

# Body image and advertising effects assignment

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Over the centuries, beauty has been primarily defined by pictures of socially adorable figures and portrayals of idealized women ?? often became the epitome of what is attractive and beautiful. Nevertheless, past literatures have shown that people being barraged with numerous idealized images may lower self- esteem and cause various psychological disorders. The purpose of this report is to investigate whether an increasing amount of media exposure will lead to body image distortion.

A survey consisting of 45 questions regarding their attitudes towards the idealized images, their habits and receptions were asked, which aims to evaluate the effect of the media. There were 40 participants, with 15 males and 25 females. Results supported the hypothesis, demonstrating that exposure to both magazine and television induce body dissatisfaction based on comparison and self-evaluation. A considerable number of people have constantly tried to control their weight.

Introduction The distortion of body image has often been brought into association with advertising and the media in the past decades (Cash & Uprisings 2002). More often than not, thin size models fill TV commercials and women's magazines, retorting an alluring, slim yet unattainable body shape. This ideology subconsciously serves as a source where women might perceive what the social desirability and the epitome of beauty and success is (Lerner, Cracking & Stuart 1 973; Sandhogs, Kurt & Strobe 2001). Cash and Uprisings (2004) and Becker et al. 2002) have proposed the connection between the predominance of body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem with the representation of a thin ideal in the marketing industry, which sometimes leads to various kinds of psychological issues such as eating disorder,

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depression and anorexia. In similar research previously done by Stick and Shaw (1994), the participants expressed shame, guilt and stress upon exposure to images of thin ideals. Past literature has shown how different types of advertising such as print media, TV commercials and music videos contribute to the distortion of self-image.

Tightening (2003) found that girls between the age of 10-14 who frequently read appearance related magazines are three times more likely to lose weight and those who valued celebrities commercials expressed a desire to go on diet and get thinner (Levine & Harrison 2004). In addition, pessimistic mood and body image disturbance were initiated after women watched television (Schooled et al. 2004) and music videos featuring by thin models (Tightening & Slater 2004).

While the media are largely responsible for the initialization of a thin ideal, other literature has also identified external social factors which influence the perception of body images. Peers, as the most influential social group, can accentuate the effect of social comparison and induce group popularization, consequently feeling more extreme and distorted about their body shape. Karma, Giles, and Helm (2008) discovered that subjects with peers valuing Hines as beauty were more likely to suffer from inferiority complex. The perception as to what is desirable are often impacted by peer group (McCabe & Recalling 2001).

Parents are another factor which is seen to be the most influential group among children since parents are presumably reliable and trustworthy. Parents' comment on their children body shape might convey the social

norm and thus contributes to children's dissatisfaction (Rodgers, Pastor, & Chaparral 2009). Furthermore, self-esteem, as an internal factor, is closely tied to body dissatisfaction because adolescents evaluate their appearance base on world views. In current society where the media portray overweight as a stigma, it is not surprising that adolescents may get access to different criticism concerning their appearance. Ender self-evaluation, those who develop low self- esteem are prone to have poor body image (Hendricks & Burgeon 2003). Age plays an imperative role in the extent of consequences caused by advertising. For instance, Clay, Vignettes, and Dimmitt (2005) showed that 65 % of girls between 18 - 20 years old conformed to the body of thin ideals, which indicated that they Were likely to become internalized because they valued societal acceptance based on attractiveness. A lot of research conducted their experiment solely on women, however, little research has been carried out specifically on college-age individuals of both sexes.

The aim of this research is to investigate on the effects of advertising on body image among college-age individuals in particular. It is proposed that if college-age student are more exposed to the media, the more their body image perception may be distorted. The methodology of this research will firstly be addressed. This is followed by a questionnaire conducted on participants, moving on to interpretation and analysis of results obtained. Finally, discussion of the research and recommendations are made.

Methodology This research was conducted based on mainly qualitative and partly quantitative research.

This was mainly due to the behavioral based hypothesis and complexities associated with statistical analysis. A questionnaire was formulated to assess the influence of body image perception under the exposure of idealized images in the media. Four main types of questions, including personal information, attitudes towards advertising, habits and behaviors were addressed. There were 40 participants in total, consisting of 15 males and 25 females. The participants were randomly chosen and comprised of friends, relatives and students from school.

The dominant age group of participants is 17-33, with the exception of one 50 years old woman. There are 28 Asians and 12 people from western countries, including 18 Christians, 3 Buddhists, 2 Muslims and 3 others. The participants' rights in participating this questionnaire were acknowledged. It was explicitly stated that their participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from it whenever necessary. Confidentiality of participants were preserved by not recording their names. The questionnaire was conducted successfully, however, with a few shortcomings.

Firstly, the amount of media exposure of each participant was not controlled, resulting in the majority of them having limited influence on body image, if applicable. In addition, the small samples were predominantly Christians which limited the generalizations of the results, thus may not represent the wider community. Interpretation Question 1-6 is the personal information of 40 participants. The participants age range from 17 to 50, with 68 % female and 32% male respectively. With the majority of participants as Christian (48%), and 33% even no faith.

Question 7 to 8 examined the likelihood of exposure of participants to female magazines. Almost all participants have read a female magazine. Question 9 explicitly revealed the level of body dissatisfaction and self-esteem of participants. Overall speaking, 85% respondents were either not confident or dissatisfied with their own appearance (See bar chart 1). When gender was considered, female (27.5%) expressed a much higher uncertainty on body image than men (7.5%) (See bar chart 1). Bar Chart 1. Question 10-13 was designed to verify the social standard of beauty that people perceived nowadays.

Over half of the respondents acknowledged that an ideal body shape should look slender and slim and 70% agreed that being thin is a prerequisite for models. Question 14-17 addressed the impact of media exposure and peers' attitude with body image. Peers' standards were accounted to have considerable amount of influence on body image. 70% of participants valued their friends' appearance-related comment, with male having a milder effect than female. (See bar chart 2) Bar chart 2. Interestingly however, more participants did not feel pressure when exposed to thin idealized models, with half of them not bothering what the body size of models are.

Question 18-22 determined the persuasiveness of the media. Despite 52.5% of respondents agreed that the media is vital in shaping the socially desirable body image as illustrated in pie chart 1, the percentage of people who felt inadequate after exposure of idealized images were not unanimous. Pie chart 1. Around 60% of people will not be convinced to purchase a diet product. Question 23 - 26 addressed the general trend and impact of ideal body in the society. As shown in pie chart 2, 66% of respondents contended <https://assignbuster.com/body-image-and-advertising-effects-assignment/>

that the more attractive they look, the better their first impression to others may be.

Pie chart 2 Most strikingly, all participants agreed that they were judged by others based on appearance and body shape. (See bar chart 3) Bar chart 3 Question 27 - 37 was set to understand participants' habit and behaviors. Although participants seem to be quite confident on themselves, the majority of them have at least tried to beautify their photos using image-editing software and 68% looks into the mirror several times a day. Question 38 used a visual approach to test participants' perception of beauty. Respondents were not extreme, with 64% choosing the normal body figure.

Question 39- 0 tested the attitude towards weighing on scale. It was interesting that while most respondents believed they were satisfied with their body image, 34% were afraid to accept any weight gain. Question 41- 42 identified other factors which might contribute to body dissatisfaction. Self-esteem (38%) followed by parental attitudes (34%) were deemed to be significant factors other than the media. Question 43-45 validated the significance of media in body image and the most susceptible group of people in the society.

Generally, over 80% of people admitted that the media exert a great influence on body image, with males aged 16-25 as the most susceptible group. Discussion and conclusion This report was conducted to examine whether exposing to more thin-ideal images in the media will consequently lead to body image distortion of an individual. From the results of the

questionnaire, it can generally reveal that there was a link between the initialization of thin ideals and body dissatisfaction with media exposure.

Other social factors such as self-esteem, parental attitude and peers influence may also cause notable impact on body image. A number of interviewee responses were similar to some other related research, supporting the hypothesis. Respondents demonstrated their ideal body image by acknowledging that women should appear slim and slender while men should be muscular to be considered as perfect, which is consistent with the ubiquitous portrayal of thin ideals dominated by the media (Stringer-Moore & Somoza 2000).

Results were in line with most of the past literature that 85% of survey respondents were either not confident or dissatisfied with their own appearance (Barman, Personnel & Martinez 2006; Nominato & McCabe 1997). Gilbert et al. (2005) elucidated the phenomena by two major mechanisms, social comparison and cultivation theory. While Thompson & Stick (2001) proposed that women particularly have the innate tendency to evaluate their own attractiveness with desirable models, Tightening & McGill (2004) dealt with gender differences.

The findings consistently showed that female value peer's comments and social acceptance and undergo self-evaluation more likely than male. Albeit the unattainable models featured in advertisements as suggested by Bouts & Burger (2000), the respondents mainly agreed that thin models are achievable and adorable. Spirits, Henderson & Civilian (1999) reported that over half of the models fell into the anorexic category. The devastating



effects of these unrealistic thin ideals which cause eating disorder can be attributed to the fact that over 95% of ads were either airbrushed or digitally altered (Thompson et al. 1999).

Moreover, given that appearance maps one's first impression (Chain et al. 2011; Olivia & Outdoor 2010), it is not surprising that half of respondents believed that they will have a greater chance of employment with an ideal body shape. Generally, participants contended that the media is vital in shaping the socially desirable perfect body, which cultivates and accentuates comparison, resulting in body discontent (Laurie et al. 2007; Scour, Sanders, & Steiner 2000). Most evidently, almost all participants classified the most susceptible group as 16-25 years old girls, which is coherent with many existing studies.

While majority of responses supported the hypothesis, some contradictory results with related research were obtained in the survey. Despite an increasing evidence that exposing to appearance related television show are related to greater body dissatisfaction and behaviors such as purging skipping meals or dieting (Harvests & Tightening 2002; Bell, Layton, & Dimmitt 2007; Want, Vickers & Amos 2009), exponents would not be initiated to purchase diet products or skip meals after viewing television advertisement.

Neither did the majority of respondents care about models' body sizes nor felt pressure upon viewing related advertisements. While the results contradicted with McCabe & Recalling (2001) who revealed that thin-ideals advertisements trigger dieting behaviors, Hallowed et al. (2005) however,

rendered support by demonstrating no immediate effect of ideal shaped models portrayal on women's body distortion or related concerns.

Interestingly, several results given by the respondents were contradictory.

While respondents admitted that they are confident in their appearance and style, the majority of them have at least tried to beautify their photos using image-editing software and look into the mirror several times a day. Also, participants showed fear against weighing themselves and have tried to keep fit. These results might indicate that their concerns on body image might not be solely contributed by the media, which the hypothesis focused. This can be validated by majority of respondents agreeing that they will be judged by friends upon their own appearance.

Apart from the media, self-esteem and peers standards were identified as crucial factor for impacting body image. This corroborated with existing "tripartite influence model" suggested by Shorts & Thompson (2006), which concurred that the perfect beauty image is transmitted and reinforced by three factors: self-esteem, peers and the media. The rather weak correlation between media exposure and body dissatisfaction might be due to the habit of respondents, where many respondents watched television two to three times a week or even less.

As they are not heavy television viewers, the social comparison and self-Evaluation does not actively take place. The IM of this report is to examine whether exposure to thin ideals images will cause body image distortion. On the whole, the results support the hypothesis that thin ideal images presented in the media does influence the perception of an individual's body

image and help shape the social standards of beauty. One limitation was that a lot of our participants were not heavy television viewers, possibly reducing their exposure to the media.

Hence the lack of self-evaluation suggested by the social comparison theory might shed light on the insignificant results. Nevertheless, our findings add more rounds to the existing tripartite influence model which recognizes peers and self-esteem as equally important as the media. Recommendation Since exposing to thin idealized images in both magazines and television were found to exert the greatest influence on 16-25 aged females, it can be deduced that this age group is most susceptible to impacts regarding body perceptions.

However, the findings were conducted on a variety of age groups with different lengths of exposure to the media, thus there is a lack of quantitative analysis to undergo precise comparison and identify the impact on the most vulnerable group. Further research could limit the age group of the participants and certain types of idealized images exposure to render support to the hypothesis. Regarding the devastating effects of body image distortion such as anorexia and depression, the findings can implicate intervention and regulatory measures through education and the media.

As Cushman and Thompson (1997) reported that a vast majority of models were airbrushed in advertisements, it is vital to educate the youth on the reality of these images by encouraging campaigns by companies like 'Dove revolution of beauty'. Thus people would not pursue an unattainable body and offer an alternative to the culture of perfection.