



Perfectly Imperfect: How Body positive Advertisements in Social Media Foster Consumer Engagement?

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5 **Perfectly Imperfect: How Body Positivity Advertisements in Social Media Foster**
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7 **Consumer Engagement?**
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12 **Abstract**
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14 While brands are debunking beauty stereotypes and employing body positive advertisements
15 to foster consumer engagement, empirical research on the influence of body positive
16 advertisements is scarce. This research integrates the literature on body positivity and gender
17 role stress theory to examine, across two studies, how and when body positive advertisements
18 influence consumer engagement. Our results indicate that consumers’ responses to body
19 positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisements lead to greater engagement with the brand when
20 gender role stress is high (vs. low). Notably, body positive explicit and implicit advertising
21 strategies increase engagement, with implicit strategy fostering greater engagement than
22 explicit strategy. Furthermore, we show that consumers’ perceived brand authenticity is the
23 psychological mechanism underlying the impact of body positivity on consumer engagement.
24 These findings advance the literature on body image in advertising and offer marketers a
25 better understanding of the use of body positive advertising strategy in their marketing and
26 communication campaigns.
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46 **Keywords:** *Consumer engagement, body positive advertisement, responsible marketing,*
47 *consumer well-being, brand authenticity, gender role stress, social media, implicit*
48 *advertising strategy*
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Most popular brands hire bombshell supermodels for advertisements, despite their unattainable beauty standards. However, advertising scholars and practitioners are concerned about a cluttered media environment juxtaposed by dwindling consumers' attention and diminishing effectiveness of commercials that often glorify thin models. Interestingly, some advertisers have now turned to a relatively less-employed advertising strategy by deploying models of diverse shapes and sizes (Lou et al. 2019) as part of their body positivity campaigns. For instance, Aerie's "Real" campaign urged its consumers to feel confident, and comfortable in their own bodies, earning 40 million impressions on Instagram (#LoveYourRealSelfie 2015).

Prior studies investigating benefits of body positive advertisements for brands have reported mixed findings with positive (Agerup and Scharf 2018; Lou and Tse 2020) and negative (Anschutz et al. 2009; Borau and Bonnefon 2016) outcomes (see Table 1). Although body positive content has been intuitively assumed to foster consumer engagement (Cohen et al. 2019), which is a key marketing goal (Hollebeek et al. 2014), no prior research has examined it empirically (see Table 1). As consumer engagement plays a pivotal role in enhancing brand success, research may benefit by investigating how body positive advertisements foster consumer engagement.

At the core of body positive communication strategies, enterprises are experimenting with different body positive advertising strategies to engage consumers, namely, explicit and implicit advertising strategies. Explicit body positive advertising strategy aims to make body positive messaging clear and obvious. For example, brands like Dove and FabAlley have been employing body positive explicit advertising by being highly vocal about it. A FabAlley Instagram caption reads -- *FabAlley is reclaiming body positivity, right here, right now.* Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" on YouTube is another example of explicit body positivity and the campaign has received numerous "likes," indicating consumers' positive

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sentiments toward the message (Feng et al. 2019). The brand’s popularity and consumer acceptance has been evidenced by numerous social media ad impressions centered around hashtags like *#speakpositive* and *#MyBeautyMySay*. Conversely, implicit body positive advertising strategy relays the message in a subtle and indirect manner, reducing the prominence of explicit messaging. For example, brands such as Thinx, Universal Standard, and Nike have been employing models of various shapes, colors and sizes in their social media posts to communicate body positivity messages in a less prominent way instead of using flashy images or catchy taglines (Edwards 2016). Despite the prevalence of these two key advertising strategies on social media, little is known about their relative effectiveness, especially in terms of the influence each has on consumer engagement on social media (Usrey et al. 2020). Such an investigation may help companies select a suitable strategy that best represents the brand and produces optimal outcomes.

As we are witnessing a significant cultural shift, whereby women are seeking body positivity, consumers are increasingly looking for authenticity in brands (Morhart et al. 2015). Extant literature has recognized the importance of perceived brand authenticity, which has been shown to positively influence consumer attitudes and behaviors toward the brand (Yang et al. 2021). Consumers’ perceived brand authenticity reflects the degree to which consumers believe a brand is consistent and credible, driven by compassion and responsibility, and able to inspire consumers to be true to themselves (Morhart et al. 2015). Perceived brand authenticity may be vital to the success of body positive advertising, especially for enhancing consumer brand engagement, because it can explain how a brand is analyzed and perceived by consumers (Shoenberger et al. 2019). Body positivity, being a realistic, genuine, and inclusive communication approach by companies, resonates the core values of the brand to consumers, which may nurture perceptions of brand authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015).

Literature on body image suggests that the influence of body positivity on brand-related outcomes is not universal across gender roles (Simon and Hurst 2021). According to YouGovAmerica, 76% of Americans believe that the media promotes an unrealistic body image for women (YouGov 2021). Thus, self-comparisons with the beauty standards displayed in advertisements may negatively influence self-perception and self-esteem of women who fail to attain these standards (Martin and Gentry 1997). This is possibly because the internalization of socio-culturally constructed standards of appearance has often been the precondition for the experience of body dissatisfaction (Cohen 2019). Women exposed to such media become stressed about meeting appearance ideals, which leads to adverse psychological outcomes (Brown and Tiggemann 2020), including negative brand attitudes and disengagement with brands (Windels et al. 2019). Thus, body positive campaigns are likely to have a pronounced impact on women experiencing higher gender role stress. However, little is known about how the interplay between body positivity and gender role stress influences perceived authenticity and consumer engagement.

Addressing the aforementioned gaps in the extant literature, this research integrates the literature on body image (Cohen et al. 2019) and gender role stress theory (Gillespie and Eisler 1992) to provide a deeper understanding of how, why, and when body positive advertisements on social media influence consumer engagement (see Fig.1). In doing so, this research contributes to the advertising literature in several ways. First, prior studies have investigated several brand-related outcomes of body positivity, such as brand preference, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention (Aagerup and Scharf 2018; Borau and Bonnefon 2016; Cinelli and Yang, 2016; Lou et al. 2019) but have ignored consumer engagement. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first empirical investigation to examine the effectiveness of body positive advertising strategy in fostering consumer engagement. Second, while prior literature underscores the importance of body positivity, it does not distinguish between the

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different types of body positive advertising strategies and their relative effectiveness. We address this fundamental gap in the advertising literature and investigate the impact of different types of body positive advertising strategies (explicit vs. implicit) on consumer engagement. Third, we offer a novel pathway to account for the influence of body positive content on consumer engagement by examining the under-researched mediating role of brand authenticity, which has remained a crucial oversight in advertising research related to social media (Shoenberger et al. 2019). In this respect, we advance the emerging body of knowledge that explores authenticity in advertising brands (Cornelis and Peter 2017). Fourth, this research extends our understanding of individual variations in consumer engagement by examining the moderating role of gender role stress on the direct and indirect effects of body positivity on engagement. Consequently, it contributes to gender role stress theory by empirically demonstrating how gender role stress experienced by women influences their engagement with brands that endorse body positivity.

From a managerial perspective, this study can help marketers enhance consumer engagement by designing suitable body positive advertisements that promote consumers' perception of the authenticity of the advertised brand. It offers managers a deeper understanding of the conditions under which body positive campaigns can be most effective.

<Insert Figure 1 approximately here>

Literature Review

Gender Role Stress Theory

Gender role socialization is the process that incorporates social norms, principles, and belief systems to guide thoughts and actions on what it signifies to be a male or a female in a society (Steinfeldt et al. 2011). Feminine gender role socialization involves conformance to a feminine identity. Gender role stress instantiates the stress individuals feel because of their perceived inability to fulfil certain expectations of their gender role demands (Eisler and Skidmore 1987).

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3 Particularly, feminine gender role stress encompasses stress from many facets of a woman's
4 life, such as fear of being unattractive, fear of being in a marriage devoid of emotions, fear of
5 being mistreated, fear of acting assertively, and fear of not being sufficiently nurturing
6 (Gillespie and Eisler 1992).
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12 Most women experience societal pressures to conform to norms that dictate the
13 appropriate standards for femininity (Mahalik et al. 2007). The stress to comply with societal
14 standards of feminism leads to beauty and appearance-driven dispositions and body image
15 concerns (Steinfeldt et al. 2011). Societal pressures hinder independent reflection of a
16 given scenario (Harrington and Overall 2021), leading to gender role-related stress. To
17 gain social validation of their feminine roles, women suppress their "own selves" and
18 experience considerable stress because of their devotion to upholding the demands of the
19 feminine gender role, for instance, the emphasis on one's physical appearance and the need
20 for social validation (Martz et al. 1995).
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33 Societal expectations to be thin and internalization of these pressures have a
34 significant impact on how women feel about their bodies, causing body image disorders
35 (Cohen 2019). Women are "appearance-concerned" because physical attractiveness and facial
36 beauty are typically considered prerequisites for marriage (Elder 1969). Besides appearance
37 related concerns, women experience stress in the workplace because they find it challenging
38 to advance to more senior positions in the organizational hierarchy (Nelson and Burke 2000).
39 Moreover, occupational stress interferes with women's ability to fulfil familial obligations,
40 leading to work-life imbalance and conflict (Nelson and Burke 2000). Additionally, the stress
41 is exacerbated for working women because of the fear of not being perceived as sufficiently
42 nurturing in their parental responsibilities.
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56 The stress to conform to societal standards of feminism can lead to negative
57 consequences, such as body image issues (Steinfeldt et al. 2011), eating disorders (Martz et al.
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1995), depressed mood (Gillespie and Eisler 1992), shame, and guilt (Harrington and Overall 2021). Accordingly, this study employs the lens of gender role stress theory to comprehend how women stressed about meeting stereotypical feminine norms, including appearance standards, engage with brands that promote body positivity.

Body Positivity in Advertising

Body positivity seeks to challenge society’s dominant norm of appearance-focused standards by promoting love, respect, and acceptance of bodies of all shapes, sizes, tones, characteristics, and abilities (Tiggemann et al. 2020). It inspires people to look beyond the body’s aesthetic beauty and consider its functional strengths and abilities (Cohen et al. 2019). Body positivity campaigns commonly entail thoughts of self-compassion and acceptance by women of different body types and colors (Simon and Hurst 2021). This movement has gained significant traction in the past decade (Cohen et al. 2019).

Despite its growing popularity, research on body positive advertising has been inconsistent. One stream of research suggests that body positive advertisements engender positive attitudes towards the ad and elicit better brand performance (Aagerup and Scharf 2018; Lou and Tse 2020). For instance, Aagerup and Scharf (2018) find that female students rate fashion brands worn by obese models as more attractive than that worn by average-weight models. Similarly, Lou and Tse (2020) indicate that participants show higher purchase intentions toward a brand when viewing an ad of an average-size model than thin or plus-size models. In contrast, another stream of literature asserts the negative impacts of body positive ads. A study among young French women shows that natural-looking models (i.e., models with realistic body sizes and average levels of facial beauty) induce more repulsion than idealized models (Borau and Bonnefon 2016). Therefore, our understanding of the impact of body positive advertising on marketing outcomes remains nebulous. Our research addresses the

inconsistency in the extant literature by examining the influence of body positive advertisements on consumer engagement in the presence of gender role stress.

Hypothesis Development

Body Positive Advertising Strategy and Consumer Engagement

Firms are increasingly trying to engage consumers because engagement leads to important marketing outcomes, including brand referrals, sales, and profits (Roy Bhattacharjee et al. 2023). Consumer engagement is defined as a “psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships” (Brodie et al. 2011, 260). Consumers value body positive advertisements because they reflect reality and advance the cause of women’s empowerment (Windels et al. 2019). A positive body image encompasses love, respect, satisfaction, and appreciation for one’s own body (Steven and Griffiths 2020). By promoting body positivity, brands portray a customer-centric approach, debunk social stereotypes, and show empathy toward customers (Cohen et al. 2019). Body positivity posts on social media are likely to engage customers with the brand cognitively, that is, by investing their mental resources, and emotionally. For instance, on exposure to images of “regular-sized” models, who did not conform to the socially constructed thin-ideal stereotypes, women consumers reported a greater boost in self-esteem and body appreciation than those who saw thin-ideal models (Williamson and Karazsia 2018). Prior studies, utilizing the lens of social comparison, have shown that comparing oneself with unrealistic thin-ideal models negatively affects body image and self-esteem (Selensky and Carels 2021), which can subsequently reduce consumer engagement. When women are exposed to ideal body images on social media, they express more negative emotions and body dissatisfaction (Cohen et al. 2019). For instance, Victoria Secret’s decline and the subsequent shutting down of its stores since 2017 could be attributed to thin-ideal messaging (Selensky and Carels 2021). Recent studies (e.g., Davies et al. 2020)

have examined the “fitspiration” and “thinspiration” posts on social media to promote achieving ideal body standards and conspicuously lean and toned bodies. Exposure to such content exacerbates negative mood and reduced body satisfaction. Thus, ideal body image advertising strategy may reduce women’s self-esteem, which may negatively influence their engagement. Accordingly, we expect customers to invest time, effort, and resources and engage with brands that promote body positivity.

Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

H1: Body positive advertising strategy generates greater consumer engagement than the thin-ideal advertising strategy.

We further suggest that consumer engagement elicited by body positivity may depend on the type of advertising strategy employed (i.e., explicit versus implicit) considering that advertisements can convey overt or subtle signals (Okazaki et al. 2010). However, little is known regarding the relative effectiveness of these advertising strategies. Body positive explicit strategy aims to make the product’s inclusive characteristics prominent (Okazaki et al. 2010). In doing so, a direct connection is established between the product and body image.

Advertisers can also influence certain beliefs without specifically mentioning them (Yi 1990), known as implicit persuasion (Okazaki et al. 2010). In the implicit advertising strategy, the advertising message is subtly implied instead of being stated outright (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005). It is an indirect form of persuasion wherein the message is latent, and consumers are required to draw inferences from the multi-layered meanings it holds (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005). In body positive implicit advertising strategy, the body positive characteristics of the product are placed in a less prominent location and are thus expected to play a passive role in message visuals (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005; Okazaki et al. 2010). After being exposed to specific implicit advertisement cues, consumers can draw their inferences about the product’s characteristics that are not explicitly presented in the

advertising message (Yi 1990). Thus, consumers process the information, retrieve the association between the stated message and intended meaning, and eventually draw their inferences.

We expect explicit advertising strategy to have a greater impact on consumer engagement than implicit advertising strategy. This is because explicit messages, compared to implicit ones, are more salient and comprehensible; therefore, they lead to easier inference of the brand meanings (MacInnis and Jaworski 1989). Direct informational clues in explicit messaging can generate automatic responses without requiring consumers to exhaust their mental resources (Tybout et al. 1981). Most consumers behave as cognitive misers when it comes to processing messages on social media, probably because of the sheer quantum of information it contains. Prior research indicates that consumers often rely on lay theories to form inferences as they function with bounded rationality, because of which they focus on specific aspects of advertisements that immediately catch their attention instead of meticulously scrutinizing its intricacies (Sujan and Dekleva 1987). Thus, we posit that consumers can clearly and unambiguously draw inferences about the company's body positivity claims from a body positive explicit advertising strategy, as compared to a body positive implicit advertising strategy. Accordingly, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2: Body positive explicit advertising strategy generates greater consumer engagement than body positive implicit advertising strategy.

Moderating role of gender role stress

According to the gender role stress theory, women are traditionally expected to follow gender norms and possess qualities like solidarity, commitment, and compassion, over and above physical attractiveness (Gillespie and Eisler 1992). When these expectations are not met, they face psychological repercussions (Harrington and Overall 2021). They are susceptible to

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anxiety, body image concerns, struggle with weight issues and poor nutrition as they yearn to fit in with the feminine attributes of warmth, compassion, and particularly, physical attractiveness (Harrington and Overall 2021). A high level of stress has been associated with one’s ability to perform sexually, to be physically attractive, and to provide for one’s family (Martz et al. 1995). As lack of physical attractiveness can be a key reason for rejection, it could pose a threat to romantic relationships, which lowers women’s self-esteem and increases the stress related to body image (Harrington and Overall 2021).

Drawing on gender role stress theory (Gillespie and Eisler 1992), prior studies have found that the fear of being unattractive and the pressure to live up to ideal beauty standards can be significant stressors for women (Martz et al. 1995). When an individual’s gender role stress is high, and brands promote thin-ideal images, it decreases psychological well-being, depression, poor mental health (Murray et al. 2011), self-deficiencies, and low self-esteem (Martz et al. 1995), which can result in brand disengagement. However, when brands debunk the unrealistic body standards and beauty ideal stereotypes through body positive advertisements, women with high gender role stress are likely to experience body satisfaction (Cohen et al. 2020) and engage with such brands. On being exposed to brands that promote body positivity, individuals with high gender role stress celebrate being accepted in their skin and consequently feel empowered (Vadakkepatt et al. 2022). Such individuals perceive brands promoting body positivity as more inclusive, which, in turn, generates their engagement with the brands.

We further argue that consumers’ level of gender role stress may also impact their response to different types of body positive advertising strategies. Specifically, women with low gender role stress are likely to have more psychological resources at their disposal (Tang and Lau 1996), which enable them to decipher the latent meanings in body positive implicit advertisements, thereby fostering higher engagement. However, high gender role stress is

likely to deplete the available psychological resources that are needed to meaningfully decipher indirect persuasion strategies. Hence, when gender role stress is high, explicit body positive advertisement strategies are likely to generate greater consumer engagement than implicit body positive advertisement strategies. Accordingly, we posit the following hypotheses:

H3a: Customer's gender role stress moderates the relationship between body positive advertising strategy and consumer engagement, such that the influence of body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisements on consumer engagement is accentuated (attenuated) for a customer with high (vs. low) gender role stress.

H3b: Customer's gender role stress moderates the relationship between body positive advertising strategy and consumer engagement, such that the influence of body positive advertisements on consumer engagement is accentuated (attenuated) for a customer with high (vs. low) gender role stress, when explicit (vs. implicit) body positive advertising strategy is followed.

Mediating role of perceived brand authenticity

Perceived brand authenticity captures consumers' subjective evaluation of the genuineness of a brand, which has favorable effects on the brand in the form of brand attachment, positive word-of-mouth, purchase intention, and brand trust (Morhart et al. 2015). An authentic brand is characterized by honesty, trustworthiness, meaningfulness, sincerity, and commitment to quality (Beverland et al. 2008).

Consumers are cognizant of the disparity between reality and life, as illustrated in advertising (Shoenberger et al. 2019). Advertisements that feature real models are perceived as more authentic, resulting in increased advertising effectiveness (Cornelis and Peter 2017). Furthermore, when brands promote "realistic" body imagery, engage in honest and heartfelt conversation about issues such as well-being, disparage marketers' depiction of "unreal"

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body image ideals, and promote body confidence on social media, customers perceive authenticity (Cornelis and Peter 2017). Prior studies have demonstrated that endorsers’ qualities can be transferred to the perceived quality of endorsed. For instance, Yang et al. (2021) found that genuineness and trustworthiness of the source/model in a brand’s Instagram image positively influences consumers’ perceptions of brand authenticity. Accordingly, we posit that body positive content is likely to enhance consumer perception of brand authenticity because such content is likely to be construed as more genuine, personally meaningful, and symbolic to consumers (Morhart et al. 2015).

Perceived brand authenticity drives consumer engagement with brands because consumers seek genuine brands (Shoenberger et al. 2019) to discover meaning and purpose in life (Beverland et al. 2008). They place a premium on authenticity and support sincere brands that adhere to moral principles (Morhart et al. 2015). Considering that an authentic brand provides something symbolic or meaningful to its consumers and is a source of identity creation, consumers consider it a part of their self-identity (Morhart et al. 2015). Consumers are more likely to engage with the brand when they perceive it to be genuine, especially through messages based on the common values it upholds (Moharana et al. 2023). Accordingly, a brand’s body positive content may reflect that it is concerned about the well-being of its consumers and not solely driven by financial motives, which may enhance consumers’ perceptions of brand authenticity. This emphasis on genuineness, trustworthiness, and virtuousness is likely to foster consumer engagement with the brand because perceived brand authenticity helps to strengthen consumer-brand bonding (Yang et al. 2021). Thus, we advance the following hypothesis:

H4: Customer’s perceived brand authenticity positively mediates the relationship between body positive advertising strategy and consumer engagement.

We further argue that gender role stress affects the indirect relationship between body positive advertisements and consumer engagement through perceived brand authenticity. Body positive advertising uses normal models and advances the idea of embracing individuals in their “actual form,” that is, how they are, while questioning the beauty stereotypes; thus, it helps reinforce body acceptance (Vadakkett et al. 2022). Hence, individuals stressed about meeting the ideal body standards find body positive advertisements closer to their “actual selves.” Consistent with this, Malär et al. (2011) mentioned the fit between a brand’s communication style and the consumer’s actual self-perception as being a determinant of brand authenticity. Thus, for women with high gender role stress, the influence of body positive ads on brand authenticity is likely to be elevated. Conversely, in the case of thin-ideal advertisements, one’s ideal self is activated, which makes the advertisements feel phony or artificial. This impression may weaken the impact on brand authenticity. Hence, we posit that the indirect effect of body positivity on consumer engagement via brand authenticity may also be strengthened. Accordingly, we posit the following hypothesis:

H5: Gender role stress moderates the indirect relationship between body positive advertising strategy and consumer engagement via perceived brand authenticity.

Overview of Studies

We test the theoretical framework (Figure 1) by employing two experimental studies. Using a fictitious brand, Study 1 investigates the impact of advertisement strategy (body positive vs. thin-ideal) on consumer engagement. It also examines customers’ perceived brand authenticity as the mediator and customer gender role stress as a moderator in the relationship between body positive advertisement strategy and consumer engagement. Study 2 uses a real brand to evaluate these relationships. Apart from revalidating the results of Study 1, we introduce the concept of body positive explicit vs. implicit advertising strategy and examine

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its role in influencing the relationship between body positive advertising strategy and consumer engagement. This research (Study 1 and Study 2) has received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Essex, Colchester, UK (IRB number: ETH2122-0826).

Study 1

A total of 155 female respondents from the U.S. participated in the study through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for a compensation of \$1.30 each. We deliberately recruited females for the study because research has indicated that females are especially vulnerable to the adversities of ideal beauty and body standards (Shoenberger et al. 2019). This experiment employed a 2 (advertising strategy: body positive vs. thin-ideal) × 2 (gender role stress: high vs. low) factorial design. Age, education, and weight did not differ significantly across conditions. This study was conducted in Qualtrics. The computer program randomized the questions and blocks to eliminate the possibility of common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Following Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema (2012), we incorporated two quality-control questions in the survey to ensure that participants were paying attention.

Stimuli

Taking a cue from prior research (Lefebvre and Cowart 2021), two stimuli were designed to depict an activewear brand’s Instagram advertisements (see Appendix A). A fictitious brand named Dressix featuring non-celebrity models was used to regulate participants’ prior brand knowledge, familiarity, and preferences for the brand or model. The activewear product category was chosen because it relates to women’s body image concerns (Cohen et al. 2019). The fictitious brand name of Dressix was developed using the brand name generator Namelix (Mogaji 2021). Instagram was chosen as a source of advertising stimuli because of its popularity among customers (1000 million users worldwide as of 2021, Statista, 2021) and because brands often use Instagram to engage with their customers. For the body positive

condition, an Instagram post featuring a plus-size model was designed to endorse the activewear brand Dressix. Next, the thin-ideal condition featured a slim model endorsing the activewear brand Dressix. We employed an image-editing software professional who digitally altered the images to make the model appear thin. Both the posts contained similar number of likes, caption text, and hashtags to rule out any confounds. Both the posts contained common hashtags, such as #dressix, #activewear, #trending, #newcollection, and #shopnow. To further prevent confounding effects, comments on Instagram posts from all the stimuli were eliminated.

Procedure

Prior to the start of the study, the participants were given a brief overview of the research. Following which, the participants read an informed consent form. The content included in the informed consent indicated that the participant's participation is completely voluntary and free from coercion. The consent letter also informed the participants that the information collected will be kept securely and only be accessible to the lead researcher. After providing informed consent, participants took part in a task, adapted from Wong et al. (2013), to elicit their gender role stress. It required them to describe their personal experiences of what it meant to be a woman (see Appendix 1). Next, the participants were briefed on the stimuli brand, that is, Dressix. They were then randomly assigned to one of the two stimuli conditions (body positive or thin-ideal), using the random allocation feature in Qualtrics. Participants in each condition viewed the stimuli (i.e., brand Dressix's Instagram post) for at least 30 seconds.

Participants then responded to measures for manipulation checks. Next, consumer engagement was measured using an adapted version of the scale developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). All questions were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale (1= "strongly disagree,"

7= “strongly agree”). Finally, the participants were asked to provide their key demographics, such as age, weight, and height. Appendix 2 provides the items and reliability of the scale.

Results

The results confirm successful manipulation of body positive and thin-ideal conditions. A paired sample t-test indicated a significant difference in customers’ perceptions of body positive advertisements. Perceived body positivity was significantly higher in the body positive experimental condition than in the thin-ideal experimental condition ($M_{\text{bopo}} = 5.82$ vs. $M_{\text{thin-ideal}} = 4.94$, $t = 5.746$, $p < .01$). Next, we test the hypothesized relationships after obtaining the desired results by manipulating the variables involved.

Consistent with H1, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results revealed a significant effect of advertising strategy ($M_{\text{bopo}} = 5.55$, $M_{\text{thin-ideal}} = 4.90$, $F(1, 154) = 10.441$, $p < .01$) on consumer engagement. An examination of planned contrasts demonstrated that the participants in the body positive condition reported greater consumer engagement than those in the thin-ideal condition ($M_{\text{bopo}} = 5.55$, $M_{\text{thin-ideal}} = 4.90$, $p < .01$). Thus, H1 is supported.

Next, we employed two-way ANOVA to test the interaction effects of body positive advertising strategy (body positive vs. thin-ideal) and customers’ gender role stress (high vs. low) on consumer engagement. Gender role stress scores were computed by averaging the responses of all items on the frequency of stress (Wong et al. 2013). Next, the continuous variable was transformed into a categorical variable by median split (Median = 3.4). High scores indicating greater levels of gender role stress were coded as 1, whereas low scores were coded as 0. The interaction effect was calculated using high versus low scores. The results showed a significant two-way interaction ($F(1, 152) = 5.061$, $p = 0.026$) (see Figure 1). Thus, H3 is supported.

Follow-up analyses revealed that when participants were in the high gender role stress condition, the body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisement strategy significantly affected consumer engagement ($M_{\text{bopo}}=5.86$, $M_{\text{thin-ideal}}=4.89$, $t=4.18$, $p<.01$). However, when participants were in low gender role stress condition, the body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisement strategy did not significantly affect consumer engagement ($M_{\text{bopo}}=5.24$, $M_{\text{thin-ideal}}=4.91$, $t=1.95$, $p=.054$), thereby supporting H3a. We also analyzed the alternative mechanism of Body mass Index (BMI) as a moderating variable because it is related to body satisfaction (Simon and Hurst 2021). Results indicated that body positive advertising strategy did not significantly interact with BMI in generating consumer engagement ($F(1, 152)=.239$, $p=0.626$).

We further examined the mediation effects by employing Model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes 2022). The mediation model was estimated using 10,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (Hayes 2022). Advertising strategy (body positive vs. thin-ideal) was treated as the independent variable, perceived brand authenticity as the mediating variable, and consumer engagement as the dependent variable. The results indicated that the indirect effect of body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertising strategy consumer engagement ($b=0.2390$, $SE=0.0629$, $CI=[0.1242, 0.3668]$) via perceived brand authenticity was significant. Thus, H4 is supported. Furthermore, to test the moderated mediation hypothesis, we ran Model 8 in the SPSS PROCESS macro based on 5000 samples (Hayes 2022). The results revealed that gender role stress moderated the direct and indirect effects of body positive advertising strategy on consumer engagement via perceived brand authenticity (index of moderated mediation $=0.0653$, 95% CI $[0.1476, .3130]$). Thus, H5 is supported.

Study 1: Discussion

The findings of Study 1 demonstrate that, compared to thin-ideal advertisements, body positive advertisement strategies positively influence consumer engagement with the brand.

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Thus, H1 is supported. Furthermore, we test the moderating role of customer gender role stress on body positive advertising–consumer engagement relationships. As expected, our findings demonstrate that on exposure to a body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisement, customers with high gender role stress engaged more with the brand, supporting H3a. Furthermore, evidence of the mediating effect of customers’ perceived brand authenticity explains the mechanism that underlies the impact of body positive advertisement strategy on consumer engagement, thus supporting H4. This study also provides evidence for the moderating-mediation role of gender role stress on the indirect relationship between positive body advertisements and consumer engagement via perceived brand authenticity, supporting H5.

Study 2

A total of 207 female respondents from the UK participated in the study through Prolific for a compensation of £1.50 each. They were assigned to one of two experimental conditions (explicit and implicit body positive adverting strategy) using a randomized block procedure. This study employs the real brand Nike to improve ecological validity of the findings. Specifically, the study includes “nikewomen,” which is a popular brand among youth and sports enthusiasts, making it relevant to women looking to buy active wear. Nikewomen has an active social media handle with 9.1 million followers. They regularly promote their products using body positive advertising strategy. This ensured that the study featured 1) a brand with high brand awareness and (2) product categories that are regularly advertised with body positivity messages to increase the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, Study 2 measures customers’ self-reported perceptions of gender role stress.

Stimuli

The stimuli were designed in line with explicit and implicit manipulations developed by Usrey et al. (2020) and adopted for social media context. The stimuli for each condition were

fictitious Instagram advertisements that mimic the actual Instagram post of “nikewomen” (See Appendix B). The stimuli were images taken from an actual nikewomen’s Instagram handle to ensure picture quality. To manipulate body positive advertising strategy, this research used a real image from the nikewomen Instagram handle, which featured a group of models with various body shapes and sizes and belonging to different ethnicities. In each condition, we held constant the text content of the advertisement, which included a generic product message “We are for you, Nike for you” and a body positive message “All bodies deserve love, care and respect.” To manipulate body positive explicit signals, the body positive message appeared in the centre of the image and was enlarged to fit the area, making it prominent in the advertisement. The generic product message appeared at the bottom of the picture and was small in size, reducing the emphasis on the product’s core characteristics. In the body positive implicit signals condition, the placement and prominence of the information appeared in reverse order to downplay the product’s body positive characteristics. The likes, texts, and hashtags remained the same for both the conditions. Generic hashtags like #nikewomen, #activewear, #trending, #newcollection, and #shopnow were used across both the conditions. To prevent confounding effects, comments on Instagram posts from both stimuli were eliminated.

Procedure

Pretest

To ensure our manipulations had the desired effect, we conducted a pretest (N = 45). Each respondent was shown one of the two body positive advertisements and asked to rate the extent to which the body positive advertising was displayed in an explicit or implicit manner. To measure this, we employed scales developed by Okazaki et al. (2010) to measure the extent to which information in a given advertisement is implicit (i.e., subtle, indirect, implicit, and imprecise) or explicit (i.e., direct, assertive, and precise) on a seven-point bipolar scale.

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We found that our manipulations did have the desired effect on both the explicit ($M_{\text{exp}} = 4.53$, $M_{\text{imp}} = 3.362$, $t = 6.004$, $p < .001$) and implicit ($M_{\text{imp}} = 4.38$, $M_{\text{exp}} = 3.30$, $t = 6.694$, $p < .001$) measures.

Main study

Similar to Study 1, the participants read an informed consent form at the beginning of the study. After receiving informed consent, we measured participants' gender role stress using thirty-nine items from Gillespie and Eisler's (1992) feminine gender role stress scale. The gender role stress scale measures a constellation of maladaptive stress responses, particularly salient for women. They include the following: a) fear of unemotional relationships, b) fear of being unattractive, c) fear of victimization, d) fear of behaving assertively, and e) fear of not being nurturant. Participants rated stressfulness of each situation on a six-point scale ranging from "not at all stressful" to "extremely stressful" (Gillespie and Eisler 1992). High and low stress were determined through a median split (Median = 3.5). Furthermore, gender identification was measured using six items adapted from Batra and Ghoshal (2017). We included gender identification as a control variable because research shows that gender identification is related to gender role stress (Littlefield, 2004) and gender role stress is elevated for women who show high levels of gender identification.

Next, the participants were briefed on the stimuli brand, Nike. They were then randomly assigned to one of two stimuli conditions (body positive explicit or body positive implicit advertising strategy) using the random allocation feature in Qualtrics. Participants in each condition viewed the stimuli (i.e., brand Nike's Instagram post) for at least 30 seconds. After exposure, the participants completed the brand familiarity scale from Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993) for nikewomen. This scale comprised of three items (familiar/unfamiliar, inexperienced/experienced, knowledgeable/not knowledge able) given in seven-point numeric format. Furthermore, participants completed one item designed to measure previous

exposure to Instagram ads for the brand claiming “You saw a social media advertisement sponsored by nikewomen?” on a five-point scale (once to five times or more). Next, participants responded to manipulation checks for body positive explicit and implicit advertising using scale items from Okazaki et al. (2010). Consumer engagement was measured using an adapted version of the scale developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014), similar to Study 1. They also reported their perceptions of brand authenticity (the mediating variable), measured on a seven-point scale adapted from Morhart et al. (2015). Finally, the participants were asked to provide their key demographics, such as age, height, weight, and BMI.

Results

The results confirm successful manipulation of body positive explicit and implicit advertising strategy experimental conditions. An independent sample t-test indicated a significant difference in the customer perceptions of the two stimuli. Perceived explicit signal was significantly higher than implicit signal in the body positive explicit experimental condition ($M_{\text{bopoex}} = 4.55$ vs. $M_{\text{bopoiimp}} = 3.23$, $t = 10.466$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, perceived implicit signal was significantly higher than the explicit signal in body positive implicit experimental condition ($M_{\text{bopoiimp}} = 4.59$ vs. $M_{\text{bopoexp}} = 3.33$, $t = 9.324$, $p < 0.001$). We also examined the control variables of brand familiarity, ad familiarity, gender identification, and BMI. The results indicated that respondents were moderately familiar ($M = 3.9$) with the product and brand familiarity did not differ significantly between the two experimental conditions ($F(1, 206) = 0.974$, $p = .325$). Additionally, we found no significant difference between experimental conditions regarding ad familiarity ($F(1, 206) = 0.321$, $p = .571$). Gender identification did not significantly vary across the two experimental groups ($F(1, 206) = 1.229$, $p = .269$). Finally, BMI data also did not vary significantly across both experimental

groups ($F(1, 206) = 0.069, p = .794$). Based on these results, we proceeded with the main experiment.

Next, we tested the hypothesized relationships after obtaining the desired results by manipulating the variables involved. We revalidated the main effects using one-way ANOVA. The findings revealed a significant effect of body positive advertising strategy ($F(1, 206) = 9.830, p < 0.001$) on consumer engagement. Specifically, in-contrast to H2, a body positive implicit advertising strategy resulted in greater consumer engagement than body positive explicit advertising strategy ($M_{\text{bopoimp}} = 4.513$ vs. $M_{\text{bopoexp}} = 4.075$), thus rejecting H2.

Next, we conducted a two-way ANOVA to test the interaction effects of body positive advertising strategy (explicit vs. implicit) and customers' gender role stress (high vs. low) on consumer engagement. As predicted, we found a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 204) = 4.394, p < 0.05$) of body positive advertising strategy and gender role stress on consumer engagement (see Figure 2). Specifically, when gender role stress was low, implicit signals had a more positive impact on consumer engagement than explicit signals. However, when gender role stress was high, no significant difference in the impact of explicit and implicit signals on consumer engagement was found. A follow-up analysis revealed that when gender role stress was low, there was a significant difference ($t = 3.734, p < .001$) between the implicit ($M = 4.38$) and explicit ($M = 3.66$) strategies for consumer engagement. When the gender role stress was high, no significant difference ($t = .852, p = .198$) existed in terms of consumer engagement (see Figure 3). Thus, H3b is partially supported.

Results indicated that gender identification did not vary significantly across the two groups ($F(1, 206) = 1.229, p = .269$). We did not find any direct significant effect of gender identification on consumer engagement ($F(1, 206) = 0.261, p = .610$). Similarly, the interaction effect of gender role stress in the presence of gender identification was found to be non-significant ($F(1, 204) = 0.235, p = .629$). These unexpected results could be because

of high gender identification within the sample (mean of 4.00) with more than 80% of the participants reporting medium to high gender identification. We also evaluated BMI as an alternative moderating variable. The interaction effect of BMI in the relation between body positive advertising strategy on consumer engagement was found to be non-significant ($F(1,204) = 2.76, p = .098$).

Furthermore, we examined the mediation effects by employing Model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes 2022). The mediation model was estimated using 10,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (Hayes 2022). Body positive advertising strategy (explicit vs. implicit) was treated as the independent variable, perceived brand authenticity as the mediating variable, and consumer engagement as the dependent variable. The results indicated that the indirect effect of body positive advertising strategy on consumer engagement ($b = 0.3335, SE = 0.0656, CI = [0.2080, 0.4646]$) via perceived brand authenticity was significant. Thus, H4 is supported. Furthermore, to test the moderated mediation hypothesis, we ran Model 8 in the SPSS PROCESS macro based on 5000 samples (Hayes 2022). The results revealed that gender role stress moderated the direct and indirect effects of body positive advertising strategy on consumer engagement via perceived brand authenticity (index of moderated mediation $= 0.7966, 95\% CI [0.1744, 0.3144]$). Thus, H5 is supported.

<Insert Figure 2 here>

<Insert Figure 3 here>

Study 2: Discussion

The results of Study 2 suggest that body positive advertising strategies increase consumer engagement. We found that the body positive implicit advertising strategy generated greater consumer engagement than the body positive explicit advertising strategy, a counter-intuitive finding; thus, H2 was rejected. We also tested the moderating role of customer gender role stress on body positive advertising–consumer engagement relationships. Corroborating the

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findings of Study 1, this study reveals that gender role stress indeed moderates the influence of body positive advertising strategy on consumer engagement, thereby establishing the external validity of a real brand. Specifically, when gender role stress was low, the body positive implicit advertising strategy generated greater consumer engagement than the body positive explicit strategy. However, participants with high gender role stress did not show any difference in their level of engagement, partially supporting H3b. Furthermore, evidence of the mediating effect of customers’ perceived brand authenticity was found, supporting H4. This study also provides evidence for the moderating-mediation role of gender role stress on the indirect relationship between positive body advertisements and consumer engagement via perceived brand authenticity, supporting H5.

General Discussion

Although consumers are increasingly seeking greater inclusion and diversity in terms of embracing body positivity, research on the effectiveness of body positivity campaigns has been mixed (Aagerup and Scharf 2018; Borau and Bonnefon 2016). This investigation reinforces and extends earlier work on the role of body positivity in positively influencing desirable brand outcomes (e.g., Borau and Bonnefon 2016; Lenne et al. 2021) by providing a deeper understanding of how, why, and when body positivity encourages consumer engagement. This is the first empirical investigation to understand the influence of body positivity, as a form of marketer-generated advertising strategy, on consumer engagement, which is critical for brand success (Hollebeek et al. 2014). In doing so, we uncover the mediating role of perceived brand authenticity and moderating role of gender role stress to explicate the relationship between body positivity and consumer engagement. Specifically, our results indicate that compared to a thin-ideal advertisement, body positive advertisements increase consumer engagement with the brand. Thus, this study contributes to and extends consumer engagement research by providing insights into the novel drivers of consumer

engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2014) from the perspective of morally conscious advertising (Vadakkapatt et al. 2022).

This research further clarifies the relative effectiveness of different types of body positive advertising strategies by examining the comparative effects of body positive explicit versus implicit strategies on social media consumer engagement. Contrary to our expectations, the results of the experimental study demonstrate that body positive implicit (vs. explicit) advertising strategy leads to higher consumer engagement. This counter-intuitive finding could possibly be explained using the concept of indirect persuasion, which holds that people are more receptive to messages that are presented subtly or implicitly (McQuarrie and Phillips 2005). This is because implicit messaging elicits reflection and necessitates deliberation and rigorous processing of information to decode or decipher latent meanings, which greatly influences consumers' brand beliefs (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Considering the generation effect, retention for internally generated cognitions is stronger than for externally presented stimuli because memory recall may lead to long-lasting retention (Bertsch et al. 2007). Thus, decoding implicit information demands more cognitive effort than decoding explicit information, which likely makes it more memorable (Yi 1990). Therefore, consumers are more receptive to implicitly conveyed body positive messaging, which fosters greater engagement with the brand than the explicit advertising strategy. Another possible reason could be that the use of explicit body positivity in advertising may not have a linear and incremental impact on consumer engagement. A threshold effect or inverted U-shaped impact of the use of explicit body positive ads may occur because such ads may lose steam after a certain point (if they are too explicit), becoming less effective or even backfiring; however, this may not be the case for implicit advertising strategies. Future research may investigate this further.

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Furthermore, by investigating the moderating role of gender role stress, this study adds to our understanding of the conditions in which body positivity is likely to be more strongly related to consumer engagement. In addition to extending consumer engagement research, this study advances our understanding of the gender role stress theory (Gillespie and Eisler 1992) and the literature on gender roles in advertising (Eisend 2019) by empirically demonstrating that women who are highly stressed about meeting societal expectations of beauty and body image issues engage more with brands that promote body positivity.

Specifically, our findings in Study 1 show that, on exposure to a body positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertisement, customers with high gender role stress engage more with the brand. Women may have a perceptual tendency to assess a given situation as highly stressful because of the sheer belief systems and values that are rooted in strict adherence to the conventional feminine gender role (Gillespie and Eisler 1992). They feel pressured to conform to the beauty standards and norms that women are expected to adhere to (Gillespie and Eisler 1992). Thus, women with high gender role stress are more likely to engage with brands that break stereotypes and promote body positivity than women who are less stressed about meeting ideal body standards. These findings were further extended in Study 2. Specifically, body positive implicit advertising strategy significantly affected engagement for participants with low gender role stress. Possibly, women with low gender role stress are likely to have more psychological resources available (Tang and Lau 1996), which enables them to decipher latent meanings in body positive implicit advertisements, thereby fostering higher engagement. Additionally, it seems that women with low gender role stress prefer more subtle forms of communications when it comes to body positivity. However, for participants with high gender role stress, we did not find any difference in the level of engagement. While prior literature mainly argues for the direct influence of body positivity on marketing outcomes (Simon and Hurst 2021), this research uncovers perceived brand

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3 authenticity as a key explanatory mechanism for understanding the relationship between body
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5 positive advertisements and consumer engagement. Therefore, body positivity enhances
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7 consumer engagement because brands utilizing body positive advertisements are perceived to
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9 be more authentic by consumers. Thus, this study contributes to the burgeoning literature on
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11 brand authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015; Yang et al. 2021) in two ways.
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15 First, the present study responds to calls in the authenticity literature (Shoenberger et
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17 al. 2019) for more research on the role of body positive advertisements by empirically
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19 demonstrating the positive relationship between body positivity and perceived brand
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21 authenticity. Prior studies have investigated consumers' perceived authenticity of advertised
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23 images and advertisements (e.g., Shoenberger et al. 2019). Given the scant literature on the
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25 development of brand authenticity, especially on social media (Yang et al. 2021), this
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27 research contributes to the brand authenticity body of research by advancing our
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29 understanding of the novel determinants of perceived brand authenticity, such as body
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31 positive advertisements. Thus, this study echoes the suggestions of post-modern research,
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33 which argues that customers assess the authenticity of an advertised brand by comparing it
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35 with reality (Morhart et al. 2015).
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40 Second, this study further adds to our knowledge on the determinants of perceived
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42 brand authenticity by clarifying the conditions that regulate the effects of body positive
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44 advertisements on perceived brand authenticity. Particularly, the relationship between body
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46 positivity and perceived authenticity was found to be stronger when gender role stress was
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48 high. Accordingly, our moderated mediation analysis demonstrated that women with high
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50 gender role stress engage more with brands that use body positive advertisements because
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52 such brands are perceived to be more authentic. This result corroborates the findings of a
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54 prior study in which authenticity was found to be inversely related to attractiveness, because
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56 highly attractive models were perceived as unrealistic or fake (Shoenberger et al. 2019).
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Thus, this study contributes to and extends the literature on authenticity and gender role stress in advertising by demonstrating that brand engagement of consumers with high gender role stress can be stimulated by breaking down unrealistic media portrayals of “thin-ideals” and utilizing body positive content, which also enhances their perception of brand authenticity. This further allows us to contribute to the growing body of literature on transformative advertising research (Gurrieri al. 2022) by demonstrating that body positivity advertisements can be regarded as a form of morally conscious advertising, which positively influences consumer engagement.

Practical Implications

Our study demonstrates that body positive advertising strategy can be extremely useful for encouraging consumer engagement on social media, especially for women experiencing high gender role stress. This is because brands utilizing body positive advertising strategy are perceived to be more authentic and genuine, which stimulates consumer engagement. Further, this study provides companies with actionable ways to develop body positive advertising strategies on social media.

First, our findings demonstrate that it may be more prudent to consider body positive implicit advertising strategy to foster higher engagement. Although it seems at odds with a firm’s initial desire to promote inclusivity via an emphasis on body positivity, our results suggest that downplaying the body positivity by amplifying the core body positive elements of the advertisement may motivate consumers to process the embedded body positive message in a more favorable way. For example, Nike has been praised for its campaign that celebrates body positivity without overtly demonstrating it (Edwards 2016).

Second, as women’s level of gender role stress is a key factor in body positive advertising strategy, it is particularly important for marketers to understand the level of gender role stress for their segmentation and targeting strategies. Conducting surveys or

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3 observational studies to understand consumer's gender role stress may provide the feedback
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5 in developing inclusive advertising strategies. However, some consumers may believe that
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7 brands featuring plus-size models are promoting obesity and unhealthy behaviors, which puts
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9 companies in a tenuous position because they consider what imagery best represents the
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11 brand. Thus, understanding women's gender role stress, and especially targeting women with
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13 low gender role stress with body positive implicit advertising strategy, may minimize
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15 negative reactions and foster higher engagement.
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19 Overall, this research highlights how body positive advertisements can inform,
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21 inspire, and enlighten customers about the brand values that go beyond achieving short-term
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23 commercial goals. Body positivity is an intrinsic part of responsible marketing that marketers
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25 and policymakers may leverage to influence positive societal change in behavior and enhance
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27 consumer engagement.
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30 ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

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32 This study has certain limitations that future research could address. The current study was
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34 limited to a female sample. Hence, future studies should examine this phenomenon using
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36 male samples because men also express issues related to self-esteem, body dissatisfaction,
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38 and body image, which may have broader implications for marketers. Future researchers can
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40 assess various gender identities espoused by consumers and their impact on consumer
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42 engagement.
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47 Future scholars should examine whether their implicit ads (emphasizing the words
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49 "we and you" and "Nike for you") create a connection between consumers and the brands,
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51 which may foster consumer engagement. It is reasonable to believe that consumers become
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53 psychologically connected to brands that help them define their identities and allow them to
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55 express themselves (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Future research should control for
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57 consumer-brand connection when examining the impact of explicit versus implicit
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conditions. Additionally, future research may examine the role of consumer-brand connection by investigating whether consumer-brand connection is established when consumers are exposed to explicit (vs. implicit) body positive ad stimuli, and how it influences the moderating role of gender role stress between body positive advertising and consumer engagement. As new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) emerge, it would be intriguing to determine whether using AI to promote body positivity in advertisements improves customer experience or whether it hampers brand authenticity because of the absence of “real models.”

While we investigated the mediating mechanism of perceived brand authenticity, future research may examine advertisement authenticity and/or message authenticity as alternative underlying psychological mechanisms. Future studies may also investigate the impact of other moderators on the link between body positive advertisements and consumer engagement, such as thin-ideal internalization (Dittmar and Howard 2004, social comparison tendency (Dittmar and Howard 2004), and body dissatisfaction (Cohen 2019).

Although this study used real brand stimuli, we acknowledge that it was conducted in an experimental setting, which has limitations in terms of generalizability. Thus, future researchers can use sophisticated text mining techniques and sentiment analysis methods to capture real-time and heartfelt discussions on body positivity on social media. Finally, future scholars can investigate consumers’ willingness to pay price premiums for body positive brands.

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Tables, Figures, and Appendix

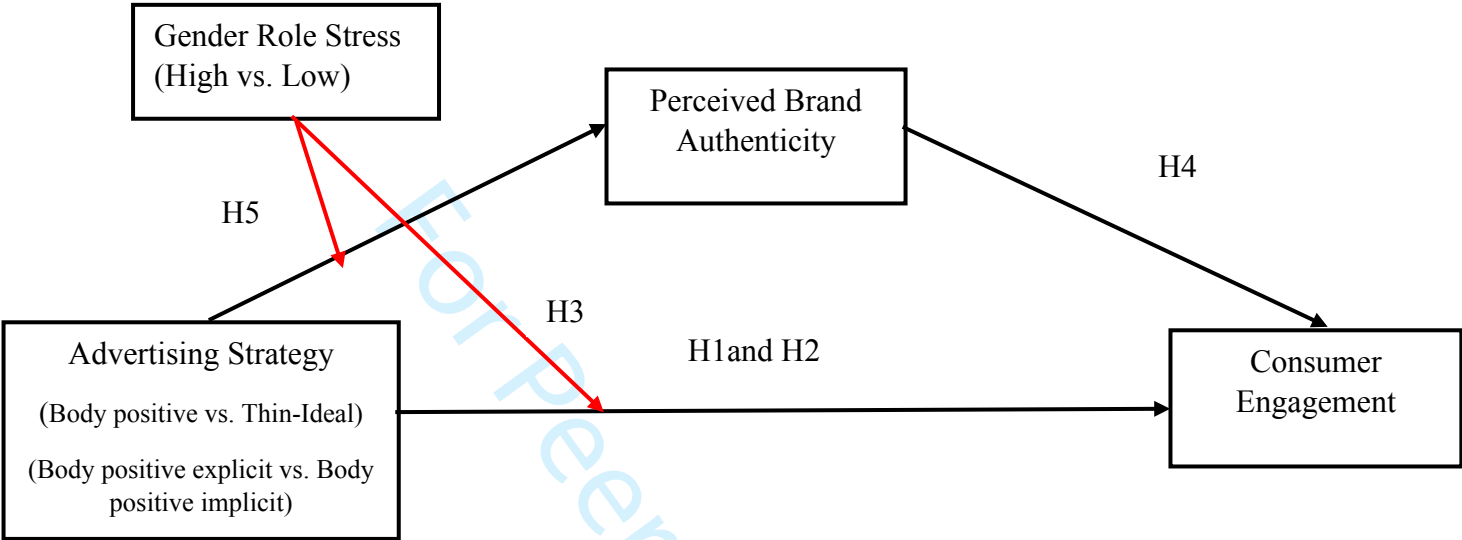


Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

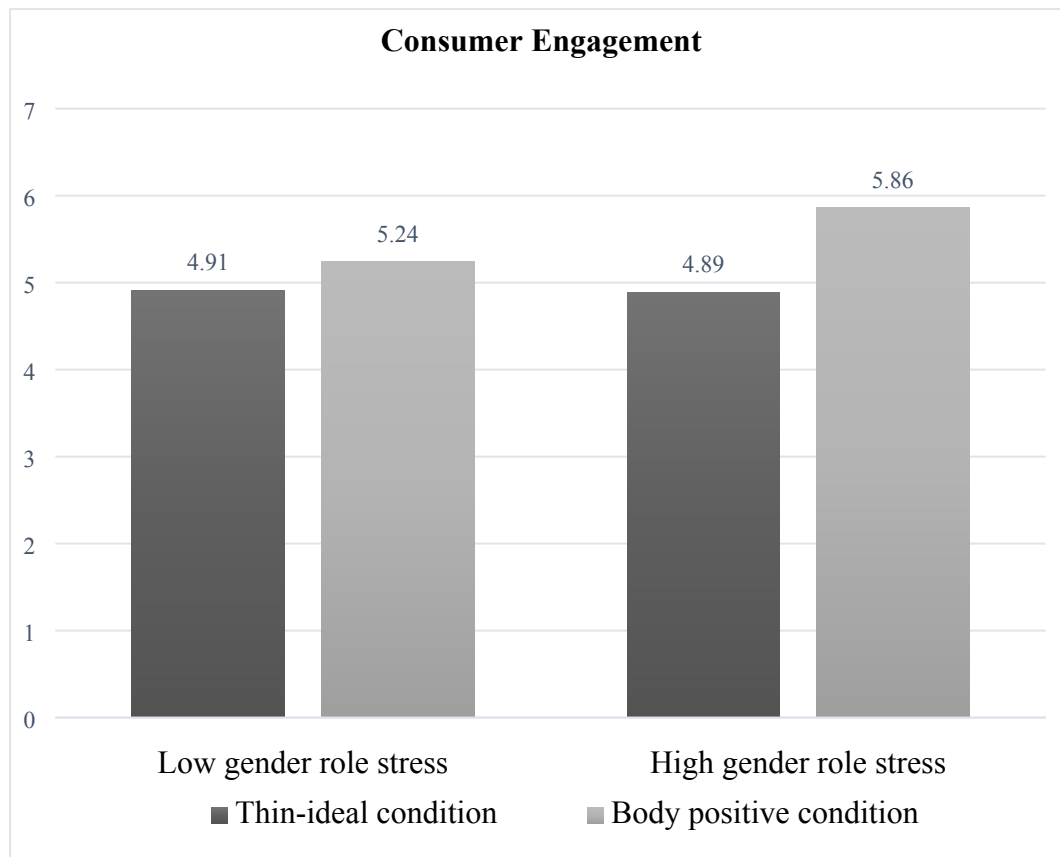


Figure 2: Interaction of advertising strategy and gender role stress on consumer engagement

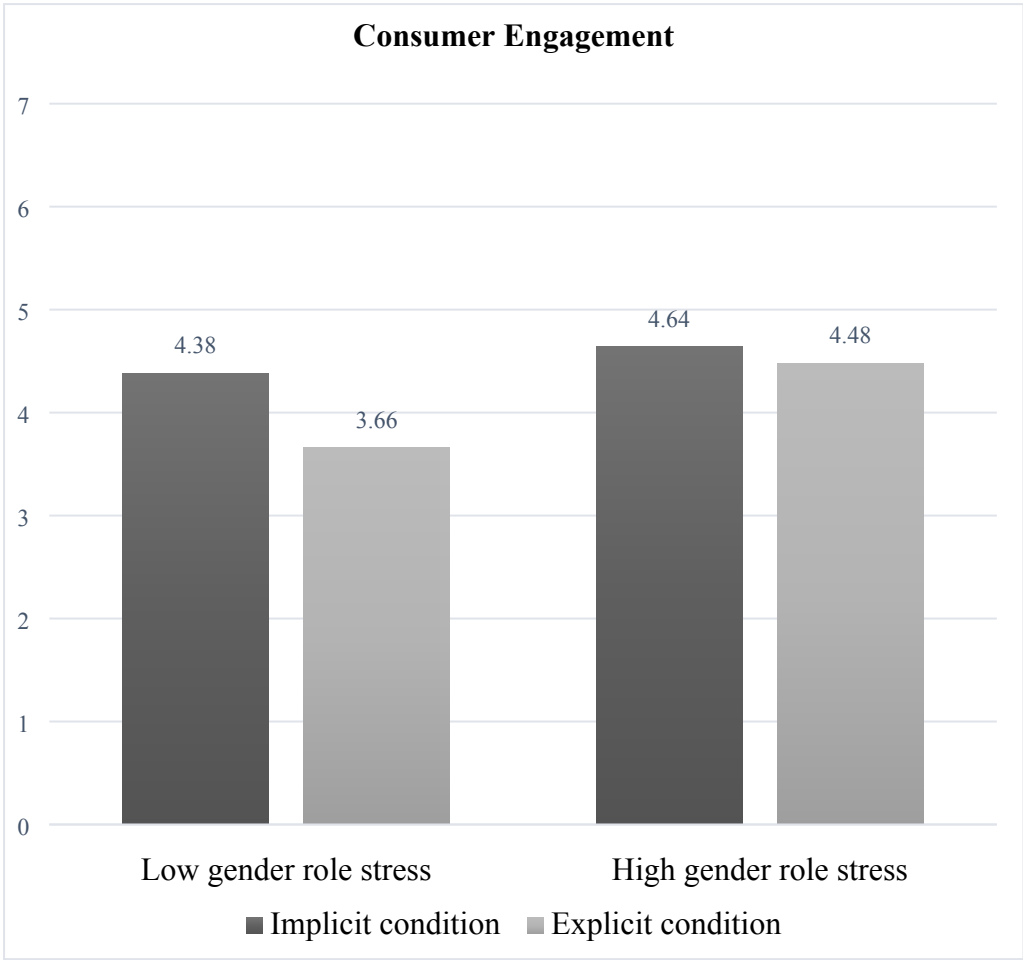


Figure 3: Interaction of body positive explicit versus implicit conditions and gender role stress on consumer engagement.

Table 1: Literature on body positivity

Study	Independent Variable	Outcome examined	Mechanism	Moderator	Valence	Theory	Key Findings
Anschutz et al. (2009)	Advertisement model body sizes (Ideal vs. Natural)	Mood, Body anxiety, Food intake	Sadness	Thin internalization	Negative	Fear of fat theory	Women expressed negative feelings and reduced appetite on watching less-slim models in ads.
Borau and Bonnefon (2016)	Advertisement model body sizes (Ideal vs. Natural)	Advertisement and brand attitude, Purchase intention	Body anxiety, Repulsion towards model	Body mass index (BMI)	Negative	-	Advertisement performance was undermined by natural models evoking aversion in viewers with higher BMI.
Cinelli and Yang (2016)	Advertisement model body sizes	Attitude towards endorsed product	Self-model similarity	Malleability of one's attribute	Mixed	Implicit self-theory	Perceived malleability of one's size influenced attitude towards a product endorsed by a plus-size model. Only when the plus size model is used to promote a body-relevant product does this impact exist, and is mediated by perceived similarity to the model.
Cohen et al. (2019)	Advertisement type (Body positive vs. Thin-ideal vs. Appearance neutral Instagram post)	Mood, Body satisfaction, Body appreciation, and self-objectification	-	-	Positive	Objectification theory	Body positive content improved women's positive mood, body satisfaction and body appreciation compared to thin-ideal and appearance-neutral content.

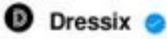
Study	Independent Variable	Outcome examined	Mechanism	Moderator	Valence	Theory	Key Findings
Lou et al. (2019)	Advertisement model body sizes	Purchase intention	User imagery congruity	Culture (Collectivist vs. Individualistic)	Mixed	Self-congruity theory	Americans who observed an average-sized model indicated increased purchase intent. Singaporean Women did not differ in their responses seeing an average-sized model.
Brown and Tiggeman n (2020)	Instagram post captions (no caption vs. disclaimer vs. body positive vs. control)	Body image	State appearance comparison	Trait appearance comparison	Negative	Social comparison theory	Using body positive captions by attractive celebrities does not improve women's body image.
Davies et al. (2020)	Instagram post type (Fitspiration vs. Body positive)	Mood, Body esteem	-	-	Positive	-	Instagram posts with fitspiration captions increased negative moods.
Steven and Griffiths (2020)	Advertisement type (Body positive vs. thinspiration vs. fitspiration Instagram post)	Affect, Body satisfaction, well-being	-	-	Positive	-	Body positive posts increased body satisfaction, increased positive affect, decreased negative affect, and improved emotional well-being.
Tiggeman n et al. (2020)	Model size (average vs. thin), Body positive captions (present vs. none)	Body dissatisfaction, Body appreciation	-	Thin-ideal internalization	Mixed	-	An Instagram post's visual content has a greater influence on body image than any text that goes along with it. It is effective to promote body appreciation and satisfaction by featuring models with different body types.


Study	Independent Variable	Outcome examined	Mechanism	Moderator	Valence	Theory	Key Findings
Lenne et al. (2021)	Advertisement model type (Idealized vs. Non-idealized)	Well-being, Attitude towards advertisement, Purchase intention	Appearance schema	Thin-ideal internalization	Positive	Framing theory	Attitude towards advertisements and purchase intent are higher for ads encouraging self-care of the body than for typical objectifying ads.
Lou and Tse (2021)	Advertisement model body sizes (Average vs. Thin vs. Ideal)	Consumer well-being, Advertising effectiveness	Women's perceived similarity to the model	Body mass index	Mixed	Social comparison and Self-congruity theory	Women prefer an average-sized model over a thin or plus-sized model in advertisements.
Selensky and Carels (2021)	Body positive Advertisements	Weight bias, Self-esteem, Body image, and Affect				Social comparison theory	Women who viewed body positive campaigns expressed significant improvements in their positive affect, mood, and self-esteem.
Simon and Hurst (2021)	Advertisement type (Body positive post featuring average size vs. large sized model)	Mood, Body satisfaction, food choice, and hunger	-	-	Positive	-	Viewing body positive posts featuring average-sized women increased positive mood and body satisfaction.
This study	(Body positive vs. Thin-ideal), (Body positive explicit vs. Body positive implicit)	Consumer engagement	Perceived brand authenticity	Gender role stress	Positive	Gender role stress theory	Body positive advertisements fostered consumer engagement, mediated by perceived brand authenticity. Consumers with a high gender role stress on exposed to body positive content engaged more with the brand.




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Appendix A: Stimuli for Study 1

Condition 1: Body Positive










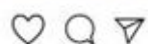
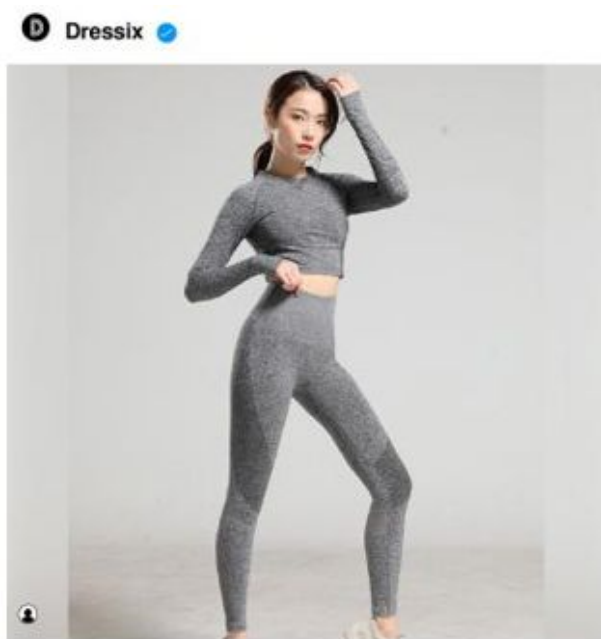
70,769 likes

Dressix Sass and style. That's what Dressix is all about!

Shop our latest active wear range by visiting our profile and clicking on the link to online store or simply login to www.Dressix-activewear.com 

#dressix #activewear #trending #newcollection #shopnow

Condition 2: Thin-Ideal



70,769 likes

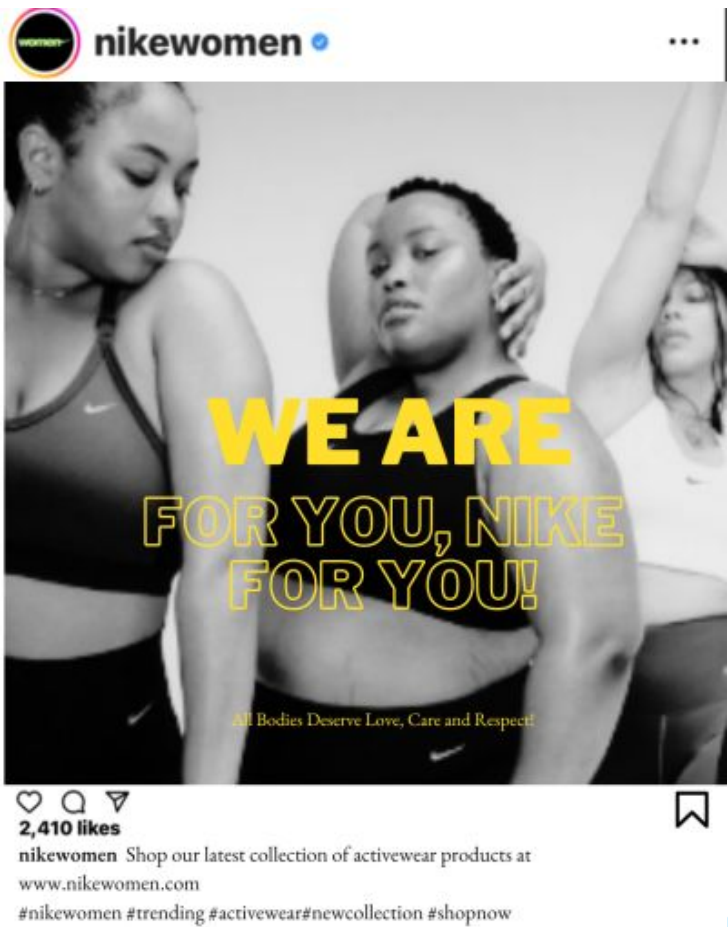
Dressix Sass and style. That's what Dressix is all about!

Shop our latest active wear range by visiting our profile and clicking on the link to online store or simply login to www.Dressix-activewear.com 🛒

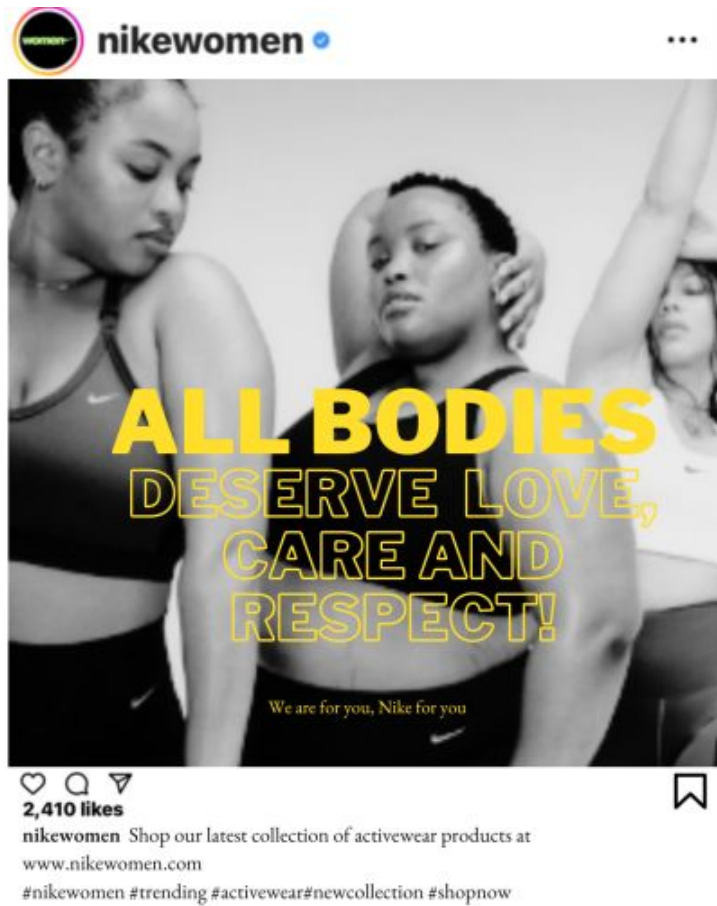
#dressix #activewear #trending #newcollection #shopnow

Appendix B: Stimuli for the two conditions (Study 2)

Condition 1: Implicit Manipulation



Condition 2: Explicit Manipulation



Online Supplementary Material

Appendix 1: Scenario to elicit Consumers’ Gender Role Stress in Study 1

Please describe your personal experience of what it means to be a woman by completing the following sentence, “As a woman . . .” 5 times.

Please provide 5 different responses. Respond as if you are giving the answers to yourself, not somebody else. There are no correct or incorrect responses. Do not worry about logic or importance, and do not overanalyze your responses. Simply write down the first thoughts that come to mind. Next, referring to those 5 responses, please indicate how often this experience is stressful for you (1= “Never/ Almost never” to 5= “Always/Almost always”)

Appendix 2: Psychometric properties of the scales

Scale Items and Source	Reliability Study 1	Reliability Study 2
<i>Manipulation check for Body Positivity (Study 1: Fictitious Brand)</i>	.809	NA
The brand Dressix believes in embracing bodies of all shapes and sizes		
The brand Dressix believes in being inclusive		
The brand Dressix promotes the idea of body positivity		
<i>Perceived Brand Authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015)</i>	.917	.958
This brand connects people with what is really important		
This brand reflects important values that people care about		
This brand connects people with their real selves		
This brand adds meaning to people’s lives		
This brand cares about its customers		
This brand is true to a set of moral values		
This is a brand with moral principles		
This brand gives back to its customers		
This is an honest brand		

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60	<p>This brand will accomplish its value promise</p> <p>This brand will not betray you</p> <p>Consumer Engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2014)</p> <p>Using this brand would get me to think about it</p> <p>I would think about this brand a lot when I'm using it</p> <p>Using this brand would stimulate my interest in learning more about the brand</p> <p>I would feel very positive when I use this brand</p> <p>Using this brand would make me happy</p> <p>I would feel good when I use this brand</p> <p>I'll be proud to use this brand</p> <p>I would spend a lot of time using this brand compared to other activewear brands</p> <p>Whenever I'm using activewear, I would usually use this brand</p> <p>This brand is one of the brands I would usually use when I use an activewear.</p> <p>Gender role stress (Gillespie and Eisler 1992)</p> <p>Being perceived by others as overweight</p> <p>Finding out that you gained 10 pounds</p> <p>Feeling less attractive than you once were</p> <p>Being heavier than your mate</p> <p>Being unusually tall</p> <p>Being unable to change your appearance to please someone</p> <p>Turning middle-aged and being single</p> <p>Wearing a bathing suit in public</p> <p>Feeling pressured to engage in sexual activity</p>	.925	.956
		NA	.919

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Having to deal with unwanted sexual advances		
Being taken for granted in sexual relationship		
Being pressured for sex when seeking affection from your mate		
Having multiple sex partners		
Having an intimate relationship without any romance		
Not being able to meet family member's emotional needs		
Your mate will not discuss your relationship problems		
Being considered promiscuous		
Having others believe that you are emotionally cold		
Hearing a strange noise while you are at home alone		
Hearing that a dangerous criminal has escaped nearby		
Having your car breakdown on the road		
Feeling that you are being followed by someone		
Having to move to a new city or town alone		
Receiving an obscene phone call		
Bargaining with a salesperson when buying a car		
Negotiating the price of car repairs		
Making sure you are not taken advantage of when buying a house or car		
Supervising older and more experienced employees at work		
Trying to be good parent and excel at work		
Having to "sell" yourself at a job interview		
Talking with someone who is angry with you		

<p>Your mate is unemployed and can not find a job</p> <p>Your child is disliked by his or her peers</p> <p>Having a weak or incompetent spouse</p> <p>Having someone else raise your children</p> <p>Returning to work soon after your child is born</p> <p>Trying to get your spouse to take responsibility for child care</p> <p>Losing custody of your children after divorce</p> <p>A very close friend stops speaking to you</p>		
<p>Explicit and Implicit Manipulation Check (Okazaki et al., 2010)</p> <p>Aggressive</p> <p>Assertive</p> <p>Direct</p> <p>Explicit</p> <p>Precise</p> <p>Subtle</p> <p>Suggestive</p> <p>Indirect</p> <p>Implicit</p> <p>Imprecise</p>	NA	0.675
<p>Gender Identification (Batra and Ghoshal, 2017)</p> <p>Overall, being a woman has a lot to do with how I feel about myself</p> <p>My gender is important to my sense of what kind of person I am</p> <p>In general, I am glad to be a woman</p> <p>In general, being a woman is an important part of my self-image</p> <p>Being a woman is an important reflection of who I am</p> <p>I participate in activities related to my gender</p>	NA	0.826