

INFLUENCE OF NON-IDEALISED MODELS IN ADVERTISING ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

The models depicted in body positive commercials are non-idealized models. Non-ideal models exhibit body sizes, complexions, and general appearances that are more true to life compared to typical ideal models. Additionally, they may also portray a wider range of age and race groups. This study aims to examine the impact of non-idealized models in advertising on consumers' purchase intention and also by incorporating trust as a mediating variable. The study was conducted quantitatively using self-administered questionnaires. The results found by analysing the responses from 205 respondents using Warp PLS 8.0 found that there is a significant influence on the all relationships. Comprehending the intricacies of non-idealized advertising models and their influence on customer behavior is essential for marketers and advertisers aiming to develop genuine and impactful campaigns. The results of this study can provide valuable insights for advertising tactics, helping professionals adopt more efficient and morally sound ways in the constantly changing realm of consumer-brand relations.

Key Words: *Non-Ideal Models, Perceived Body Similarity, Purchase Intention, Trust*

Introduction

In modern times, we live in an environment that is predominantly visual, with a continuous influx of pictures. Advertisements constitute a significant portion of the visual content we come across on a daily basis. Therefore, marketing is essentially concerned with the manipulation of perception. Advertisement imagery plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of the world and their own identities, therefore contributing to the "reality" that modern consumers perceive. The repeated exposure to rare elements in advertising images can lead to their normalisation, suggesting the internalisation of the visual message. Nevertheless, the portrayal of "reality" in advertising often diverges significantly from our real-life experiences. Idealisation is a common practice in marketing communication.

There is a continuing and cumulative debate about whether advertising positively or negatively affects consumer well-being. The answer to this question depends on the specific context, demographic, and many consequences that are taken into account. Consumer well-being, which is closely linked to consumer behaviour, refers to the overall satisfaction of consumers' desires, whether they are related to material possessions, emotions, social connections, or bodily needs. Advertising has the ability to support prosocial agendas and advocate for urgent social issues, leading to beneficial transformations. Conversely, it can also portray stereotypical representations or unrealistic aspirations, such as beauty standards, body ideals, and lifestyles. Additionally, it may promote harmful products associated with 'sin', such as alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling, which can cause physical and psychological damage to susceptible consumers. Furthermore, it may endorse the use of disposable and unsustainable items, like plastic food packaging, which gradually contribute to environmental deterioration. In light of this context, our objective is to further the ongoing discourse by specifically examining a particular type of advertising: body image advertisements aimed at women. In doing so, we aim to provide novel perspectives to advertisers, consumers, and scholars.

It is hence unsurprising that advertising pictures have a pivotal role in shaping notions of physical appearance. Whether it is an advertisement for cosmetics or beer, the concept of the "good life" is often linked to slender and fit female models, who have minimal body fat. Therefore, based on the conventional advertising inventory, the "ideal" human archetype is characterised by youth, fair complexion, and physical fitness. The pervasive exposure to these ideal physiques has established the prevailing criteria for appearance, hence exerting pressure on individuals of both genders to attain unattainable ideal bodies. The phenomenon of internalising the ideal body standards has been demonstrated to have a detrimental impact on both the temporary and enduring aspects of consumers' body image.

Typically, advertisers select models with idealised body forms to serve as endorsers. Given the significance of these models in marketing communication, marketers need to be mindful of how they depict the perfect body in advertisements. Specifically, female endorsers tend to show thin-ideal proportions with fair complexion and lengthy hair, as these characteristics are commonly perceived as appealing. The utilisation of idealised body forms in advertising aims to affect attitudes and impact consumer behaviour. However, a significant adverse outcome of this practice is that it leads young women to perceive skinny models as the epitome of beauty and physical appearance. Hence, the manner in which the media depicts feminine beauty exerts influence on women's self-perception. Mainstream media outlets establish the criteria that determine the essential qualities of a "beautiful woman". These criteria are unattainable for all women as the majority of models portrayed in the media adhere to the same beauty ideals, characterised by a uniform body image and physical

look. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that women are highly susceptible to the impact of depictions of exceedingly slender female models. This susceptibility often results in a detrimental cycle of diminished self-worth, dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance, the development of eating disorders, and potentially even melancholy. Research findings indicate that women who engage in upward social comparisons with skinny models often experience body dissatisfaction due to perceiving themselves as less attractive than the idealised ideals shown in the media.

Promisingly, a growing number of companies have begun to utilise body positivity as a marketing tactic by opting for more diverse casting selections. Notable instances of body positive advertisement campaigns include Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign (Dove 2020), Lindex's "Fall Fashion Heros" campaign (Lindex 2016), Monki's "Honest Swim" campaign (Gil 2018), and Aerie's "#Aerie Real" campaign (Malisani 2020), among others. Like the other instances, the vast majority of body positive advertising have primarily targeted the female demographic, aiming to empower women by challenging conventional norms of body image (Drake 2017).

Understanding the potential impact of model selection in advertising on consumers' body image and psychological well-being is crucial. Equally important is understanding how it can affect the success of the advertisements themselves. Comprehending the efficacy of body positive marketing is crucial as it enables us to derive concrete commercial advantages from research findings concerning self-perception (Drake 2017). Therefore, acquiring the knowledge is necessary in order for further advertising professionals to potentially take action and alter their approach towards a more body positive trajectory.

Literature Review

Body image, defined as an individual's perception and evaluation of their own body, evolves over the course of one's life (Dittmar 2009). This development can be influenced by sensory and behavioural experiences, physical attributes, and social factors. Hence, the psychological notion of body image is uniquely formed by each person, rendering it exceedingly subjective. Previous research examining the formation of body image have found that environmental and social elements are among the most influential factors (McCabe & Ricciardelli 2006; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde 2008). The influence of media on body image is attributed to the combined impact of environmental and societal factors. Hence, it is unsurprising that a substantial amount of media study conducted in the 21st century has delved into the impact of various media formats on the assessment of body image by the general public. A significant portion of the media visuals that consumers encounter in their daily lives are dominated by advertisements. Advertising pictures play a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of the world and their own identities, hence influencing the

reality experienced by modern consumers. The portrayal of reality in commercials typically diverges significantly from actuality, as idealisation is a common practice in marketing communication in an idealised advertising.

Body Positive Advertisements

Both consumers and policymakers have recognised the potential adverse impacts of physical beauty standards and have consequently voiced their worries regarding the utilisation of strictly defined ideal models in ads. Therefore, it can be asserted that the body positivity movement has made an impact on the advertising sector. Advertisers are experiencing mounting pressure due to the growing scepticism surrounding the representation of conventional ideal models in advertising visuals.

The body positivity movement and body positive commercials seek to shift the current culture that idealises certain body types towards a more inclusive one. A body culture that is inclusive would enable a greater number of persons to attain a good perception of their bodies. A good body image encompasses an individual's admiration, safeguarding, and embrace of their physical being. An individual who possesses a positive body image holds favourable attitudes towards their physical appearance and bodily functions, demonstrates respect for their body by attentively acknowledging its requirements and responding appropriately, and safeguards their body by rejecting impractical standards of beauty.

While the use of non-ideal models in advertising is not yet widespread, there is a growing trend among corporations to adopt body positivity as a marketing strategy. This is in response to the rising criticism from customers and lawmakers. Dove set a significant precedent in body positive advertising in 2004 with the introduction of the "Real Beauty" campaign series. This campaign showcases authentic women and challenges the portrayal of unrealistic and unattainable body standards in commercials. According to Pounders (2018), the successful campaign by Dove has significantly enhanced the brand's image. This aligns with the hypothesis of Craddock et al. (2019), who suggested that companies can effectively incorporate promoting positive body image into their corporate social responsibility strategy. Conversely, the campaign has significantly influenced the long-term sales achievements of Dove goods (Pounders 2018). Inspired by Dove's successful approach, several other businesses, including Lindex (Lindex 2016), Monki (Gil 2018), and Aerie (Melisani 2020), have adopted body positive advertising strategies to appeal to female consumers.

The advertising business possesses significant influence over media imagery, making it one of the most influential entities in this regard (Diedrichs & Lee 2010). Currently, there is insufficient information to answer the industry's issues regarding the effectiveness of non-ideal models as an alternative to ideal models. Prior research has primarily concentrated on examining the impact of idealised models in advertising on consumers, neglecting to

consider the potential influence on advertisers and their inclination to alter their strategies (Jung & Heo, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to employ scientific reasoning to determine the validity of body positive advertising as a marketing strategy, in order to potentially motivate more corporations to adopt the use of non-ideal models in their advertisements. It is imperative to elucidate the correlation between the selection of models and potential commercial ramifications for the advertising organisations. Hence we propose the hypothesis as

H1: Perceived Body Similarity of models influences the Purchase Intention

The credibility of body positive marketing is the key determinant of their effectiveness. Trustworthiness is the quality of being honest, sincere, and true. It refers to the receiver's view of the likelihood that an endorser is conveying the statements that they believe to be most truthful (Munnukka, Uusitalo, & Toivonen 2016, p. 184). Priester and Petty (2003) elucidate that consumers possess a pronounced inclination to evaluate the credibility of advertising sources.

Trustworthiness is not only correlated with the efficiency of advertisements, but it is also closely associated with the concept of resemblance. Perceiving interpersonal similarity typically leads individuals to view the other person as trustworthy. Therefore, as the degree of apparent similarity rises, the level of trustworthiness experienced should also rise. The principle should also be extended to models depicted in advertisements: the greater the viewer's perception of resemblance between themselves and the depicted model, the greater the level of trustworthiness attributed to the model should be. Trustworthiness of the model is expected to increase as the perceived resemblance between the viewer and the model increases. Previous research has regarded easily recognisable non-ideal models as more reliable compared to unachievable ideal models. Customer purchase intention is a crucial characteristic utilised by marketing managers to forecast future sales and assess the influence of their efforts on customer purchasing behaviour. Marketers utilise models in advertising to exert influence on consumers' buy intentions. The attractiveness of the model's look directly correlates with an increase in consumers' propensity to acquire the goods. According to the empirical research conducted by Groesz et al. (2002), it has been determined that females exhibit a more unfavourable attitude after being exposed to photographs of thin models, as opposed to when they are exposed to images of ordinary or plus size models. Hence the second hypothesis is framed as

H2: Trust acts as a mediator in the association between Perceived Body Similarity (PBS) and customer Purchase Intention (PI)

Scope of the study

This study has considered the variable perceived body similarity to identify the influence of non-ideal models in advertisements. Further the investigation is cross sectional in nature and hence shall not capture any change in behaviour over a period of time. The data is collected from the state of Kerala.

Research Methodology

The study is characterised by its descriptive nature. The study sample consisted of individuals residing in the state of Kerala, which is known for having the greatest level of media exposure in India. The study gathers primary data from a sample of 205 respondents through the utilisation of the random sampling method. Information is gathered by a questionnaire comprising around 26 items. The technique employed for sample selection is random sampling. The research data was examined via the Partial Least Squares (PLS) programme, specifically Warp PLS 8.0.

Data Analysis

The model's fit and quality indices for both the models, one without mediation and one with mediation, could be estimated from the values presented in Table 1. All fit indices were determined to indicate a good fit, and both models have been deemed suitable for further investigation.

Table 1: Model Fit Indices

Model fit and quality Indices	Criteria Fit	Model values (without Mediation)	Model values (with Mediation)
Average Path coefficient(APC)	Accepted if $p<0.001$	0.745 $p<0.001$	0.535 $p<0.001$
Average R-square (ARS)	Accepted if $p<0.001$	0.555 $p<0.001$	0.596 $p<0.001$
Average adjusted R-Squared	Accepted if $p<0.001$	0.553 $p<0.001$	0.593 $p<0.001$
Average full collinearity VIF	Accepted if ≤ 5	2.185	2.744
Tenehaus GoF(GoF)	Small ≥ 0.1 Medium ≥ 0.25 Large ≥ 0.36	0.676	0.703
Symphson’s paradox Ratio	Accepted if ≥ 0.7	1.000	1.000
R-square contribution Ratio	Accepted if ≥ 0.7	1.000	1.000
Statistical suppression Ratio	Accepted if ≥ 0.7	1.000	1.000
Nonlinear bivariate Causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	Accepted if ≥ 0.7	1.000	1.000

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the constructs were measured using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability scores from PLS, it was found that for all constructs the value was greater than 0.7 and hence acceptable (Nunally,1978). The validity of the constructs were measured using the average variance extracted and all values were found to be greater than 0.5. Hence the validity of the constructs was established (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Without Mediation	PBS	PI	
Cronbach's Alpha	0.867	0.845	
Composite Reliability	0.919	0.860	
AVE	0.790	0.858	
With Mediation	PBS	PI	TRUST
Cronbach's Alpha	0.867	0.845	0.907
Composite Reliability	0.919	0.860	0.842
AVE	0.790	0.858	0.844

Model

H1: Perceived Body Similarity (PBS) influences the Purchase Intention (PI)

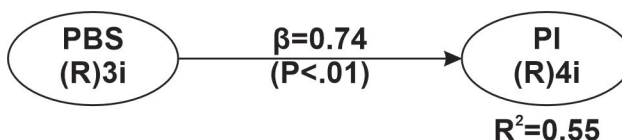


Fig.1 Structural Model

From the structural equation model, it was found that Perceived Body similarity (PBS) has a positive influence on Purchase Intention (PI). ($\beta=0.74$, $P<0.01$). R squared (R^2) value is found to be 0.55. Hence the hypothesized relationship that there is an influence of Perceived Body Similarity on Purchase Intention is established from the model.

H2: Trustworthiness acts as a mediator in the association between Perceived Body Similarity (PBS) and customer Purchase Intention (PI)

Trust was incorporated as a mediator in the relationship between Perceived Body Similarity (PBS) and Purchase Intention (PI). The structural equation model (SEM) revealed that Trust served as a mediating variable between Perceived Body Similarity (PBS) and Purchase Intention (PI).

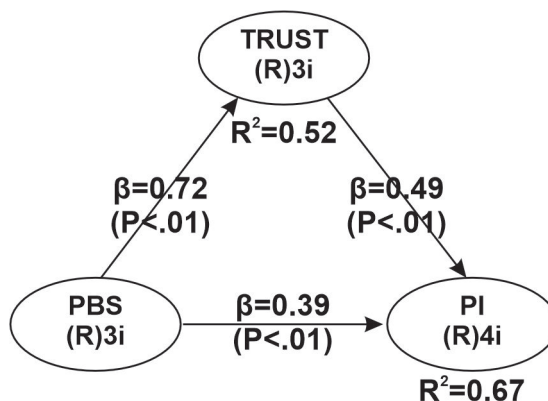


Fig:2 Structural Model with Mediation

The path values are as follows:

Perceived Body similarity (PBS) to Trust: $\beta=0.72$, $P<0.01$

Trust to Purchase Intention (PI): $\beta=0.49$, $P<0.01$

Perceived Body similarity (PBS) to Purchase Intention (PI): $\beta=0.39$, $P<0.01$

The coefficient of determination (R^2) is determined to be 0.67. This means that 67% of the variability in the Purchase Intention (PI) can be accounted for by this connection. When Trust is employed as a mediator, the coefficient of determination (R^2 or R^2) rose from 0.55 to 0.67. Thus, Trust acts as a mediator between Perceived Body similarity (PBS) and Purchase Intention (PI).

Sum of Indirect Effects	PBS	Trust
PI	0.353	
Total Effects		
PI	0.746	0.488
Trust	0.722	

*PBS=Perceived Body Similarity, PI=Purchase Intention

From the structural model it was identified that there is a significant influence of Trust as a mediator in the relationship between perceived body similarity and purchase intention. Similarly the analysis using T test in order to identify the difference between male and female found that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents but There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA for PBS ($F(3,201) = 12.048$, $p = .000$), Trust ($F(3,201) = 7.993$, $p = .000$) and PI ($F(3,201) = 12.004$, $p = .000$). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the people with age 40 had higher means than lower age groups.

Findings and Suggestions

- The findings of the study suggest that by portraying non-ideal male models in advertisements, advertisers can increase advertisement effectiveness as consumers express more favourable attitudes toward body positive advertisements (especially people above the age of 40) with non-ideal models than traditional advertisements with ideal models. The perceived similarity with the non-idealized model promotes model trustworthiness which in turn leads to Purchase Intention. Hence, advertisers creating advertisements for consumers are strongly encouraged to make more diverse casting choices and to cast models that reflect the diversity of their target market.
- By employing body positive marketing strategies, promoting companies can not only achieve better results from advertising, but also to benefit in terms of corporate social responsibility. Thus, the study provides valuable insight into how advertisement campaigns featuring models should be constructed.
- The use of non-idealised models would increase perceived body similarity and decreases body anxiety which will lead to better advertisement performance.

Conclusion

Advertisements featuring non-ideal models who do not fit the ideal standards are more effective than advertisements with ideal models, as consumers have more positive attitudes towards the former. Advertisers can further enhance this effect by selecting a specific target group that shares similar characteristics with the non-ideal models. This creates a sense of trustworthiness and ultimately increases the likelihood of purchase. By using this targeted approach, advertisers have the potential to improve consumers' attitudes towards body positive advertisements, which in turn will have a significant impact on their intention to make a purchase. Additional research can examine the variations of non-ideal models in diverse cultural and contextual settings. Cultural disparities can have a substantial influence on the way advertisements are perceived and interpreted. Analyzing these discrepancies can offer valuable insights for global marketing strategies. Furthermore, investigations can be conducted on the utilization of non-ideal models in the realm of digital and social media advertising. Given the growing prevalence of online platforms, comprehending how non-ideal factors affect consumer behavior in the digital sphere is crucial for marketers.

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