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## Perception about Body Image Media Advertisements among Female Students in Twin Cities, Pakistan

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**Abstract:** *This study is about positive body image campaigns broadcasted on Pakistani television which have attained much attention for creating awareness about women's body shaming. Media conveys and promotes socio-cultural values and societal stereotypes pertaining to body shape and size that create the perception of the ideal man and woman among individuals. Therefore, body image has become an important issue for one's self-esteem, and mental and physical health, especially among women. This study investigates the perception of body image media advertisements among female students in twin cities, Pakistan. More specifically, the study analyzes six selected media advertisement campaigns displayed on TV channels. All these selected media campaigns share one common motive i.e. awareness of body positivity. The selected campaigns have been launched by different brands through a series of video advertisements to promote their products/collections during the last five years. The study applied a quantitative approach to obtain the opinions of N=282 Pakistani female students from 5 universities. Results were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The results indicated that the selected advertisement campaigns possessed effective characteristics.*

**Key Words:** Body Positivity, Body Shaming, Media Campaigns, Mental Health, Self-esteem

### Introduction

This study deals with the positive body image media campaigns in Pakistan and their effect on Pakistani university female students. The study analyzes six selected media campaigns displayed on television channels: 1) Dalda Meri Awaz #Meri Awaz (2018), 2) Nishat Linen #Happy Shopping (2017), 3) Gul Ahmed #Mein Perfect Hoon (2017), 4) Dove #My Beauty My Say (2018), 5) Aerie #Aerie Real (2014),

and 6) Maybelline #Make It Happen (2016). All these selected media campaigns share one common motive i.e. awareness of body positivity. These campaigns have been launched by different brands through a series of video advertisements to promote their products/collections during the last five years which have attained a lot of attention and popularity among young women in Pakistan and university female students are no exception.

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The concept of body positivity revolves around the notion that all human bodies are beautiful and should be celebrated in the same way (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010). People should accept and love not only their own bodies but also others. All bodies deserve the same love, respect and appreciation regardless of their imperfections and flaws (Tylka et al., 2013). The concept of body positivity encompasses beauty as a social construct that can be perceived differently by different people from different perspectives (Tiggemann, Courts & Clark, 2014). Beauty is not what media presents in the form of Photoshop idealized thin images or deep-rooted societal stereotypes but it encompasses diversity in shapes, sizes, weights and ethnicity. While deciding on what beauty is, the talent of the individual and the function performed by the body should not be ignored. A beautiful body is a real, confident and healthy body that possesses self-esteem and psychological well-being (Webb, Wood-Barcalow & Tylka, 2015). Due to positive body image media campaigns in the recent past, women are becoming more aware and accepting of themselves, which has attained much attention and popularity among women for understanding the phenomenon of body positivity.

The effect of positive body image media campaigns on female university students has been poorly understood in Pakistan. This gap substantiates the effectiveness of positive body image media campaigns on young females in Pakistani, where religious beliefs and societal norms have a deep-rooted influence.

Media advertisements (hereafter ads) play an important role in shaping the behaviors and attitudes of people about a certain phenomenon, product and/or service (Bessenoff, 2006). Therefore, many companies and individuals use media in any of its forms, such as electronic, print and social media, for advertisements of their products & services. Consequently, thousands of media ads are being inundated on a daily basis. However, the majority of these ads promote perfect body ideals and encourage thin female body image standards. Researchers have found a direct relationship between watching media ads and body

dissatisfaction, especially among women and girls (Knobloch-Westerwick & Crane, 2012, Dittmar, 2009). As a result, serious concerns are raised that body dissatisfaction may lead towards eating disorders, decreased self-esteem and various physical and psychological issues. The exploitation of thin body images in media campaigns, especially on women of all ages, has put huge pressure. Groesz, Levine, and Murnen (2002) stressed that *“adolescent girls and college women are most affected by poor body image and are most likely to diet.”*

However, in the recent past, there has been a wake of positive body image in the literature (Jain & Tiwari, 2016, Swami, Cass, Waseem & Furham, 2015), and an increasing trend of advertisements in media to smash body shaming and instill confidence in women. Positive body image deals with the appreciation and acceptance of all body types regardless of their shape, size, color and ethnicity (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2014).

### Significance of the Study

The study investigates the effect of media advertisements on body dissatisfaction behavior among Pakistani students of the selected Twin Cities (Islamabad and Rawalpindi) Pakistan through positive body image by using specific procedures and tools. The study looks at highly significant concepts under the deep-rooted influence of religious beliefs and societal norms.

The study could help managers and decision-makers in media advertisement companies and especially policy-makers in products/services organizations to consider better practices and management strategies to exploit the perception of positive body image among young Pakistani females and to update their advertisement strategies for the effective advertisement of their products/services. The study's scope is reduced to assure internal validity as it prevails over external validity (Cook & Campbell 1979).

### Literature Review

Various scholars have defined body image in various ways and provided almost similar concepts and

definitions. For example, [Khor et al. \(2009\)](#) defined body image as the way an individual thinks or perceives his/her body and how it appears to others. Similarly, [Harter \(1998\)](#) defined it as an individual's own views about his/her overall physical appearance that shapes his/her own self-worth and mental health throughout the life span. He further emphasized that body image is concerned with physical characteristics, family relations, identity and sexuality. [Thompson et al., \(1999\)](#) viewed it as one's own internal representation and unique perception about own outer appearance. For [Cusack \(2000\)](#), it is one's own perceived attitude about own body shape, size and beauty. [Wiederman \(2000\)](#) comprehended that body image is our own mind setup about our body and is a complex mental picture with multi-dimensional aspects having perceived sociological meanings in relation to our family and society. [Altabe et al. \(1999\)](#) and [Cash & Muth \(1997\)](#) advocated that body image is a multi-dimensional aspect that can be physical, cognitive and behavioural. Nevertheless, its multi-dimensional aspects reflect a person's own cognition, perception, effective response and behaviour about his/her body. [Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus-Horvath \(2010\)](#) described that the notion of body image is affected by many factors including but not limited to the following: 1) biological/genetic, 2) cultural, 3) developmental, 4) interpersonal, 4) societal/media, 5) spiritual/religious, 6) communal. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) classified the concept of body image into two categories i.e. 1) negative body image and 2) positive body image. Negative body image is strongly linked with body image dissatisfaction and results into negative psychological, behavioural and physical outcomes, whereas positive body image are related to body satisfaction and increases self-esteem, self-passionate and happiness ([Tylka& Wood-Barcalow, 2015](#)). However, they clarified that positive body image is not the exact opposite of negative body image and the concept of body image is incomplete without positive body image.

## Methodology

[Babbie \(2016\)](#) described research design as an empirical process of investigating the posited research questions, while [Tan \(2012\)](#) described it as a plan and steps of the said above. It can be descriptive, co-relational and experimental (Stangor, 2011). This study is designed to focus on the characteristics of ads, the diversity, models, roles, message delivered and perception of ads in the view of positive body image. The study adopted a descriptive research design where major themes related to positive body image were extracted from the literature using thematic analysis and a survey questionnaire was developed based on these themes. The magnitude and frequency of these themes were assessed through exploratory data analysis (EDA). Thematic Analysis is performed alongside Survey. For research question 1, thematic analysis was formulated to know the key themes and a Questionnaire was developed to find out the views and perceptions of the respondents.

A coding sheet was prepared through verbatim inscriptions to identify the major themes from the literature on positive body image and by viewing and taking notes of the ads of selected media campaigns. Then a list of major attributes of positive body image was prepared. The contents were classified and the attributes in major categories were selected regarding positive body image.

A preliminary list was prepared, using a triangulation process for the credibility of the results, followed by the preparation of a coding sheet. Table 1 shows the coding sheet and items which were finally identified and consequently used in the survey questionnaire.

Five-point Liker scale was used to know the opinions of respondents, where 1 represented Strongly Disagree to 5 as Strongly Agree with an option of 0 = Neutral. The descriptive statistics were used by applying data to SPSS to find out the magnitude and frequency of the responses.

**Table 1.** Coding Sheet

S. No	Conceptualization	Operationalization
1.	Characteristics of Ads	2.1. Language 2.2. Taglines 2.3. Presentation 2.4. Organization 2.5 Substance (music + text) 2.6. Animation
2.	Models in Ads	4.1. Natural/Real 4.2. Happy 4.3. Body confident 4.4. Less-sexual
3.	Message Delivered in Ads	6.1. Body appreciation 6.2. Body acceptance 6.3. Broadly conceptualizing beauty 6.4. Adaptive appearance investment 6.5. Inner positivity 6.6. Filtering information in a body-protective manner 7.7 Spirituality
4.	Effect of Ads	7.1. Increasing self-esteem 7.2. Enhancing psychological well-being 7.3. Enlarging self-compassion 7.4. Venting frustration 7.5. Offering encouragement 7.6. Reducing eating disorders 7.7. Improving health conditions

A survey is the most effective and efficient method to reach a large number of respondents in a short time to get meaningful data (Saunders et al., 2015). Therefore, a total of 500 questionnaires were sent to the female respondents through their professors/lecturers/tutors in five universities. An exploratory approach was applied for the purpose of data analysis which is used for quantitative data analysis, through ‘statistical tools to comprehend important traits of data’ (Fowler, 2002). One of the major purposes of exploratory data analysis is to

have an insight into the data sets for eliciting important information, such as a ranking list wherein the results are presented in the forms of tables, graphs and charts.

### Findings

**RQ 1:** Which key Strategies have been Applied in the Ads of Selected Media Campaigns on Positive Body Image?

**Table 2.** Key Strategies

Advertisement Campaigns Key strategies		
1	#MeriAwaz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used the essence of motherhood to smash body shaming.</li> <li>Promoted and encouraged a body image that is healthy.</li> </ul>
2	#HappyShopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used real women to promote body positivity.</li> <li>Encouraged diversity in body shape, size and wear.</li> </ul>
3	#MeinPerfectHoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used imperfection to promote body positivity.</li> </ul>

Advertisement Campaigns Key strategies	
4	#MyBeautyMySay
5	#AerieReal
6	#MakeItHappen

- Promoted happiness in one's own skin.
- Promoted its own definition of beauty.
- Don't care about what other people say about you.
- Used real women, even with disabilities, to promote body positivity.
- Promoted and encouraged self-confidence.
- Contended beauty as the respect of culture.
- Provided a sense of confidence.

### Below are the Results of the Survey

A total of 282 respondents returned the completely filled questionnaires. In this way, the response rate is 57% which is considered reasonable in survey research (Saunders, et al., 2015). Table 3 shows the sample characteristics. The distribution of the respondents on four aspects i.e. age, education, employment status and location, has been presented. Table 3 shows that 64.8% of the respondents lie in the age bracket of 18-22 years and 26.2% fall in the age bracket of 23-27 years. However, only 8.3% of respondents belong to the age bracket of 28-32 years. It means that majority of the respondents have ages 18 to 22 years which are mainly young university female students. The sample also shows that 66% of respondents are BS (bachelor degree holders) as compared to 34.4% of respondents who are MS (master's degree holders). This shows that the majority of the respondents are bachelor's

degree holders. The employment status of the respondents shows that 75.2% of the respondents are unemployed, whereas 24.8% are employed. This makes sense because more respondents lie in the age bracket of 18-22 years and have a bachelor's degree. Therefore, there are fewer chances of their employment in a tough Pakistani job market with these credentials. The location of the respondents shows that 75% of them belong to urban areas, whereas 25% belong to rural areas. This shows that more respondents belong to urban areas as compared to rural areas. In conclusion, the majority of the respondents lie in the age bracket of 18-22 years, have a bachelor's degree and belong to urban areas. This makes the sample a representative sample because the main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of positive body image media campaigns on Pakistani university female students.

**Table 3.** Sample Characteristics

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
18-22	163	64.9
23-27	74	26.2
28-32	25	8.9
Total	282	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
BS	185	65.6
MS	97	34.4
Total	282	100.0
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Unemployed	212	75.2
Employed	70	24.8
Total	282	100.0
<b>Location</b>		
Rural	71	25.2

	Frequency	Percent
Urban	211	74.8
Total	282	100.0

**RQ 2:** Which Characteristics of the ads of Selected Media Campaigns are Considered more effective by the Audience?

**Table 4.** Respondents’ Opinion on Characteristics of ads

Characteristics of ads	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1 Language	6%	25%	68%
2 Tagline and catchy phrases	15%	20%	65%
3 Presentation	16%	21%	63%
4 Organization	8%	32%	60%
5 Substance (music + text)	18%	27%	55%
6 Animation	16%	18%	66%

Six characteristics of ads have been analyzed i.e. language, tagline and catchy phrases, presentation, organization, substance and animation. The results in Table 4 show that majority of the respondents agreed upon the effectiveness of the ads in all the six characteristics. More specifically, 68% of the respondents agreed that the language of the ads is comprehensive and understandable by the audience. The audience can well understand the language of the ads because the majority of the ads are in their national language Urdu. Only 6% of the respondents disagreed with the language of the ads. However, 25% of the respondents remained neutral while giving their opinion on the language of the ads. While giving their opinion on the tagline and catchy phrases in the ads, 65% of the respondents agreed that the tagline and catchy phrases are memorable. Only 15% of the respondents disagreed with the tagline and catchy phrases. However, 20% of the respondents remained neutral. When asked about the presentation of the ads, 63% of the respondents agreed that the ads attract the attention of the female audience in Pakistan. Only 16% of respondents disagreed that the ads attracted the attention of the Pakistani female audience. However, 21% of the respondents have given their opinion as a neutral response on this aspect. When

the question was asked about the organization of the ads, 60% of the respondents agreed and that the organization of text and other components change the perception of females in Pakistan. However, 32% of respondents remained neutral on this aspect. Only 8% of respondents disagreed with the organization of the ads. When asked about the substance of the ads, 55% of the respondents agreed that the presence of music and text in the ads makes them attractive to the Pakistani female audience. Only 18% of respondents disagreed with this aspect. The neutral response was 27% on this aspect. As for as the animation in the ads is concerned, 66% of the respondents agreed that the animation largely targets the female audience in Pakistan. Only 16% of the respondents disagreed with this aspect. However, 18% of respondents have given their opinion as neutral. In conclusion, the majority of the respondents agreed that all the six characteristics of the ads were effective, whereas less number of respondents disagreed on the effectiveness of the characteristics of the ads.

**RQ 3:** Which Appearance of the Models in the ads of selected Media Campaigns is Considered more Significant by the Audience?

**Table 5.** Respondents' Opinions on the Appearance of Models in ads

Models in ads	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1 Natural/Real	6%	8%	86%

Models in ads		Disagree	Neutral	Agree
2	Happy	5%	13%	82%
3	Body confident	2%	8%	90%
4	Less-sexual	4%	21%	75%

Four aspects of the appearance of models in the ads have been analyzed i.e. natural/real, happy, body confident and less sexual. The results show that 86% of the respondents agreed that models in the ads are natural/ real. It means models in the ads are not idealized and Photoshop. Only 6% of respondents disagreed that models are natural/real. However, 8% of respondents have given a neutral opinion. When response was evaluated on whether the models in the ads are happy or otherwise. Then 82% of the respondents agreed that they were happy. Only 5% of respondents disagreed that they were happy. The neutral response on this aspect is 13%. When the response was evaluated on whether models in the ads are body confident or otherwise then, it was

found that 90% of the respondents agreed that the models in the ads are body confident. Only 2% of the respondents disagreed that the models in the ads are body confident, which is a fairly small fraction. The neutral response on this aspect is 8%. When a question was asked whether the models in the ads are less-sexual or not then, 75% of the respondents agreed that models in the ads are less-sexual. Only 4% of the respondents disagreed that models in the ads are less-sexual. However, 21% of the respondents replied neutrally on this aspect.

**RQ 4:** Which Message Delivered in the ads of selected Media Campaigns is Considered more Persuasive by the Audience?

**Table 6.** Respondents' Opinions on the Message Delivered in ads

Message Delivered in ads		Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Body appreciation	7%	14%	79%
2	Body acceptance	5%	7%	88%
3	Broadly conceptualizing beauty	6%	7%	87%
4	Adaptive appearance investment	4%	12%	64%
5	Inner positivity	6%	12%	82%
6	Filtering information in a body-protective manner	5%	10%	85%
7	Religious beliefs	13%	48%	39%

Seven aspects of positive body image have been analyzed i.e. body appreciation, body acceptance, broadly conceptualizing beauty, adaptive appearance investment, inner positivity, filtering information in a body-protective manner, and spirituality/religious beliefs. The results demonstrate that 79% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads is body appreciation. Only 7% of the respondents disagreed that the message delivered in the ads is body appreciation. However, the neutral response on this aspect is 14%. The results also show that 88% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads is body acceptance and love. Only 5% of the respondents disagreed that the message delivered in the ads is body acceptance and love. However, the neutral response on this

aspect is 7%. Similarly, the results indicate that 87% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads is broadly conceptualizing beauty. Only 6% of the respondents disagreed that the message delivered in the ads is broadly conceptualizing beauty. However, 7% of respondents remained neutral. The results in Table 6 also show that 64% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads is an adaptive appearance investment. Only 4% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, the neutral response is 12%. Table 6 also shows that 82% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads is Inner positivity. Only 6% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, 12% of respondents remained neutral. When we see the respondents' responses on



filtering information in a body-protective manner, then we can see that 85% of the respondents agreed on this aspect. Only 5% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, 10% of respondents remained neutral regarding filtering information in a body-protective manner. When respondents' response was evaluated on spirituality/religious beliefs, then it was found that 39% of the respondents agreed that the message delivered in the ads was in line with the

spirituality/religious beliefs. Only 13% of the respondents disagreed that the message delivered in the ads is in line with their spirituality/religious beliefs. However, 48% of respondents remained neutral that the message delivered in the ads is in line with their spirituality/religious beliefs.

**RQ 5:** Which Effects of the ads of Selected Media Campaigns are Considered more Important by the Audience?

**Table 7.** Respondents' Opinion on the effect of ads

Effect of ads		Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	Increasing self-esteem/self-image	7%	7%	86%
2	Enhancing psychological well-being	7%	13%	80%
3	Enlarging self-compassion	10%	20%	70%
4	Venting frustration	13%	22%	65%
5	Offering encouragement	12%	24%	64%
6	Reducing eating disorders	11%	13%	76%
7	Improving health conditions	8%	13%	79%

Seven aspects of the effects of ads have been analyzed i.e. increasing self-esteem/self-image, enhancing psychological well-being, enlarging self-compassion, venting frustration, offering encouragement, reducing eating disorders, and improving health conditions. The results show that 86% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is increasing self-esteem/self-image. Only 7% of the respondents disagreed that the effect of the ads is increasing self-esteem/self-image. However, the neutral response on this aspect is 7%. The results also show that 80% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is enhancing psychological well-being. Only 7% of the respondents disagreed that the effect of the ads is enhancing psychological well-being. However, the neutral response on this aspect is 13%. Table 7 also shows that 70% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is enlarging self-compassion. Only 10% of the respondents disagreed that the effect of the ads is enlarging self-compassion. However, 20% of respondents remained neutral. Moreover, the results show that 65% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is venting frustration. Only 13% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, the neutral response is 22%. Furthermore, the results

show that 64% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is offering encouragement. Only 12% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, 24% of respondents remained neutral. When we see the respondents' responses on reducing eating disorders, then we can see that 76% of the respondents agreed on this aspect. Only 11% of the respondents disagreed on this aspect. However, 13% of respondents remained neutral regarding reducing eating disorders. When respondents' response was evaluated on improving health conditions, then it was found that 79% of the respondents agreed that the effect of the ads is in line with improving health conditions. Only 8% of the respondents disagreed that the effect of the ads is in line with the improving health conditions. However, 13% of respondents remained neutral that the effect of the ads is in line with improving health conditions.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Body image is a psychological phenomenon where an individual consciously or unconsciously perceives their own appearance from the point of view of others to shape 'self-worth and mental



health' as [Harter \(1988\)](#) defines alongside its 'physical characteristics, relationships, identity and sexuality. While, this is an individual self-intrinsic activity, yet always extrinsic as its personal perceived attitude, in the words of [Wiederman \(2000\)](#), 'own mind setup' as [Cusack \(2000\)](#) calls it off 'his/her body shape, size and beauty. Therefore, this complex socio-psychological act means greater with multi-dimensional perspectives, though it seems similar yet brings different meanings in different cultural structures.

[Altabe et al. \(1999\)](#) and [Cash & Murth \(1997\)](#) stressed that 'physical, cognitive and behavioural' aspects are always affected by several factors such as [Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus-Horvath \(2010\)](#) have mentioned. [Tylka and Wood-Barcalow's \(2015\)](#) further classification of body image into negative and positive revealing both not exact opposite results in negative psychological, behavioural and physical outcomes whereas positive body image results in body satisfaction and increased self-esteem, self-passionate and happiness, respectively. While the concept of body image upon which they agree is incomplete without positive body image, used in advertisements usually change the behaviour and attitudes of people, especially of young women and society.

As shown in Table 4, these six characteristics of ads are thus essential for designing and crafting effective ads due to the ever-changing role of technology to attract audiences' attention and are also considered an innovative marketing technique for advertising ([Horbal, 2017](#)).

The comprehensive language, memorable taglines, attractive presentation, and organization of textual elements to change the perception of the female audience, along with conventional text with music as a metaphor, are the necessary characteristics of ads, whether animated or static, target large female audience as the current study proves.

Moreover, the models in the ads of selected media campaigns are natural/real, happy, body confident and less sexual, and these media images, instead of idealized Photoshoped images,

have a positive impact on young women's

perception of their own bodies. They identify their own bodies with natural and real images presented on screen and feel more comfortable, which increases their self-confidence and happiness as [Jain & Tiwari \(2016\)](#) assert.

The ads of selected media campaigns have many messages: body appreciation such as instead of physical appearance, there are many other admiral aspects, body acceptance and love which help in emphasizing one's merits instead of perceived flaws, broadly conceptualizing beauty that encourage diversity in beauty instead of focusing on single set-standard, adaptive appearance investment that engages in healthy and enjoyable physical activities, eating behaviours and self-care of the body, inner positivity such as one's inner optimism that develops positive behaviours, filtering information in a body-protective manner bring awareness and rejection regarding unrealistic media images, and spirituality/religion that encourage to believes in a higher power to cherish.

These messages, therefore, have 'core dimensions of body positivity, as [Tylka & Wood-Barcalow \(2015\)](#) stressed. The study came up with many effects of ads:

These ads increase self-esteem/self-image, enhance psychological well-being and improve mental health, enlarge self-compassion, help in venting frustration among the audience created by traditional idealized images on media, encourage audiences and create confidence among them, reduce eating disorders and improve health conditions. The images promote awareness that a healthy body is a perfect body. Overall, the ads of selected media campaigns have a positive effect on their audience regarding their body image.

## Conclusion

The paper concludes that these messages promote body positivity and benefit women in healthy eating patterns, enhancing their self-esteem and psychological well-being as well as building a strong personality. Overall, the study indicates that these advertisement campaigns empower young women through awareness, improve health conditions and reduced eating disorders.

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