Body Positivity in Advertising: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

While advertising has traditionally portrayed unrealistic and idealized body standards, a growing number of brands have recently embraced more attainable and diverse body representations, referred to as body positivity. However, research on the effectiveness of body-positive advertising yields mixed findings, both in terms of advertising effects (e.g., attitudes, purchase intentions) and extended effects (e.g., body image, self-esteem). The field remains theoretically fragmented, with limited understanding of moderating effects and whether and how advertising and extended effects are interrelated. This meta-analysis synthesizes 421 effect sizes from 48 studies across 39 publications to evaluate the impact of body positivity in advertising on consumer responses. The results indicate that body positivity produces negligible advertising effects, except for engagement, but increases body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and reduces body improvement intentions. These results are best explained by the self-awareness hypothesis, but not by social comparison or empowerment theories. Advertising effectiveness

varies by consumer age, and gender match between endorser and audience, and has increased over time. Importantly, body positivity influences advertising outcomes directly, without mediation through extended effects. These findings offer implications for both researchers and practitioners and outline directions for future research.

Keywords: body positivity, advertising effects, extended effects, meta-analysis