

Decoding the Role of Advertisements and Exploring the Motivators that Influence the Perception of Self - Image

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Abstract

The study of a person's opinion of their own body is the study of "body image." While the definition was not much complicated, the arguments around the "Body Image" have numerous folds, from weight and size to appearance and normality. There can be a long list of things that can affect a person's body image concept and make them feel good about themselves or even dread being in their bodies. The source can be anything from one's peers to the brands advertising their products with the help of models and celebrities. In this research, we will focus on the advertisements impacting the self-body image. The advertisers take the help of models and celebrities to impact the minds of their viewers and nudge them to try their product. In today's world, a consumer's self-image is targeted by how an advertisement is made. The research used a mixed-method approach to imply the finding of the study. The study validated and established the identified and the proposed construct and implied that the advertisements impact the viewers to attain or aspire for the sure self-body image. However, for a brief period, the effect and impact it creates cannot be overruled entirely.

Key-words: Body Image, Self – Image, Advertisements, Sociocultural Standards, Ideal Body.

1. Introduction

Advertising is a kind of exposure given to the customers to persuade them to buy or at least try a particular product. In this day and age, an average human being is exposed to thousands of beauty images weekly. While advertisers may use a vast array of tactics to induce curiosity and intrigue within customers, they sometimes aim to show a customer their ideal self and compare it to their real self, which may have good, bad, or worse effects on the viewers [1]. However, some of these advertisements set some unrealistic and unachievable body standards for the viewers. The

advertisers take the help of models and celebrities to impact the minds of their viewers and nudge them to try their product. They aim to make the viewers directly or indirectly want a body like the models or celebrities in their advertisements [2]. In today's world, a consumer's self-image is targeted by how an advertisement is made and, consequently, takes cues from such advertisements and develops a connection with the product. These advertisements are also said to evaluate the standards of good looks or the beauty standards amongst the younger generations, both males and females. These standards are usually high and a little challenging to achieve [3]. The impact deepens when such brands use celebrities to endorse their products. When it comes from a celebrity that a person looks up to, it is more convincing and has more significant effects on a consumer, similar to advice from their family and friends [4].

While there can be both positive and negative impacts of such advertisements on viewers' body image, the negative impact is observed a little more than a positive one. For men, a model having buffed body and abs is shown to attract the opposite sex [5]. Advertisements have even gone to the extent of body shaming people who weigh more and adorning people who have achieved a body that cannot be expected from regular human beings [6]. The harmful effects of such disparities on human beings may start small. However, they may quickly become huge issues for these young adults. They may lead to mental disturbances or may even be physically dangerous [7]. Western advertising encourages "thinness" especially in women. The concern of brands using skinny models to advertise their products and their detrimental effect on the viewer's body image increases. The gap between the ideal and the real self may lead a consumer to feel inferior or low on confidence in various aspects [8]. It creates dissatisfaction within them concerning their bodies and leads them to develop eating disorders to achieve their ideal self. A study done on preteen boys showed that when they indulged in food avoidance to get their ideal body, they often had psychological disturbances like depression and anxiety disorders [9]. In the post-modern world, a consumer does not want to develop a consistent, authentic and straightforward identity. They always change their self-concept depending on the context of body image. Considering this, the purpose of this study is first to understand the impact that the advertisements create in the viewers' minds and how it affects them? Secondly, to understand whether people acknowledge such advertisements and further look to attain or replicate self with the portrayed body-image?

2. Literature Review

Many pieces of research have acknowledged that since the time advertisements and media have existed, the viewers and customers have continued to feel an urge to have a “perfect” body, as portrayed by the celebrities and models doing those ads [10]. Be it print, radio, TV, OOH, or even digital, if we speak of present times. There are unrealistic beauty and body standards that get instilled in society’s minds. The viewers who get affected by this are also a part of this very society. When the actual body of the viewer and the bodies that the models and celebrities adorn have a deviation, dissatisfaction arises in the minds of the viewers about these deviations [11]. It starts from the teens and can create mental and physical disturbances within individuals until their 40’s or even further in life. Enough research has shown that to meet these ideal body standards, people practice unhealthy diets or even workout regimens that are not suitable for every individual [12]. These lead to severe, sometimes life-threatening, eating disorders. If not, they also contribute to the development of mental illnesses like depression and anxiety. This research took a cue from some existing researches. It worked towards developing a framework to take forward the study in a structured manner [13].

2.1. Perceived Motives of Celebrities/Models and Advertisers

According to the attribution theory, a person is inclined to perceive a cause for someone’s actions. These perceptions made by a person influence their behavior and affect their expectancies. For this study, one of the constraints that are a part of the theoretical framework is to establish that a viewer perceives that the advertiser, the models, and the celebrities endorsing a product want to showcase the perfect or the ideal body that one is expected to have to look attractive and socially acceptable. A connection with the advertiser’s opinion of an ideal attractive body and the perceived motive of viewers exists. The studies also show that if a viewer attributes a positive motive to an advertisement of a particular brand, their brand evaluation also, in turn, shows to be in a positive direction. We expect to see a direct relationship between the attributions to motives with the brand evaluation in similar lines. This variable has come into existence, keeping in mind the attribute theory and Laura Mulvey’s theory of male gaze and psychoanalytic.

2.2. Perceived Ideal Body-Image

Here, the factor is when a person determines their ideal body image. It is typically an understanding of the discrepancies between a person’s real body structure and how they would

ideally like it. Multiple factors help an individual to determine this. Media and advertisements are some of the greatest influencers on a person's body image, as elaborately discussed in this study. In earlier research, it is also established that advertisements use the physical appearance of a model or celebrity to sell and promote a brand's products. It is evident in several studies that a great deal of dissatisfaction arises when a viewer compares their own body with celebrities and models that get featured in advertisements, leading to eating disorders to achieve a desired yet unrealistic body. A considerable portion of both boys and men who get into the endomorphic or ectomorphic category find that they do not fit into the ideal and thus work harder to obtain the more mesomorphic body they witness in television and magazines.

2.3. Perceived Sociocultural Standards of Ideal Body

According to the sociocultural theory of body image, the beauty standards accepted in society positively contribute to the development of disturbances in one's body image, observed by David & Warrior. Advertisements are one of the significant determinants of these societal standards of beauty and ideal body. The glorification of thin bodies and the shaming of fat bodies is the most critical contributor to eating disorders. It is also seen that this standard differs from ethnicity to ethnicity, consequently, culture to culture. As the masses are exposed to the advertisements, this irrational and unrealistic "socially accepted" ideal body is easily determined by the viewers. Several kinds of research also showcase the role of mass media on cultural standards of body images. It is found that social media and advertisements depict various sociocultural tangents of individuals. In research, indirect support for the "sociocultural theory of eating disorders" was provided that showcased minimal levels of satisfaction concerning the size and shape of the body. There is a study that also states that self-esteem issues lead to the development of eating disorders [14].

2.4. Effects on the Viewer's Body Image

The viewer comes across a discrepancy in their mind, on their body image. Hence, it is either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's own body. If it is dissatisfaction, the viewer, in the next step, will look for methods to overcome this dissatisfaction and minimize the discrepancies. By showing possibilities and creating dreams, the viewers of an advertisement are made to view images of attractive models and celebrities achieving their own "Body goals" with the help of the said products that are promoted in these advertisements. These adverts have a subliminal yet massive effect on

people. However, fewer times, a positive effect from this manipulation has also been reported. It is essential to ultimately conclude that it gives the readers clarity about the effects that advertisements have on the viewer's body image.

2.5. Aligning Ideal Self-Image with the Brand's Showcased Image

A viewer aligns their ideal self-image and body image with the image that the brand portrays. Here, a viewer relates and agrees to the normalcy created by the brands during the advertising. These standards, though depicted, as usual, are extraordinarily unreal and unattainable. When promoting their product, the brands directly or indirectly communicate the definition and standards of an attractive body through the people who are promoting the products. When a customer aligns with the brand's idea of an attractive body, they start questioning their current body shapes and sizes. Alternatively, the consumer might agree with the body standards set by a particular advertisement. They might feel comfortable with the set body standards due to having a similar body structure as shown in the ads, which may also affect elation and satisfaction [15].

3. Proposed Theoretical Framework

With the help of the literature review, four independent variables are identified; perceived celebrity/model/advertiser motives, perceived ideal body and perceived sociocultural standards of an attractive body, and Alignment with the Brand showcased image. The dependent variable is and the Perception of the viewer on the self-body image. The considered variables under the study are proposed to form a framework given in Figure 1.

The hypothesis stated below will help to establish and validate the constructs in the proposed framework.

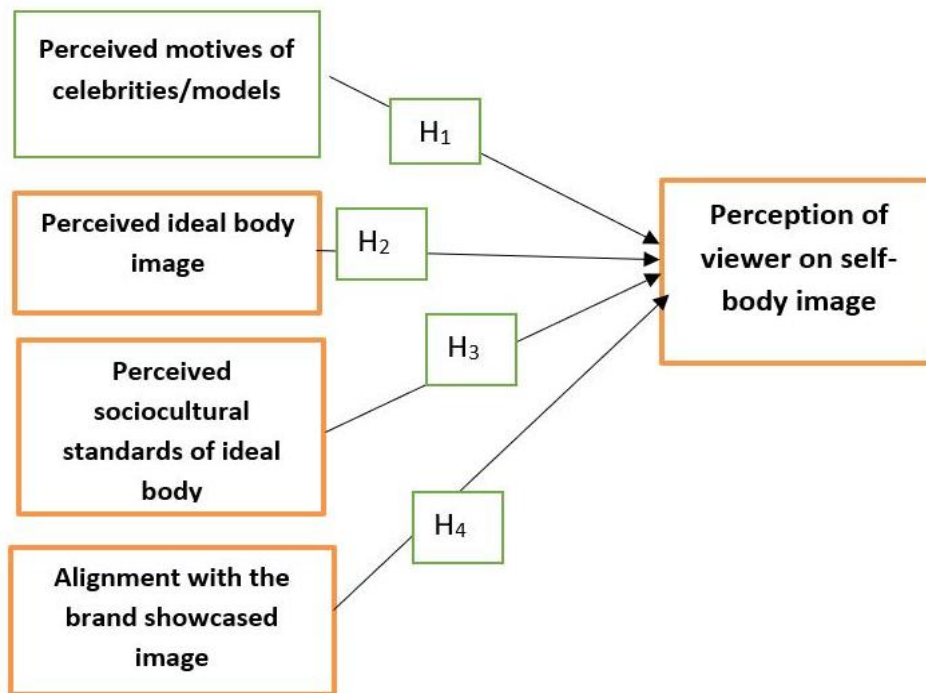
H1: Perceived motives of celebrity/model/advertiser has a significant impact on the Perception of the viewer on self-body image.

H2: Perceived ideal body image significantly influences the Perception of the viewer on self-body image.

H3: Perceived sociocultural standards of the ideal body significantly influence the Perception of the viewer on self-body image.

H6: Alignment with the brand showcased image significantly influences the Perception of the viewer on self-body image.

Figure 1 - Proposed Conceptual Framework



4. Methodology

The research uses a mixed-method approach. Firstly a quantitative technique is used to validate the framed hypothesis and the proposed framework. Then the research is extended with qualitative analysis through Focus group discussions (FGDs). A mixed-method approach will help to get an in-depth understanding of the subject. A total of 200 respondents have filled the survey. The survey was circulated via email and through social media platforms. The researcher used convenience sampling to reach the target audience. The target age group considered for the study is 20-35 years and people residing in the urban localities of India. The FGDs happened at the participant's mutually convenient time. The FGD is done through video conferencing. Eighteen participants have given their consent to participate in the discussion, so three FGDs were conducted with six participants each. The participants were also a part of the survey in the earlier phase [16].

5. Findings

5.1. For Quantitative Survey

The reliability is tested using Cronbach's alpha test. The α value is 0.776, which shows that the survey tool used for the study is reliable. The test of multicollinearity is also done using variance

inflation factor values (VIF). The VIF value is 1.006, which indicates no such impact of multicollinearity. The hypothesis framed is tested through multiple regression analysis in SPSS. The independent variables considered in the study are Perceived motives of celebrities/models and advertisers (PMOC), Perceived ideal body-image (PIBI), Perceived sociocultural standards of the ideal body (PSCS), and Aligning ideal self-image with the brand's showcased image (ABSI). The dependent variable is the Perception of the viewer on the self-body image (PVSI). The p-value is significant ($p \leq 0.05$); thus, supporting and validating the hypothesis framed. The R square value is 0.642, which indicates that there is almost 64 percent overall impacts of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The result of the multiple regression analysis is presented in the given table. The output of the analysis, shown in Table 1, verified the Perceived motives of celebrity/model/advertiser, perceived ideal body image, perceived sociocultural standards of the ideal body. Alignment with the brand showcased image does significantly influences the Perception of the viewer on the self-body image.

Table 1 - Coefficients

Coefficients								
Model		Standardized Coefficients			t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		Beta					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.124	0.239		4.709	0.000	0.654	1.594
	PMOC	0.070	0.032	0.121	2.198	0.029	0.007	0.133
	PIBI	0.113	0.043	0.150	2.589	0.010	0.027	0.198
	PSCS	0.167	0.051	0.184	3.289	0.001	0.067	0.267
	ABSI	0.338	0.056	0.351	6.010	0.000	0.227	0.448

a. Dependent Variable: PVSI

5.2. For Qualitative Survey – FGDs Summary

The rationale behind selecting the participants for discussion was to get an in-depth and extended opinion on the research variables. An attempt was made to consciously select more respondents falling under the ages of 23-24 and 30-32. They contributed to more than 50 percent of the questionnaire respondents. Three focus group discussions with six participants; each participant in each group was taken with a total of eighteen participants. The discussion is summarised below to get a clear understanding [17].

5.3. Perception of Motives of Celebrities/Models Featured in Advertisements

On being asked how often one comes across an advertisement featuring a celebrity or a model, all ten respondents thought they do come across such advertisements quite often. A few said daily, they see advertisements featuring lean models and celebrities all over social media and newspapers. Seven out of ten respondents said that the primary motive of these celebrities and models is the monetary value attached to them, and they do not care about the products that they endorse. The other three had a slight belief that the models and celebrities are a little conscious and aware of what they are advertising. One of the respondents thought that *leaner models are healthy when they advertise brands related to food, beverage, beauty, and fashion*. Another respondent thought that *brands approach celebrities/models that have a public image and personality similar to that of the brand* [18]. He supported his point by quoting examples of cement or steel brands hiring sports persons and Milo, an energy-boosting drink advertised by Sachin Tendulkar. All the other interviewees agreed that brands hire people who match with the brand personality to put that particular kind of impact on its viewers. All of the interviewees thought that the models and celebrities have attractive bodies [19].

5.4. Perceived Ideal Body Image

On being asked if they would go for a product advertised by a model or a celebrity who is not lean and thin but has a slightly bigger body, the participants had divided opinions. While most of them showed interest in a brand that has a comparatively bigger body shape, but some of them said that if they were honest, they would not probably go on to buy a product that had a model of a slightly bigger body. They have to go with the brands advertising themselves with the help of someone with a thin and lean body. The idea of going with a brand advertising itself with a slightly bigger body was one of the participants mentioned that *she would prefer a brand that endorses itself with a model or a celebrity showcasing a more familiar and achievable body type, instead of a brand that showcases too unachievable and potentially unhealthy body type*. The majority of the participants said that *these models and celebrities earn their bread and butter by maintaining a particular body type, which requires hours and hours of daily workout and strictly monitored diet plans*. They thought that we, being people who are not a part of showbiz, cannot afford to spend much time and money maintaining such a body type; hence, we tend to look for shortcuts that are more often than not extremely harmful and unhealthy for the body [20].

5.5. Perceived Sociocultural Standards of Ideal Body

The interviewees held a strong opinion on this particular question. All of them agreed that there is something as the society's standards of an ideal body type. While most of them said that it depends on individual to individual if they want to get affected by or align with the society's idea of an ideal body, but few of them mentioned that *many times in their lives, they had experienced depression and anxiety as they have succumbed into the society's pressure about the ideal body type and getting body-shamed*. The participants gave examples of how they usually get body shamed for being extremely thin and also being a little over-weight [21].

One of the participants quoted a Hindi saying, "Jo dikhta hai VO bikta hai," when asked if they think that advertisements in any way contribute to the ideal body standards set by society. They thought that it plays both ways, in the sense that advertisements do significantly impact society's mindset of an ideal body as a whole. However, the advertisers also feed upon the existing societal standard before strategizing whom they want to advertise their brands with, as again if they agree to the society's body standards during the advertisement of their brand, more people belonging to that society will resonate with the brand and buy their products [22].

On being asked if the models and celebrities we look at in advertisements have a healthy body, the opinions were somewhat divided. Exactly half of the interviewees said that they believed that the models/celebrities have all the time and money to take the healthier route to achieve a particular body type. At the same time, if we as commoners went on to copy them, we would probably end up getting into unhealthy ways of pursuing it. One example of an *unhealthy diet that many of her peers follow is intermittent fasting, which is an utterly unhealthy way of immediately reducing weight*. The other half of the respondents said that the models/celebrities do not necessarily follow a healthy plan to attain their bodies. They use pills, steroids, and surgeries for it, which is unhealthy for any of the viewers to follow [23].

5.6. Alignment with the Brand's Showcased Image

The interviewees were asked to select a packet of green tea, where one of which was Lipton green tea, being endorsed by Shradhha Kapoor. The other being organic India green tea, being advertised purely on its functions and not with the help of any model/celebrity, but the price points for both these products were the same. Eighty percent of them said that they would prefer to buy a brand purely based on its functions. All of these interviewees selected another green tea brand instead

of the one being endorsed by Shraddha Kapoor. Some selected another brand because they felt like it tasted better. In contrast, others selected another brand because they felt like it had better health benefits than Lipton [24].

The majority of the interviewees believed that they would never be able to either follow a strict diet or get into a rigorous physical regimen. At the same time, the other two were male interviewees who were all in for putting in that extra amount of physical endurance to achieve their ideal body shape, which they currently did not have. However, the others were quite satisfied with the kind of body that they are in currently and believe that they do not subscribe to any showcased body image.

6. Conclusion

The interviewees believe that the models/celebrities who endorse a particular product are least concerned about their selling and what they are standing for. All the benefit from is the monetary aspect of the partnership with any brand. They think that the brands make a conscious decision while selecting an endorser for their mind. The brands' rationale while choosing these models/celebrities for the brand is that their image/personalities should fall entirely in sync with the image/personality that the brands want to create of their products in the viewers' eyes. So, they always look for the perfect candidate to get this job done.

While these celebrities/models look attractive, they set unhealthy body standards in society and people's minds. Models and celebrities have zero size bodies as they earn their livelihood through it, but for the viewers who are not a part of the showbiz and neither have that kind of money nor the time to get into the bodies similar to these celebrities and models should never put such standards for themselves. It was agreed upon during the discussion that there are people around them who get hugely influenced by these body standards, and they have also felt pressurized by the same at some point in life. They agreed that advertisements play a significant role in creating society's unhealthy yet ideal body standards.

It is safe to say that the thin and lean bodies of models and celebrities who feature in advertisements are unhealthy. Nevertheless, people are attracted to them. The imagery sets the society's mind to be the ideal body, and many people get succumbed to attaining such bodies. If not, they get body shamed for not fitting into society's ideal body standards created by advertisements and other contributors.

It is also clear that these tactics do not lead to the consumers buying these products, as they ultimately care about the product that provides the most benefits to them.

Hence, it can be concluded that the drawbacks of brands featuring unhealthy body types in their advertisements are way more than any amount of benefit they provide to increase the product's sales. While featuring a skinny person in advertisements may contribute to creating the brand's desired image in the minds of the consumers, it is hard to look at any other aspect that showcases any positive effect of doing this. In contrast, the adverse effects are numerous, from people getting body-shamed to getting eating disorders. Through this research, it would be advisable that brands focus on featuring models and celebrities who can help in developing a healthy and normal body standard and also involve more functional benefits of their products in their advertisements, as the current tactics do not increase their sales numbers, while they might increase body issues within the youth and maybe also a little brand recall.

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