The effect of Advertising Models’ Body Size on Consumers’ Perceptions of Self and the Ad
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Methodology

90 female undergraduate students at Drexel University participated in a 3 (model’s body size: slim, average, large) × 2 (product type: luxury vs. non-luxury) between subject design.

They were first shown a set of three ads of either a luxury or non-luxury piece of clothing by a model in one of the six conditions. Models who are advertising for the same product across conditions are all the same only varying in size (using photoshop and based on a pretest).

Background & Literature

Social Comparison Theory:
• In absence of objective means, people evaluate themselves by making comparisons with others.
• Upward comparison has direct negative effect on mood and self-esteem while downward comparison has been shown to be positively correlated with self-esteem (Pyszczynski et al., 1981; Wills, 1986).
• Comparison with slightly superior others are deemed by people to be more useful and motivational and less painful (Guder, 1977; Wood, 1989; Collins, 1997).

H1a: Women will show higher self-esteem when exposed to average-sized clothing models than when exposed to slim-sized or large-sized clothing models.

H1b: The relationship between exposure to advertising models and women’s self-esteem is stronger for women who care more (than less) about their body size.

Similarity/attraction theory:
Normally Attractive Models (NAMs) are shown to be more liked by consumers than Highly Attractive Models (HAMs).

H2a: Women will have more favorable attitude towards the advertisement of clothes advertised by average-sized models than those advertised by slim-sized or large-sized models.

H2b: The relationship between exposure to advertising models and participants’ attitude towards the advertisement is stronger when the advertised product has non-luxury (versus luxury) overtones.

H3: Women will have a more (than less) realistic view of their body when exposed to average-sized clothing models than when exposed to slim-sized or large-sized clothing models.

Results

Participants then filled various scales pertinent to hypothesized dependent variables regarding self-esteem and ad evaluation. They were then asked to choose the body type which they deem closer to how their body looks like. Data on weight and height are collected.

Participants in the large and slim size conditions consistently underestimate their weight (2.34, p<.005 & 3.27, p<.001) while participants in the average group showed significantly more realistic predictions (.18, p=.63).

BIBLIOGRAPHY