Representation of Women Through Advertising Photography and Body Positive on Instagram

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Abstract. This research aims to understand the perceptions of young university women about advertising photography and the Body Positive movement, to analyze how it impacts the representation of women who defy socially established beauty stereotypes. The study focuses on the opinions of young female university students from the School of Communications of a private university in Lima regarding the campaign "Up women, just as we are" of the Falabella brand, through the social network Instagram. A qualitative approach was adopted, and an ethnographic design was used for data collection, which included semi-structured interviews with 20 university women between 18 and 24 years old. The results revealed important aspects in the campaign's advertising photography, highlighting a more inclusive and authentic representation of diversity in advertising. The content of the Body Positive movement presents a renewed and realistic image of women. In addition, the significant influence of Instagram as a platform is evident, underscoring the need for brands such as influencers to include authentically positive content in their posts.

Keywords: Advertising photography, body positive, Instagram, stereotypes.

1   Introduction

Today, advertising must not only be credible, attractive, and not only convince consumers in a logical way, but also seek to seduce them with a powerful image [1]. In this sense, advertising has used women's bodies to promote products, and although some evolution has been evidenced, the representation of models that perpetuate a distorted image of women persists [2]. However, in some cases, advertising strategies have been modified by including diverse models and not retouching the images, to promote the identification and empowerment of women with different body types [3].

The last century has witnessed a proliferation of advertising photographs that have promoted an ideal of beauty, a trend that has been exacerbated by technological advances in photography and image editing [4]. Physical beauty has been an important

criterion in the selection of models and celebrities to represent products and services [5].

Likewise, body image is the mental perception of one's own body, influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors, as well as by interaction with the environment and the media [6]. For years, the stereotypical representation of women in advertising, which tends to show young, thin, and beautiful women predominantly, has been questioned and has generated the *'body positivity'* movement [7, 8]. This movement challenges traditional beauty norms by promoting acceptance and celebration of body diversity and encouraging an inclusive message of self-love that challenges idealized depictions such as body size [9] . This movement promotes self-acceptance and criticizes the fashion industry, sports, and the media for their unrealistic portrayal of the human body [10].

On the other hand, the effects on body image may vary according to the use made of social networking sites [4]. Digital platforms have become the main tool for standing out, attracting attention, and establishing connections between individual and collective identities [7]. The shift toward visual content on online platforms has generated widespread acceptance of initiatives that confront discrimination and shame related to obesity [11]. Specifically, Instagram offers a unique space for communicating through images and conveying highly meaningful messages [8].

At the international level, a recent study focuses on analyzing the advertising options available to companies in today's environment, focusing on the influence on their customers [12]. It is relevant because it highlights the crucial role of social networks, especially Instagram, in the dissemination of advertising photography with young audiences. Another study conducted in Spain focuses on the emotional reception generated by the ideal of women in advertising. This research is paramount as it reveals that brief exposure in three advertisements with idealized female models affects emotional well-being and increases the likelihood of weight control-related behaviors in young women [13]. Another project developed in Mexico[14] focuses on plus-size women, analyzing the image shown in advertising. It is determined that users identify with the bodies shown and do so in a sarcastic or mocking way.

In Peru, the research conducted by Sedano [15] The main purpose of this research is to analyze the connection between stereotypes of feminine beauty and advertising images of a lingerie brand. He determined that the standards of feminine beauty and advertising photography are interrelated to form an idealized image of the female body, with the intention of capturing the attention of the viewer. Another publication focuses on the integration of body positive in the social networks of some companies in Gamarra. Aiming to know the perception of users on how the body positive movement is used to improve their brand image [16]. Through the interviewees, it is manifested that advertising should focus on promoting self-esteem and raising awareness about the diversity of bodies, sizes, and skin tones of people. Finally, another study

[17] analyzes the construction of the female image in photography and how it is shown in advertising, which generates unrealistic and representative results in women.

From this, it is important to analyze the inclusion of body positive in Falabella's digital advertising campaign "Up women, just as we are", which has been chosen because it aims to make real bodies visible and make women feel powerful and fantastic, receiving positive comments in its first year of launching. Likewise, through the campaign, the difficulty that exists to normalize the different bodies was evidenced [18]. For that reason, this study seeks to answer the following question: How do young university women, between 18 and 24 years old, from the Faculty of Communications of a private university in Lima perceive the use of advertising photography, through Body Positive, in the campaign "Up women, just as we are" on Instagram?

2   Methodology

This study is framed in the interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach, which seeks to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants from their own perspective [19]. An ethnographic design was employed to explore in depth the behaviors, beliefs, and values of the participants in their natural environment [20].

For this study, the advertising campaign "Up women, just as we are"- Falabella, broadcast on Instagram in January 2024, was selected. According to Ipsos [21], two out of three women mention having received unsolicited comments about their bodies. In this sense, Falabella is relaunching the "Up women, just as we are" campaign. In 2024 with the main slogan "My body doesn't need your opinion" it seeks to eradicate opinions about other people's bodies [22]. Falabella is one of the first brands in Peru to run advertising campaigns empowering women. Its mission is to communicate the diversity of bodies and generate self-esteem in women [21,22]. Likewise, the sample is by convenience and is composed of 20 young university women from the Faculty of Communications, aged between 18 and 24 years [24]. A study indicates that 32.5% of young people in this age range actively use social networks such as Instagram [25]. The sample is focused solely on knowing the perception of women, since from childhood and as they grow up, they tend to express unfavorable perceptions about their physical attractiveness [23]. Therefore, for data collection, the technique used is the semi-structured interview, because it allows a flexible interaction with the participants to explore relevant topics [26].

Between February and March 2024, 20 interviews were conducted (Table 1), with a duration range between 20 to 35 minutes, which were carried out in person. Also, a guide with questions was elaborated [27] divided into four topics: a) What elements of advertising photography do young university women perceive in the "Up women,

just as we are" campaign on Instagram? b) What changes has body positive generated with the "Up women, just as we are" campaign? c) How do they perceive the advertising photography, through the Body Positive movement, of the "Up women, just as we are" campaign on Instagram? Finally, the data collected will be analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which will help to identify and explore patterns, themes, and emerging meanings in the participants' responses [28].

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Cycle	Career
P01	22	Female	10	Communication and Photography
P02	22	Female	10	Communication and Photography
P03	18	Female	2	Communication and Advertising
P04	20	Female	4	Communication and Advertising
P05	19	Female	5	Communication and Marketing
P06	20	Female	7	Communication and Photography
P07	21	Female	4	Communication and Marketing
P08	23	Female	9	Communication and Photography
P09	21	Female	9	Communication and Photography
P10	21	Female	9	Communication and Photography
P11	24	Female	9	Communication and Photography
P12	20	Female	7	Communication and Photography
P13	20	Female	6	Communication and Marketing
P14	21	Female	9	Communication and Interactive Media
P15	20	Female	7	Communication and Photography
P16	24	Female	9	Communication and Interactive Media
P17	24	Female	9	Communication and Interactive Media
P18	21	Female	7	Communication and Photography
P19	20	Female	7	Communication and Photography
P20	19	Female	7	Communication and Advertising

3   Results and discussion

3.1   Elements of the advertising photography identified in the campaign "Up women, just as we are" on Instagram.

According to the interviewees, they comment that the elements of advertising photography that they perceive in the campaign are the following: a) Selection of models and b) Message.

   a)   Model selection

According to the interviewees, the selection of the cast of models (Figure 1) emerges as a crucial factor in the creation of advertising images, as it projects inclusion and diversity, aspects that are striking in a sector where certain body stereotypes prevail. According to the interviewees, advertising tends to perpetuate a limited representation of women, and this campaign stands out by making real bodies visible. In addition, the interviewees praise the incorporation of age diversity in the casting, considering it successful and effective in conveying the campaign's message. This finding coincides with the study by Vicente-Fernández & Arroyo-Almaraz. [29] who mention that the representation of women has traditionally followed a dominant model characterized by a search for perfection. Also, a study [30] refers to the fact that the ideal of modern woman promoted in advertising and other visual representations has pressured real women to seek goals that are unattainable. In addition, as mentioned in another research [31] the inclusion of new roles in advertisements has been observed, which has influenced the transformation of traditional beauty standards, promoting a wider and more realistic variety that encompasses different races, skin tones and body types. In that sense, this finding contributes to dismantling the representation of the ideal of feminine beauty. This shift in the visual narrative reflects an evolution towards a more inclusive and authentic representation of women in the media.

"Well, different types of women are used, different ages, different bodies, among others. When I saw it, I loved it" (P03).

Fig. 1. Falabella_pe (6 January 2024) The only opinion that matters is yours! Remember that comments on bodies can cause harm. #ArribaMujeresFalabella. *[Photo with text]. Instagram.* Retrieved from. https://www.instagram.com/p/C1wumCJxjhu/

b)   Message

According to the interviewees, the message conveyed by the advertising pieces has considerable value, as it represents a significant advance in the authentic representation of women. They perceive that photography plays a crucial role in promoting change and conveying positive messages such as raising awareness, thus helping to strengthen women's self-esteem and confidence. They also stressed the importance that this type of message continues to be promoted by more brands, recognizing its positive impact on society. A study [32], commented that visual adaptation moved from other people's bodies to their own bodies. That is, women alter their perception of their own body image after seeing distorted images of unfamiliar individuals. Along the same lines, another study [33], points out that showing women as objects and not as human beings has an impact on women's mental well-being, provoking feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction with their bodies. In this sense, as Sanchez mentions [34] the most effective way to connect with the user involves listening, understanding their perspective, and showing empathy. Therefore, it is crucial to develop campaigns and visual representations that convey a message of authenticity and truth, to challenge and eliminate stereotypes ingrained in society over time.

"A woman is perfect just the way she is, it doesn't matter what kind of body type you have, what color skin you have, it doesn't matter, you are just perfect." (P05)

3.2   Changes generated by the body positive with the campaign "Up women, just as we are"

According to the interviewees, they comment that the changes that body positive has generated with the campaign are the following: a) Emotions and feelings and b) Social change.

  a) Emotions and feelings

According to the interviewees, another significant change they experience on a personal level is the excitement and feeling they get from seeing the campaign photographs. They feel confident and happy looking at women of various sizes and body types, which contrasts with the continuous exposure to previous campaigns that perpetuate idealized models. Along the lines of Herbst [35] indicates that women were more likely to cite lack of confidence as a factor that prevented them from performing. In this regard, another study [36] mentions that digital ads, are focused on generating emotional and evocative responses. Likewise, in another research [37] mentions that emotions are used to elaborate advertising messages that are positive and then transfer those feelings to brands. Therefore, the fact that body positive content can evoke positive emotions and feelings in female viewers represents a breakthrough. It is crucial to continue collaborating with brands to develop this initiative beyond a simple strategy, as it opens new possibilities in the way photographs are made and communicated.

"The truth is that I think it is very good that they are starting to show women with different bodies so that they stop creating insecurities in people..." (P05).

  b) Social change

According to the interviewees, the representation of diversity in the campaign has an effective visual impact that provokes significant social change. Many of them have experienced comments about their body appearance, even in their personal environment, making it a sensitive topic that touches on very intimate aspects. In this sense, a tangible social change stands out, as some interviewees have initiated conversations with family and friends about the body positive movement. This has allowed them to reaffirm their self-worth and recognize themselves as beautiful without the need for external validation. This change in perception reflects an evolution towards a society that is more respectful of bodily diversity. This finding is related to research [38] which mentions that young women often crave encouraging messages about their bodies and physical well-being from their parents. Likewise, another study [39] indicates that a social comparison process is initiated based primarily on evaluating how much one resembles the ideal or standard one has in mind. However, a study [40]

indicates that there is comparison with the ideal of self-improvement, i.e., looking like the model's body, which leads to an increase in satisfaction with one's own body. In conclusion, sharing body-positive content can contribute to increased satisfaction with one's own body.

"Yes, from a very young age I have had the same build, I have been thin, and I think it was reflected in my family because they told my parents: Hey, your daughter is very thin" (P12).

3.3 Perceptions of advertising photography, using the Body Positive movement, on the Instagram social network of the campaign "Up women, just as we are"

According to the interviewees, the campaign's advertising photography is perceived as a powerful means of expression, as the images reflect and celebrate the diversity of the real female body. They believe that photography plays a fundamental role in de-mystifying beauty stereotypes, thus fulfilling a vital function by conveying visual messages that invite reflection and arouse emotions in the public. From their perspective, photography acts as an effective communication channel that significantly influences society's acceptance and perception of body diversity. Likewise, for the interviewees, photography not only documents reality, but also has the power to inspire positive change in the way female beauty is perceived and valued. This finding coincides with research [41] which points out that photography possesses a sense of authenticity and serves as visual evidence, considering photography as a form of testimony. However, a recent publication[9], mentions that advertising is full of stereotypes that focus on the image and physical appearance of women. Likewise, in another study [42] explains that advertising not only promotes new products, but it also presents attitudes and visual representations that can influence the definition of people's needs and desires. In summary, photography has a significant power for communication, but its impact varies according to the role it is given in each campaign. It can be a tool to promote positive aspects in society or reinforce existing social constructs. It is crucial to reflect on how photography is used in each advertising context to ensure that it contributes positively to the social and cultural discourse.

"I think it's a medium. Means to express what these women feel and to feel empowered." (P07)

Another finding is the relationship of advertising photography as a visual footprint. The interviewees identify with the models that appear in the advertising. In addition, the power of breaking with idealizations is reinforced and they emphasize that, through this campaign, those who see it can be sensitized and reflect on issues of diversity, equality, and change. The photograph and the campaign have not only impacted on an individual level, but they also inspire others to consider and promote fundamental values for a more inclusive and equitable society. This finding relates to a study [43], mentions that users are more likely to show a favorable reception to-

wards advertisements that reflect similar traits to them, given that through these elements they can establish a psychological connection. Likewise, another study [44] mentions that the promotion of body acceptance has led many people, especially women, to discover a sense of empowerment in a society obsessed with beauty standards, especially through their own personal stories. In addition, a study [45] points out that expressions through body positive highlight the importance and necessity of implementing structural changes, such as the elimination of established beauty norms. In summary, it is crucial to develop photographs and advertising campaigns that have a lasting impact and are remembered for their positive contribution on both an individual and cultural level. Progress is being made in challenging the traditional idealization of women, and this progress can continue if it is promoted widely and systematically.

"I felt accepted because "My body doesn't need your opinion" I saw and I said, oh, finally they put ads with women who are not so skinny anymore, they don't even accept women who are chubbier" (P16).

4   Conclusions

The campaign "Up women, just as we are" presents a message that confronts entrenched stereotypes, promoting female representation and identity. This diverse representation of women changes college girls' perceptions of body types, sizes, and facial features. This has a significant impact on women, as they have rarely encountered a campaign that clearly visualizes diversity and authenticity. Therefore, the campaign is seen as a starting point for transforming established ideals and conveying a positive message on a societal level. This pioneering approach to inclusion and authentic representation of women in advertising can have a profound effect on women's perception of beauty and self-esteem.

In relation to the elements identified in the photography, we observe the breaking of female stereotypes through a more diverse, authentic, and realistic cast, as well as a message that inspires women. This interpretation contributes to a better understanding of women's desires and expectations in the representation of advertising photography. Regarding the limitations of the study, complications arose due to the unavailability of potential participants to be part of the research. This limitation makes it difficult to obtain a representative and complete sample, which influences the depth and breadth of the study's findings.

In future studies, it is suggested to delve into a more focused approach to digital tools, given that retouching or photo editing has contributed to the creation of an idealized image of women. In many cases, these tools are used to alter the build, skin, and proportions, thus distorting the real representation of the female body.

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