

# Bodies and Branding: Beating Beauty Standards

## *Abstract*

While many women's fashion companies have used social media as a PR tool to create a more inclusive and diverse image for themselves, their efforts to change do not always feel genuine to their audience. Brands do not tend to appear genuine to their audiences when their body positive content campaigns spring seemingly out of nowhere, and conflict with previous messaging that their brand has put out about bodies, diversity, or exclusivity. When companies have inconsistency between their messages and use body positivity purely as a marketing tool rather than a part of their corporate social responsibility, it hurts not only the integrity of the brand, but also the young women viewing their content.

Companies must acknowledge that the language and imagery used in their social media marketing has an impact on their audience, and take responsibility for the messages that they are sending young women with their social media presence. Not acknowledging this fact results in the creation of content that is potentially damaging or even dangerous to the young women in their audience and target demographic. In the age of the internet, social media managers within the fashion and beauty industries are currently facing the challenge of creating content that promotes body positivity in a way that feels authentic to the brand and their audience. Failing this task has negative impacts on their primary audience, young women. What if there was a way to create genuine and effective body positive social media campaigns? As young women and young communication professionals about to enter the communications field, we want to create positive change for both the industry and their audiences, which led us to conduct our research on this issue.

Our research started with a literature review in order to help understand the issues of body image, social media, corporate authenticity, and the current landscape these issues all exist in, as well as how they all connect. This literature review was the foundation of our research and informed our survey methods as well as our research questions: What are the impacts of companies' social media marketing on young women's body image and satisfaction? How can companies create genuine and effective body positive social media campaigns? What changes must be made to the current system in order to decrease the negative impacts on young women? How can companies develop authenticity and genuineness when promoting body positivity in their brand messages on social media? Our primary research was an anonymous survey of over 100 participants, aged 18-24, who used social media. Additionally, we conducted two interviews with industry professionals to gain deeper insight into the inner workings of the marketing world.

After reviewing business publications, academic research, professional interviews, and conducting our own survey of social media users in the targeted demographic, we discovered several key insights:

- I. Body positivity and diversity values need to be reflected company wide in order to feel authentic to the consumer, which has additional benefits for the brand image and public relations.

II. Changing the specific language and imagery used by brands on their social media has positive effects on the audience's perception of the brands' values.

III. In order to correct this problem, a new ethical standard needs to be developed in advertising by creating guidelines for the language and images used when depicting bodies in social media campaigns.