



# Perceptions of Diversity and Inclusion Through body positive in Peruvian brands on Instagram

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**Abstract.** This study addresses the use of body positive in the content of Peruvian brands such as Sicurezza and Capittana, where we seek to know the perceptions of women between 20 and 30 years old who follow the accounts of these brands on Instagram about the management of diversity and inclusion in fashion. The methodology employs a qualitative approach with a case design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female students of the Faculty of Communications of a private university. The results show that the importance of authenticity, diversity, identification, and truthfulness in the content shared in networks strengthens inclusion and diversity in women. Likewise, it is identified that if body positive is used as a commercial tool, it does not achieve positive changes with corporate social responsibility in brands.

**Keywords:** Fashion, body positive, Corporate Social Responsibility, perceptions.

## 1 Introduction

The fashion industry is the second most polluting manufacturing activity in the world and has a high impact on the global economy [1, 2]. For this reason, consumers in this sector demand the implementation of socially responsible practices from companies [2, 3]. Likewise, social responsibility in fashion is defined by the diversity and inclusion practices that the company manages, which contributes to the commercial success of these organizations [4].

Therefore, diversity and inclusion are essential elements for the corporate social responsibility strategy in this area [5]. For example, the Body Positive movement promotes inclusion and bodily diversity in an industry that focuses on restrictive and unrealistic beauty [6, 7]. This is evidenced in advertising, where companies challenge stigmas and confront female body stereotypes such as skin color, build, height, among others [8, 9]. Therefore, companies in the fashion industry need a more critical and transformative approach to their role in society, where they promote inclusion, challenge cultural norms and expectations associated with bodies that do not fit stereotypes [8, 10].

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Therefore, it is important that companies using body positive are genuine, contribute socially and do not use this movement as a superficial advertising strategy, but build a reputation based on responsible social management [11, 12]. Likewise, the representation of the female body in advertising campaigns is still influenced by the body stereotypes imposed by society: 93.4% of the models are thin, 62% are young, and 83.5% are digitally retouched for imperfections [13].

Along the lines of Tórtola et al. [14] indicate that female diversity and inclusion in advertising has become a priority issue in fashion. Among the demands of the new generations, they demand that fashion should be independent of size, religion, age, and disability [15, 16]. Therefore, organizations are applying social responsibility actions through inclusion, where most consumers as brands are part of the change of exclusionary female stereotypes as the only form of beauty [17]. It is important to mention that, in this last decade, beauty prototypes and feminine stereotypes have been the subject of scientific debate [18]. On the one hand, recent studies indicate that some organizations and fashion brands are working on a concept of equality, where people feel integrated. In addition, initiatives that support the body positive movement and a communication that reclaims the past stand out [9].

On the other hand, in Peru, social responsibility studies of various types are found, but when the topic 'Body Positive' is added, these are mostly based on an advertising analysis. Therefore, we seek to answer the question: What is the perception of women between 20 and 30 years old who follow on Instagram the brands *Sicurezza* and *Capittana*, on the management of diversity and inclusion in fashion transmitted through their #BodyPositive posts?

## 1.1 Inclusive practices and diversity management

Diversity and inclusion are two concepts that have come into focus in social and academic discourse in the last ten years [19]. In relation to diversity, it refers to the physical or sociocultural differences that define a person [15]. Likewise, inclusion is defined as the creation and development of a culture that fosters a sense of belonging and the incorporation of diverse groups [20].

Companies that cater to their customers' demand for diversity can create a greater connection with their customers, but it is important that their programs evolve over time and align with the values they promote to maintain their authenticity and not jeopardize their reputation [3, 21]. For example, consider your customers' issues of interest or social problems, create inclusive programs that allow diversity to flourish, and develop effective strategies that help build a positive image [22].

Likewise, companies that are committed to diversity and inclusion have a competitive advantage and reach new markets, which is economically beneficial to the organization [23]. Diversity does not only consider demographic aspects, but it also in-

cludes the diversity of thought and perspectives of different users such as people with disabilities, of different ages, aspects, and racialized groups [23, 24].

## 1.2 Body Positive

To promote body diversity and inclusion, apparel companies must be authentic in their support of the body positive movement with concrete actions [29, 30]. This movement is a response to the historically biased representation of women in advertising, where they were idealized by a specific body type, excluding shapes, sizes, and natural features [19]. This traditional approach has been challenged for promoting unattainable beauty ideals and contributing to self-image and mental health issues [4].

Fashion entrepreneurs are implementing initiatives in their business models to promote inclusion in various ways, one of them is the body positive, where images and messages seek to eliminate comparisons and cultural standards of beauty to promote self-acceptance and elimination of unrealistic body images [29, 31]. These initiatives change attitudes and beliefs, questioning social norms and expectations about bodies [10, 32, 33]. Body positive creates communities in social networks that fight against body-related discrimination [11]. Therefore, the importance of body positive lies in its ability to prevent eating disorders, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction, through positive messages about body image that promote inclusion and acceptance of diversity [3, 33].

## 2 Methodology

This study has a qualitative approach and interpretative paradigm of naturalistic and humanistic sense because the study is related to human actions, social life, and the independent experience of everyone; and focuses on the description and understanding of the reality about a subject [42]. Case study is applied as a research design as to understand and comprehend the particularity of the singular case [43]. In this case, the object to be analyzed are four posts published in December 2023, which counted with high interaction on Instagram and present the use of the Body Positive movement in two women's clothing brands: Sicurezza and Capittana, which are leaders in the Peruvian textile industry, where women feel comfortable and bet on seamless clothing [44]. The aim is to describe and interpret the position and perceptions of the sample interviewed on the object described above, in relation to the terms of commercial advertising and corporate social responsibility.

The data collection technique is the semi-structured interview, which allows for additional questions to be asked in addition to the structure proposed [45]. Likewise, this interview underwent a validation process through pilot interviews. The interview is constituted as follows: a) perceptions about the digital content of #bodypositive posts of Sicurezza and Capittana brands on Instagram, b) communication in relation to corporate social responsibility in #bodypositive posts in Sicurezza and Capittana

brands and c) perceptions about diversity and inclusion management in Sicurezza and Capittana brands on Instagram.

For the selection of the sample in this study, 15 women between 20 and 30 years old, students of the Faculty of Communications of a private university in Lima, Peru, participated. They are also followers and consumers of the brands Sicurezza and Capittana on the social network Instagram. According to recent studies, they indicate that, in 2022, women in the age range of this study spent about 59% on clothing; and 93%, on beauty [46]. A convenience sample was used, as women who consumed and followed Sicurezza and Capittana brands were selected [36]. Participants were recruited using a snowball strategy. They were provided with detailed information about the objectives of the research, the voluntariness of their participation was emphasized, and their informed consent was requested to ensure ethics in the research [42]. It was concluded with a thematic analysis process to code and identify the categories generated from these interviews to proceed with the analysis of the results [47].

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Perceptions of the digital content of #BodyPositive posts by the Sicurezza and Capittana brands on Instagram.

Regarding the first impression of the #BodyPositive posts of the Sicurezza and Capittana brands on Instagram, it is observed that most of the participants expressed a positive reaction. Most of them made it clear that the Sicurezza brand shows diverse models, while Capittana shows stereotypical models. This information is congruent with Zavattaro's proposal [11] who suggests that it is important that companies work to challenge stereotypical beauty norms and promote inclusion and diversity. Furthermore, according to Cowles et al. [31], some examples of body-positive content may include images of people with different body sizes and shapes, including those that do not conform to cultural ideals of beauty. One thing that interviewees noted about Sicurezza was that it was perceived as more diverse and representative, while Capittana presents more stereotypical models. This assessment suggests that Sicurezza has managed to convey a more inclusive message congruent with the principles of the #BodyPositive movement.

"With respect to Capittana, I feel that no, it lacks maybe to improve a little bit its Body Positive factor. And in Sicurezza I feel that they have tried to be a bit more Body Positive and create a bit more responsibility and social awareness" (E01).



**Fig. 1.** (a). Capittana brand. Image extracted from Instagram account. December 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/capittana/> (b). Sicurezza brand. Image extracted from Instagram. December 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/sicurezza/>

Regarding how they feel about seeing #BodyPositive posts, most participants mentioned that it makes them feel good, better about themselves, they never thought they would see models of different body types in advertising campaigns. These findings are consistent with the research of Cohen et al. [29] who argue that promoting body positivity in social networks can have positive effects on people's health and well-being. Some participants highlighted that they felt included when viewing Sicurezza's posts, due to the diversity of models present in the #BodyPositive posts, but not with Capittana's posts. This generated a sense of representation and belonging for them with Sicurezza's posts. These results are supported by studies, which mention that acting in an inclusive and non-judgmental way with plus-size people provides a comfortable and safe space [11, 19]. As also with the approaches of Fardouly et al. [48], who suggest that the frequency of physical comparisons on social networks such as Instagram can affect the mood of young women.

"In the case of Capittana no, because the models they have personally I feel that they don't go with my body type." (E06)

Regarding the identification with #BodyPositive posts, it was observed that half of the participants expressed feeling more identified with Sicurezza; and the other half identified with the posts of both brands. Likewise, it is again validated that all of them felt more identified with Sicurezza. These findings are supported by studies suggesting that identification with role models and the type of social comparison made can influence brand benefits [34, 36]. As noted by Béal et al. [32] participants who felt included in the brands' interests experienced greater emotional engagement, such as identification with a brand.

"In the case of Sicurezza, I think I'm quite identified because I have friends who have the body of the models they post, just like me. And in the case of Capittana, I follow the influencer Didi Ibarra, so I've always had a match with that profile. But I feel like if I were to wear that I wouldn't feel entirely comfortable." (E03)

When analyzing the characteristics of the #BodyPositive posts that participant liked, it was highlighted that a large portion of the interviewees liked the diversity of women and messages present in the Sicurezza posts. This aligns with the suggestion of a study [26], which indicates that companies should be more authentic in their support of the body positivity movement, working to improve diversity and inclusion in their company. On the other hand, one participant expressed dissatisfaction with Capittana's strategy of only showcasing their products in #BodyPositive posts. This relates to the idea put forward by Pedersen et al. [41] who mention that customers and society in general are increasingly demanding companies to adopt socially responsible practices. In this sense, companies are expected to be more aware of how their actions and not use body positivity only as a marketing tool.

"Well, in the case of Sicurezza, it is the brand that I follow the most, I really like that they touch on quite social issues, such as self-love or issues that have to do with the psychological side such as toxic relationships, love breakups and that kind of thing." (E10)

As for the authenticity of Body Positive's approach to these brands, most participants felt that Sicurezza's approach was authentic. This is in line with the suggestion of a recent study [11] who highlights the importance of companies being authentic in their approach to body positivity, challenging stereotypical beauty norms and promoting diversity rather than using the movement as a superficial tool. However, in the case of Capittana, most participants felt that their approach was null and void in relation to Body Positive. This may relate to the idea put forward by Park et al. [22], mentioning that companies should develop authentic marketing strategies that reflect their real commitment to diversity, rather than using it as a marketing tool. One participant mentioned that she had seen similar approaches before, which could indicate a perceived lack of authenticity. This idea aligns with studies [20, 22] which highlight the importance of an organization's actions being aligned with its values and principles and being perceived as authentic and consistent with its identity. In summary, participants had different opinions about the authenticity of the Body Positive approach in these brands. While they considered Sicurezza to be authentic in its approach, they expressed a lack of authenticity in the case of Capittana. These results highlight the importance of companies being genuine and consistent in their commitment to the body positivity movement, so that it works by looking authentic to its audience and does not evidence use as a superficial marketing strategy.

"With Capittana I don't identify much because the posts are more to sell and show the bikinis. And in the case of Sicurezza, I think it's quite authentic because they not only publish photos of their products, but they make posts related to empowerment and body positive. That does seem quite original to me." (E15)

### **3.2 Communication in relation to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in #BodyPositive posts on the Sicurezza and Capittana brands.**

Most interviewees considered that Sicurezza communicates CSR more effectively through its posts, sharing messages of equality, body diversity, not discriminating against the color of the models' skin, variety, and concern for communicating responsibly to the public that consumes its products. Therefore, they comment that Sicurezza transmits clear and tangible messages about their practices and commitment to social responsibility in the fashion industry. On the other hand, some interviewees indicated that Capittana does not communicate its CSR in such an evident or convincing way, as it focuses on promoting the sale of its bikinis and disseminates content of thin and blonde models that do not resemble the characteristics of Peruvian women. These perspectives are aligned with research [33, 49] which highlight the importance of effective communication of CSR activities and the establishment of a dialogue with stakeholders to know their expectations and meet their needs. Along the lines of Acea [2], stresses that CSR can be beneficial for fashion companies in terms of building a positive reputation and improving consumer loyalty. This implies that, if Sicurezza and Capittana posts communicate a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion, consumers are likely to develop more positive attitudes about brands. In summary, participants expressed mixed opinions on whether Sicurezza's and Capittana's posts effectively communicate their CSR in the fashion industry. The authors also mention that stakeholder credibility is an important aspect to consider in evaluating CSR communication in these posts.

"In Capittana, I don't see social responsibility actions, but I don't know if it becomes negative. They only use the typical models, thin, white, and blonde. At least I consider that Peruvian women are not like that, since we are a very diverse country. On that side, the only negative thing about that brand would be that." (E11)

### **3.3 Perceptions of diversity and inclusion management in Sicurezza and Capittana brands on Instagram**

Some participants felt that Sicurezza does seek to show that it cares about diversity and inclusion, suggesting that there is an effort to promote values of inclusion and diversity. This aligns with the perspective put forward by Rzeczycki [49] and Maroun [35] who highlight the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and diversity as practices that can improve business performance to strengthen the trust and legitimacy of companies in society. On the other hand, some participants felt that Capittana does not show a concern for diversity and inclusion in its posts related to #BodyPositive. This may reflect the perception that the brand is using the movement as a superficial marketing tool [30]. While some participants felt that Sicurezza seeks to show concern for diversity and inclusion in its posts, others perceived that Capittana does not show such concern. Although several stated that both seek to show that they care about these issues.

"As I said, at Sicurezza you can see a little bit more of a commitment they have. They are more committed to diversity and inclusion of women." (E09)

Regarding whether these brands are genuinely committed to diversity and inclusion, participants expressed different opinions. One participant noted that these brands' commitment to diversity and inclusion is more of a marketing or fashion issue, suggesting that there may be a lack of authenticity in their efforts. Therefore, it is suggested that companies need to be careful and authentic in their social responsibility efforts to avoid negative consequences, such as loss of credibility and trust from consumers [30, 47]. Another participant did not feel confident in stating whether brands are committed to diversity and inclusion. And most interviewees mentioned that Sicurezza seems to be more committed to this aspect than Capittana. This shows us that dialogue and stakeholder engagement is important in moving towards true corporate social responsibility [50].

"I think to achieve inclusion and diversity you have to be consistent with your messages (...) Somehow contribute to the cause. For example, if Sicurezza supports the purpose of the league against breast cancer. If Sicurezza makes donations or any other NGO that is dedicated to these issues or others. It seems to me that it would be a very favorable point that it should not remain only in the message, it should also generate actions" (E08).

## 4 Conclusions

This study demonstrates the importance of diversity and inclusion in women's clothing brands that promote and strengthen identification, authenticity, and acceptance of different bodies. Therefore, it is relevant the proper use of body positive in organizations, because if they use it as a commercial tool, effective results are not achieved for the public and the company, which generates an impact on corporate social responsibility actions.

Likewise, body positive posts convey messages that celebrate diversity, this movement has generated a favorable response from the women interviewed, who feel represented and empowered by seeing images and messages that reflect the inclusion and reality of their own bodies. Through the images and stories shared on Instagram, brands, and most successfully Sicurezza, have managed to establish an emotional bond with their audience, generating a sense of belonging and reinforcing brand loyalty. This has generated positive attitudes in the perception of brands and increased women's interest in purchasing their products. These women value the brands' inclusive and diverse approach, feel represented and empowered by the messages conveyed, and consider this communication strategy to be effective in terms of both commercial advertising and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).



The study also has some limitations, such as the lack of studies related to corporate social responsibility and body positive. Also, the lack of Peruvian experts focused on this topic. The results cannot be generalized because of the minority sample of interviewees.

Regarding future studies, it is recommended to continue with research focused on fashion experts, to analyze in greater depth the contents and elements used in body positive posts. In the field of communications, it is relevant to continue with these studies in the future to know in greater depth what is happening in the field to generate changes in perceptions about inclusion and diversity.

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