






# From Fantasy to Reality: How Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty Lingerie Ads Shape Body Image Among Young Peruvian Women

Fabiana Chavez<sup>1</sup> , Giovanni Lamarca<sup>2</sup>  and Francisco Arbaiza\*<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima – Peru

<sup>2</sup> Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima – Peru

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Lima – Peru  
francisco.arbaiza@upc.edu.pe

**Abstract.** This research examines the perceptions of Peruvian women aged 21 to 23 years old, residents of Lima and belonging to the NSE A and B, on the advertising campaigns of the lingerie brands Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty, carried out in 2014 and 2020 respectively. Using a qualitative methodology, interviews were conducted to inquire into the influence of advertising models on body image and the identification of associated eating disorders. The findings reveal an evolution in the reception of advertising messages and a growing awareness of body diversity, which occurs due to the new body positive trend, whose trend seeks to promote self-acceptance and reduce body shaming. This study concludes that while Victoria's Secret advertising reinforced restrictive aesthetic ideals, Savage x Fenty promotes a more inclusive and diverse image. These findings underscore the importance of representation in advertising and its impact on young women's mental health and self-perception.

**Keywords:** Eating disorders, advertising model, body positive, body shaming.

## 1 Introduction

Representation in fashion advertising has been at the center of numerous academic and social debates, particularly regarding its impact on self-image and the prevalence of eating disorders. This study aims to explore how lingerie campaigns by internationally recognized brands like Victoria's Secret (2014) and Savage x Fenty (2020) are perceived by young women in Peru and how these perceptions might relate to body image and the development of eating disorders.

Internationally, studies such as those by De Lenne, Vandenbosch, Smits, and Eggermont [1] have demonstrated the direct influence of fashion advertising on beauty ideals, while local research by Alomía and Arbaiza [2] has highlighted a similar correlation within the Peruvian context. However, there is a gap in the comparative analysis of

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advertising campaigns over time and their specific reception among the young, educated segment in high socioeconomic urban areas.

Addressing this gap, the current research sets its primary goal: to determine how campaigns from two differently positioned lingerie brands have influenced the perception of body image among Peruvian women aged 21 to 23 from socioeconomic levels A and B in Lima.

Using a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews, this work aims to unveil the dynamic relationship between advertising and self-concept during a period of significant social and cultural transformations.

Therefore, the guiding question for this study is: How do the lingerie campaigns of Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty influence the perception of body image and the prevalence of eating disorders among young women in Peru? This approach not only provides a contemporary insight into the impact of advertising but also establishes a foundation for future research focused on the effectiveness and ethics of marketing strategies in fashion.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Impact of Advertising on Body Perception**

In the world of advertising, restrictive beauty ideals are promoted, which consequently directly affects body perception and contributes to the prevalence of eating disorders. Campaigns such as Gucci's 2016 campaign highlight the ethical challenge facing fashion advertising, highlighting the responsibility of brands in the healthy representation of bodies. This phenomenon reflects a tension between creative freedom and the social responsibility of advertising, where regulators and the public de-mandate a shift towards more conscious practices [3].

Advertising representations in fashion are intertwined with consumers' self-image through the extended self-theory. Personal identity and the integration of brands and products into self-concept are evidenced in the public's reactions to the Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty campaigns, reflecting the influence of advertising on self-perception and self-esteem [2].

### **2.2 Body Positivity vs. Body Neutrality**

The body positive and body neutrality movements emerge as contemporary responses to the ideals of beauty, each promoting different attitudes towards physical appearance. While 'body positive' celebrates bodily diversity and challenges conventional standards, 'body neutrality' proposes a view where personal value transcends physical appearance, emphasizing the importance of individuality beyond aesthetics [4] [5]. This discovery contributes to the research, as it will allow two distinct perspectives to be made known: one trend focuses on body acceptance and challenging beauty standards, while the other emphasizes that acceptance extends beyond the body, advocating for the disregard of these standards.

### 2.3 Questioning the Ideal of Beauty in Advertising

The representation of female beauty in traditional advertising has perpetuated strict aesthetic stereotypes. However, growing pressure for inclusivity is reshaping these ideals. Brands now recognize the importance of incorporating models that reflect a wider variety of body types, showing a transition toward diversity and acceptance [6].

The advertising idealization of thinness is associated with the emergence of eating disorders. Thinness is often promoted as synonymous with personal and social success, which generates additional pressure to conform to these ideals. Images of extremely thin models in fashion advertising highlight the urgency of addressing this public health problem [7].

Digital retouching in advertising photography generates unrealistic representations of beauty, intensifying body dissatisfaction and harmful practices related to body image. These digitally altered images affect consumer satisfaction and self-esteem, revealing the need for a more realistic presentation in advertising [8].

## 3 Methodology

The research was based on the interpretative paradigm, appropriate for understanding subjective perspectives and personal meanings. A qualitative methodology was followed, which allowed unraveling cultural patterns, beliefs, social and cognitive processes. The interpretative nature of the approach was aligned with the objective of exploring the meanings that young Peruvian women attribute to body image and advertising campaigns within their sociocultural context [9]. In addition, this method provides in-depth understanding of the participant's perspectives, daily practices and if they have prior knowledge of the topics covered in this study. [10]

The sample was composed of Peruvian women between 21 and 23 years of age, residing in Metropolitan Lima, who were studying or working and belonged to NSE A and B. They were selected based on criteria that ensured their relevance to the research objectives. Through semi-structured interviews, conducted from April 17th to May 29th, descriptive data were collected on perceptions of the Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty campaigns. The qualitative approach and design facilitated an in-depth and contextualized discussion of the themes.

In the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 20 Peruvian women between 21 and 23 years of age, with the aim of collecting their perceptions about the advertising models and the presence of eating disorders in the Victoria's Secret and Savage x Fenty campaigns. The interviews were organized into three thematic blocks, and figures and tables were used for the visual representation of the data collected.

**Table 1. Semi-structured Reference Guide**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Introductory questions	<p>What is your name? How old are you? What do you do for a living?</p> <p>Do you think all these models have a healthy body? Why?</p> <p>Do you think they have a beautiful body? Why?</p> <p>Do you believe all the models are happy with their bodies? Why?</p> <p>Do you think they suffer from any eating disorders? Why?</p>
Savage x Fenty case	<p>Do you believe these models exercise? Why?</p> <p>Do you believe all these models follow some type of diet? Why?</p> <p>Do you think these models take any supplements to gain or lose weight? Why?</p> <p>Do you identify with any model in any physical aspect?</p> <p>Do you think the models relate to the brand? Why?</p>
Victoria's Secret case	<p>Do you believe these models exercise? Why?</p> <p>Do you believe all these models follow some type of diet? Why?</p> <p>Do you think these models take any supplements to gain or lose weight? Why?</p> <p>Do you identify with any model in any physical aspect?</p> <p>Do you think the models relate to the brand? Why?</p>
Closing questions	<p>Do you think the term "fat" is used to hurt someone?</p> <p>Do you think the term "skinny" is used to hurt someone?</p> <p>Do you think the term "fat" is used to compliment someone?</p> <p>Do you think the term "skinny" is used to compliment someone?</p> <p>Which of the two terms do you think is more often used to harm someone?</p> <p>Which of the two terms do you think is more often used to compliment someone?</p>

As shown in table 1, multiple case study design was adopted to allow a detailed understanding of each individual case and at the same time to make comparisons between them. Each participant became a 'case' that provided insights into the central problem of the research. For the treatment of the data, a thematic analysis was made to identify common and divergent patterns among the experiences narrated by the participants.

Rigor and scientific validity were ensured through verification procedures such as triangulation of the data collected from the interviews with the analysis of the content of the advertising campaigns, and the researcher's continuous reflection on their interpretation. A detailed record of the analytical process was kept, and codes were used to ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees (e.g., "E0123" for the interview number and age of the participant).

This approach provided a rich and in-depth description of the perceptions of young women in Lima about advertising models and their influence on body image, thus offering a contextual and nuanced understanding of the interactions between advertising and self-image.

In carrying out this research, strict adherence to the ethical standards established by the code of ethics in research of the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences was prioritized [11]. All participants provided written informed consent prior to inclusion in the study. They were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, possible risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Perceptions of the Savage x Fenty "April SS20 Collection" Campaign

Responses indicated that participants, for the most part, found the body representation in the Savage x Fenty campaign positive. They highlighted the diversity of bodies as a factor of personal identification and a positive influence on their perception of their own body image. Table 2 summarizes the categories of responses related to this perception.

**Table 2. Perception of the advertising model**

Perception Category	Description	Number of Responses	Example of Participant Quote
Identification with the models	Participants who feel represented by the diversity of bodies in the campaign.	18	<i>"Yes, because they show bodies like mine." (E1623)</i>
	Participants who do not feel represented by the diversity of bodies in the campaign.	0	

Happiness and comfort with the body	Opinions on whether models are happy with their bodies.	10	<i>"I would say that the bodies are happy because they are beautiful bodies, and they look healthy" (E0723).</i>
	Opinions on whether models are unhappy with their bodies.	1	<i>"No because constantly in several interviews they mention the ones they are not satisfied with" (E0623).</i>
Presence of eating disorders	Statements claiming that models have eating disorders.	1	<i>"These models do, just because they are models most of them suffer from many eating disorders" (E0121).</i>
	Statements denying that the models have eating disorders.	8	<i>"I don't consider any of them to have any kind of disorder"(E0223).</i>

This table shows that there were more interviewees who felt identified with the models of the Savage x Fenty campaign (fig.1) than those who did not. In addition, it was evidenced that the interviews considered that the models feel happy and comfortable with their bodies and most of them deny that they have any type of eating disorder.



**Fig. 1.** April SS20 Collection campaign of the brand Savage x Fenty in 2020.

#### 4.2 Perceptions of the Victoria's Secret "The Perfect Body" Campaign

The data revealed a general perception that Victoria's Secret models did not represent a healthy body image due to their thinness (Figure 2). Concerns about potential eating disorders were often associated with pressure to conform to a specific fashion industry ideal. This section is further developed in Figure 3, which illustrates the differing views on the health status of the models.



**Fig. 2.** The Perfect Body campaign of the brand Victoria's Secret in 2014.



**Fig. 3.** Capture of the model belonging to the 2014 Victoria's Secret The Perfect Body campaign that interviews highlighted when talking about eating disorders.

### 4.3 General Perceptions of Advertising Models, Advertising and Eating Disorders

Participants expressed mixed views on the use of the terms 'fat' and 'skinny' as potentially harmful, which is reflected in Figures 4 and 5 respectively. In terms of body idealization, some participants still consider the body of Victoria's Secret models as the ideal, while others lean towards the body models represented by Savage x Fenty.



**Fig. 4.** Capture of the model belonging to the Savage x Fenty brand's 2020 April SS20 campaign that interviewees idealized as the ideal body.



**Fig. 5.** Capture of the model belonging to the 2014 Victoria's Secret brand's The Perfect Body campaign that interviewees idealized as the ideal body.

The opinion on the predominance of thin models in advertising was unanimous, with a tendency to recognize that practices are changing but still pre-value the ideal of thinness (Table 3). There was general acceptance of the inclusion of all body types in advertising as a positive step towards realistic representation.

**Table 3.** Opinions on the Influence of the Industry on the Health of Models.

Response Category	Description	Number of Responses	Example of Participant Quote
Number of respondents who believe that models for Savage x Fenty have	Participants expressed statements about whether models present health problems based on image alone.	0	



health problems due to the industry.	Participants expressed statements about whether models present health problems based on image alone.	16	<i>"Yes, since I see them extremely thin and that is because of the demands of their work" (E0221).</i>
	Participants expressed denial about whether Savage x Fenty models have health problems just because of the image.	19	<i>"No, as I see them empowered and confident with their bodies in the photo, and they look good animically" (E0823).</i>
Number of respondents who believe that Victoria's Secret models do not have health problems due to the industry.	Participants expressed denial about whether Savage x Fenty models have health problems just because of the image.	3	<i>"No, because being skinny does not mean that you have a health problem, you can be skinny because of genetics" (E1223).</i>
	Participants expressed that they can neither deny nor affirm about the health of the Savage x Fenty models just because of the image.	5	<i>"I believe that a healthy body is not measured by how it looks, so I could not determine that" (E0922).</i>
	Participants expressed that they can neither deny nor affirm about the health of Victoria's Secret models just because of the image.	5	<i>"Maybe some do, and some don't, I couldn't confirm that just by looking at the image" (E0823).</i>

In this table it was evident that there were more interviewees that just by seeing the image of the Victoria's Secret campaign, that the models may have some health problem caused by the industry, compared to the Savage x Fenty campaign, which in this case there were more interviews that denied it when viewing the image of that campaign. On the other hand, there was an interesting finding, since the number of interviewees who could not deny or affirm whether the models in both campaigns had any health problems caused by the industry was the same.

The results section ends with a discussion of knowledge and attitudes towards the body positive trend. It was revealed that while there is recognition of the trend, there are reservations about it glorifying obesity (Figure 6).



**Fig. 6.** Capture of a model with thick contexture belonging to the April SS20 campaign of the Savage x Fenty brand 2020.

## 5 Discussion

The results of this study offer a unique insight into the perceptions of young Peruvian women towards advertising models and their relationship with eating disorders, in the context of the advertising campaigns of two different brands. This work has shown that, while the curvy models of Savage x Fenty are perceived as healthy and promote a positive identification, the extremely thin models of Victoria's Secret are seen as unhealthy and potentially suffering from eating disorders, corroborating previous studies that relate thinness with success and overweight with failure [7].

The discussion of these results is situated within the broader framework of the literature on the psychological impacts of advertising on body image. The findings confirm the concerns expressed by Bogár [12] which indicate the prevalence of harmful health practices among models due to industry pressures. However, this study adds the consumer perspective to the debate, highlighting the influence of these images on the purchase decision, in line with the findings of Keery [13].

## 6 Conclusions

Responding to the research question on the perception of advertising models and eating disorders, it is concluded that participants were discerning between the perceived health and happiness of Savage x Fenty and Victoria's Secret models. The research highlights a clear preference for diverse body representation and a concern for unhealthy practices encouraged by certain fashion industry stereotypes.

It is recognized that, while the trend towards greater diversity in advertising is encouraging, certain norms persist that continue to promote unattainable ideals of beauty. Despite differences in perceptions, there is a tendency to associate thinness with success and obesity with failure, a stigma that continues to have profound implications for both models and consumers.

These findings offer a significant contribution to the understanding of how advertising images affect body image perception and psychological well-being and open a path toward more conscious and ethical advertising that respects and celebrates body diversity.

It is important to note that the results obtained are based on a specific demographic group and should not be generalized to the entire Peruvian population. The qualitative nature of the interviews provides depth in the responses but limits the ability to quantify the prevalence of the perceptions recorded. In addition, the findings are subject to the inherent limitations of interviews, such as social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of the questions.

The findings suggest the need for future research that addresses body image perception in different cultures and how advertising campaigns can be tailored to promote healthy body image without reinforcing harmful stereotypes. It would be valuable to explore these issues in a wider range of age and socioeconomic contexts.

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