18-25.

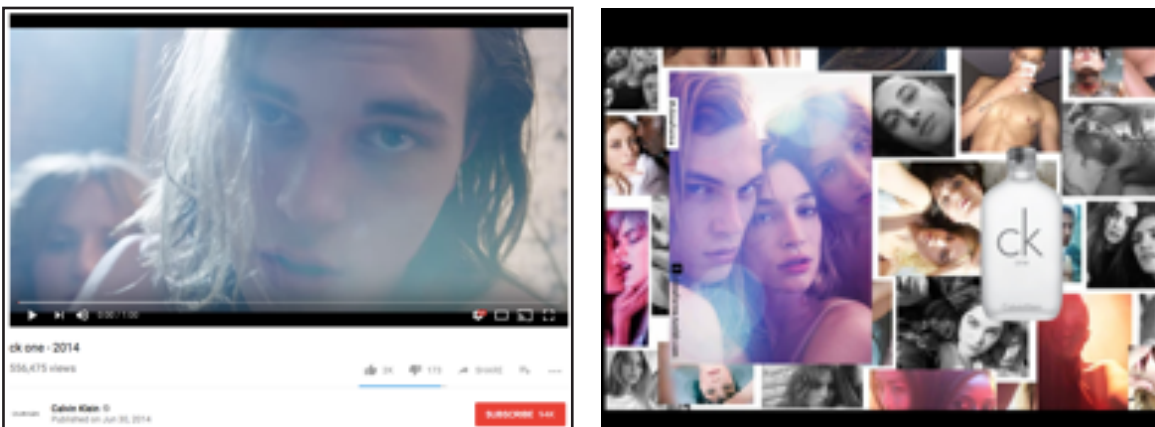


Figure 1. CK One video campaign (left) and CK One print campaign (right)

For consumer engagement, the campaign includes a hashtag, #CKmeforme, to encourage the audience to participate and engage with the influencers of the campaign. A Tumblr page was also created, where the influencers posted content, and the audience was able to like, comment, and repost the content. Through the Tumblr page, fans found the CK One Snapchat account, while others found it through the influencers' personal social channels. On Snapchat, content disappears within 24 hours, but users were able to view posts from the campaign on Snapchat during that time period. On Tumblr, users could like posts from the campaign's Tumblr page, as well as repost them onto their own Tumblr blogs. On Twitter, users could retweet or like tweets from the official Calvin Klein Twitter account, as well as other users' Twitter pages.

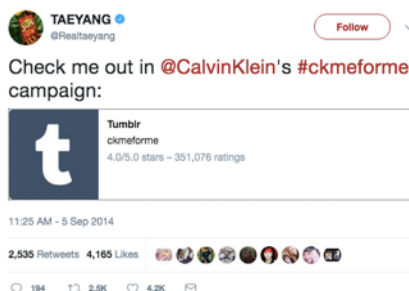




Figure 2. Korean pop star Taeyang invites his Twitter followers to check out the #ckmeforme Tumblr page

The video incorporated narratives of self-expression, sexuality, digital generation/social media, and pop culture. The entire video is shot from the perspective of a person taking a selfie video, which millennials will immediately recognize and can relate to, as nearly all of their social media content is posted from their smartphones. The campaign also sought to target Millennials by featuring young, up-and-coming musicians, including Korean popstar Taeyang, singer Dev Hynes, singer Samantha Urbani, sister musicians Say Lou Lou, and singer Kelela.

Calvin Klein used Tumblr as its main social media platform for this campaign. Most of the content on the Tumblr blog was from the campaign based on submissions by the influencers, some were reposted content from other Tumblr users, including selfies, GIFS, and short videos; and others were content that appeared to be users' selfies. When clicking on a specific post, the page gave the option to share the post on Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, or by email. Content from the Tumblr blog was posted from June 2014 to October 2014. The author analyzed month-by-month content, focusing on narratives, branded content versus UGC, and number of impressions. Below is an example of the Tumblr content analysis between June and August 2014:

Month	# of Posts	# of Branded versus UGC	Narratives	Post with Most Engagement
June 2014	17	All branded posts	Sexuality, Digital Generation	 <p>Branded content; 1,374 impressions</p>
August 2014	45	32 branded, 13 UGC	Sexuality, Digital Generation, Self-Expression	 <p>UGC; 489,092 impressions</p>

ck2 Campaign

Calvin Klein released a video campaign for its fragrance ck2 on YouTube in November 2015, followed by a print campaign with the same models shown in the video. No text is featured in the video campaign, until the last shot when the ck2 and Calvin Klein logos appear on screen, followed by the hashtag #the2ofus. The video features a variety of colors, including a bright scene of a couple outside looking at the ocean, and a deep reddish tinted scene of a couple outside with bonfires in the background.

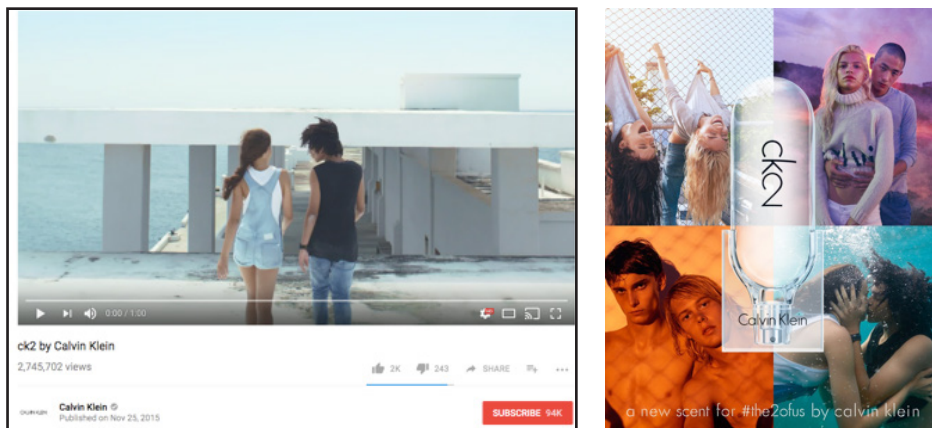


Figure 3. ck2 video campaign (left) and ck2 print campaign (right)

For consumer engagement, the hashtag #the2ofus appears at the end of the video campaign to encourage content sharing. There is no clear indication of a particular social media platform for audiences to interact with the hashtag.

Three months after the release of the video campaign and the hashtag #the2ofus, Calvin Klein released an Instagram post in February 2016, featuring stars of the ck2 campaign. It invited users to “share your together moment” at calvinklein.com/ck2 to further interact with the campaign. Users could like and comment on influencers' sponsored content on Instagram and could post their own with the hashtag #the2ofus. Users could tweet with the hashtag, like, and retweet other users, as well as comment on the YouTube video campaign, like, and reply to other users' comments.

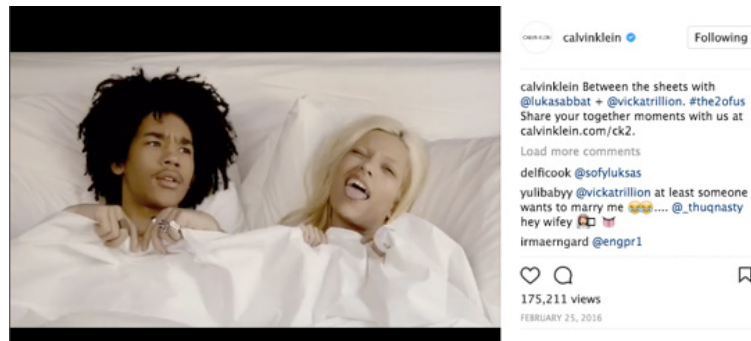


Figure 4. ck2 Instagram post. Caption: “Between the sheets with @lukasabbat + @vickatrillion. #the2ofus Share your together moments with us at calvinklein.com/ck2

The video incorporated narratives of self-expression and sexuality with young male and female models, targeting the Millennial age demographic. The fragrance specifically targets young people, as seen in the video campaign. The fragrance itself is not exclusive to a specific gender—it is being advertised as gender-fluid, from the simplicity of the bottle (clear and gender ambiguous) to the depiction of all genders in the video campaign. Young Millennials are more likely to identify as gender-fluid than other generations; according to GLAAD's 2017 Accelerating Acceptance report, 12% of Millennials identify as transgender or gender non-conforming (“Accelerating Acceptance,” 2017).

Calvin Klein used YouTube as its main platform to disseminate the campaign. The video campaign released on November 25, 2015, had 2,754,802 views, 2,000 likes and 245 dislikes, and 475 comments by YouTube users, as of February 2, 2018. Among the 475 comments, only 10 were analyzed for this study. These 10 comments had 460 likes and 75 replies in total. They used keywords, such as “equality,” “edgy,” “beautiful,” “diversity,” and “promoting acceptance,” and key phrases, such as “not all of [Calvin Klein's] customers will be in a heterosexual relationship,” “this is 2016, some people are gay,” “more likely to buy a product if the company features queer people,” and “people can like who they want and be who they want.”

#MyCalvins Campaign



Calvin Klein released its most recent campaign, #MyCalvins, on Youtube on January 6, 2015. The video starred singer Justin Bieber and model Lara Stone. Since its release, the video has garnered over 9.2 million views, 23,000 likes, and 4,000 dislikes. A print campaign with Bieber was released following the premiere of the video. The video is shot in black and white and has no text until the end shot, where #mycalvins appears onscreen, followed by the Calvin Klein Jeans logo and a link to calvinklein.com.



Figure 5. #MyCalvins video campaign (left) and #MyCalvins print campaign (right)

A hashtag, #MyCalvins, is incorporated into the campaign for audience engagement. The campaign video incorporated narratives of self-expression, sexuality, and pop culture and targeted young Millennials between the ages of 18-25, with singer Justin Bieber as the social influencer. In the video campaign description, it also encourages the audience to participate in the campaign by showing their own #MyCalvins look on social media. Following the release of the video campaign, Calvin Klein released a “micro-site” where the best user-generated content was recognized by the brand.

After the initial launch of the #MyCalvins campaign with Bieber, Calvin Klein continued to build on this campaign by partnering with models, musicians, and social influencers, using the phrase, “I ____ in #mycalvins.” The campaign has been seen on various social platforms, but the brand used Instagram as its main platform to broadcast the campaign. According to the Pew Research Center, 59 percent of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 use Instagram. This statistic is significant because young Millennials are on Instagram more so than any other social network (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Ten posts by various influencers were analyzed, focusing on the number of likes, comments, and narratives related to the campaign, and the phrase used for #MyCalvins. Below are two posts that were analyzed:

Influencer	Date Posted	# Of Likes	# Of Comments	Narratives	Phrase Used for #MyCalvins
 <p>Justin Bieber; posted on his personal account</p>	January 26, 2016	1,870,825	74,554	Self-Expression, Pop Culture	"I flaunt in #mycalvins"
 <p>Kendall Jenner; posted on her personal account</p>	January 27, 2016	1,089,963	107,784	Self-Expression, Sexuality	"I pose in #mycalvins"

V. Discussion

This study examined three distinct Calvin Klein digital marketing campaigns: CK One, ck2, and #MyCalvins. For each campaign, a hashtag was incorporated to encourage brand interaction on social media: #CKmeforme (CK One), #the2ofus (ck2), and #MyCalvins. The campaign with the most social media engagement was #MyCalvins, which is still an ongoing campaign today. According to Racked, Calvin Klein's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter followings have increased by 2.2 million, 1.8 million, and 1 million, respectively, since the release of the #MyCalvins campaign (Fumo, 2015). CK One's campaign also saw major social engagement. Within two months of the campaign's release, Calvin Klein generated more than one million views on Snapchat and 150,000 views on Tumblr (Mahoney, 2014).

The study found that each campaign targeted young Millennials through the narratives featured in each campaign video. All three campaigns featured narratives of self-expression and sexuality, while CK One also showcased narratives of digital generation/social media and pop culture, and #MyCalvins included the narrative of pop culture. CK One's video campaign mainly focused on the digital generation narrative, as the entire video is shot from the perspective of taking a selfie; this theme aligns with the target audience, dubbed as the "selfie generation" and who are considered "digital natives," the only generation that has yet to adapt to technology (Blow, 2014). CK2's video campaign focused on the self-expression narrative. According to Women's Wear Daily, the campaign depicted the "free spirited, raw narratives of today's youth," relating to the young Millennial demographic (Naughton, 2015). #MyCalvins focused on both pop culture and self-expression, as each social media post from the campaign included a celebrity with the phrase "I ___ in #MyCalvins." For example, model Kendall Jenner posted on Instagram in February 2016: "I am strong in #mycalvins." Model Bella Hadid posted on Instagram in July 2016, "I intimidate in #mycalvins."

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to examine three major Calvin Klein digital marketing campaigns and how they attracted a subset of the Millennial generation, those between the ages of 18 and 25. The study found that Calvin Klein adopted distinct social media platforms for each campaign to interact with users. Since the brand was targeting younger Millennials, it chose platforms with predominantly younger users who would be more likely to engage with each campaign. The three campaigns featured four underlying themes that attracted the young Millennial audience: self-expression, sexuality, digital generation/social media, and pop culture.

The study found that Calvin Klein has adjusted and tailored its social channels to target the Millennial market. After the release of the #MyCalvins campaign, which was still ongoing at the time of the study, the brand's online presence grew exponentially on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

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Note: All images were taken from Youtube.com, Twitter.com, Tumblr.com, and the Instagram app.
