

A Comprehensive Study of the Role of Fashion and Beauty Brands in Promoting Body Positivity: A Consumer Perception Study

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Abstract—This study explores how fashion and beauty brands engage with the body positivity movement and what effect their campaigns have on consumer perception, self-identity and purchasing behaviour. Using a structured survey administered to 100 respondents in Pune, India, the research measures brand awareness, consumer trust and the perceived authenticity of body-positive marketing. The results reveal a statistically significant link between brand familiarity and purchase intent (chi-square $p = 0.0000056$). Despite this, most respondents remain doubtful about whether brands truly champion the cause or simply use it for commercial gain. The study also highlights consumer demand for representation that goes beyond size inclusivity — encompassing age, ethnicity, disability and gender identity — alongside calls for less photo manipulation and greater corporate transparency. While body positivity campaigns have visibly shifted mainstream beauty discourse, lasting change demands that brands embed inclusivity into their culture, product lines and long-term strategy.

Keywords— *body positivity, brand authenticity, inclusive marketing, consumer behaviour, fashion industry, beauty standards, self-esteem, diversity and representation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

Over the past two decades, the fashion and beauty industries have undergone a significant shift in how they portray the human body. For most of the twentieth century, these sectors followed a narrow visual template — young, slim, predominantly light-skinned and able-bodied. The social consequences of this standard are well-documented. Research consistently shows that exposure to idealised and digitally altered images is associated with lower self-esteem, disordered eating and heightened body dissatisfaction, particularly among young women (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

The World Health Organization has noted that poor body image is a meaningful contributor to anxiety and depression among young people globally. Against this backdrop, a body positivity movement emerged from grassroots activist communities before spreading into the cultural mainstream. Brands like Dove, Aerie, Fenty Beauty and Nike now weave messages of self-acceptance, size diversity and authentic beauty into their advertising — campaigns that have earned considerable public attention and, in several cases, measurable commercial success.

Yet these efforts have also attracted criticism. Consumer advocates and researchers question whether brands are genuinely committed to inclusion or are simply engaging in ‘woke-washing’ — adopting the language of social movements to generate goodwill without making any real organisational changes. This paper directly examines that tension. It investigates how fashion and beauty brands incorporate body positivity into their marketing, how these messages land with consumers and what separates campaigns that feel authentic from those that feel hollow. The research draws on survey data from 100 respondents in Pune, India and situates these findings within contemporary academic literature.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study has five connected objectives:

- (1) To map how leading fashion and beauty brands have incorporated body positivity into their marketing and products.
- (2) To assess how body-positive campaigns affect consumer attitudes, self-esteem and purchasing decisions.
- (3) To evaluate how authentic consumers find brand-led body positivity initiatives and to determine the factors that shape these perceptions.

- (4) To identify the challenges brands face in moving from symbolic representation to genuine inclusivity.
- (5) To formulate evidence-based recommendations for brands seeking to pursue body positivity in credible, intersectional and sustainable ways.

1.3 Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guide the statistical analysis:

H₁: There is a significant association between brand familiarity and consumer purchase behaviour related to body-positive brands.

H₂: Gender significantly influences consumer perception of the motivations behind brand-led body positivity campaigns.

H₃: Age group significantly influences consumer perception of brand motivations for promoting body positivity.

1.4 Historical Context

Western beauty standards in the early twentieth century were closely tied to class and privilege, equating femininity with fragility and thinness. The 1920s celebrated slim, boyish silhouettes and by the 1960s, models like Twiggy had taken extreme thinness global. In 1969, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) launched the Fat Acceptance Movement, one of the earliest organised efforts to challenge stigma around larger bodies. The 1990s doubled down on narrow ideals through the ‘supermodel era’ and the so-called ‘heroin chic’ aesthetic. A turning point came in 2004 when Dove launched its Campaign for Real Beauty, featuring women of varied sizes, ages and ethnicities. The 2010s saw social media amplify the conversation, with influencers like Ashley Graham, Tess Holliday and Jameela Jamil reshaping public discourse. Fenty Beauty’s 2017 launch with 40 foundation shades redefined what inclusivity could look like in cosmetics. By the 2020s, the movement has deepened into an intersectional call for representation across race, disability, gender identity and age.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study is geographically limited to Pune, India and rests on a convenience sample of 100 respondents. While the findings shed useful light on a digitally engaged, urban, young-adult population, they cannot be extended to the broader Indian or global consumer base without further research. The cross-sectional design captures attitudes at a single

moment in time and self-reported data carries inherent response bias.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Historical Evolution of Beauty Standards and the Fashion Industry

Beauty ideals have always been socially constructed and have shifted considerably over time. Victorian standards prized corseted silhouettes, while the 1920s celebrated a slim androgynous figure. The post-war 1950s swung toward a curvier hourglass shape, exemplified by Marilyn Monroe. Throughout these shifts, mass media played an active role in selling products by creating and sustaining aspirational images of the body. When Twiggy emerged in the 1960s, extreme thinness became fashionable in high-end circles, a standard that intensified into the ‘heroin chic’ aesthetic of the 1990s (Kaya, 2024). Christel (2018) has documented the link between fashion imagery and eating disorders, while Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020) show that curated social media content consistently correlates with social comparison and body dissatisfaction.

2.2 The Body Positivity Movement: Origins and Trajectory

The contemporary body positivity movement traces its origins to the Fat Acceptance Movement of the late 1960s. NAAFA, established in 1969, was among the first organisations to challenge the stigma directed at larger bodies. The movement as we know it today was formalised in 1996 by Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott, who framed self-love and body acceptance as both personal and political practices (Erdem & Yildiz, 2019). Social media enormously expanded the movement’s reach, with hashtags like #EffYourBeautyStandards and #BodyPositivity gaining millions of impressions. In the 2020s, the movement has grown increasingly intersectional, centring the experiences of people with disabilities, people of colour, transgender individuals and older adults (Kaya, 2024).

2.3 Brand Responses: From Dove to Fenty Beauty

Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004 was a landmark moment in commercial body positivity. By replacing idealised models with women of varied sizes, ages and ethnicities, the campaign sparked both brand loyalty and public debate, though scholars noted the tension between its empowering message and its commercial objectives (Johnston & Taylor,

2008). A decade later, Aerie's 2014 commitment to publishing unretouched images offered a more concrete demonstration of the policy in action (Estrina, 2021). Rihanna's Fenty Beauty (2017) directly addressed the long-standing exclusion of darker skin tones with its 40-shade foundation range, while Savage X Fenty lingerie shows featured models of diverse body sizes, ages and abilities (Jess, 2021).

2.4 Critiques: Commodification and Performative Inclusion

Not all commentary on the movement has been celebratory. Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues that platforms like Instagram have commercialised body positivity, turning activist language into a tool for selling products. Estrina (2021) points out a telling contradiction: many brands use body-positive language in advertising while their actual size ranges remain limited. Humann (2021) identifies 'token diversity' in campaigns that cast a single plus-size model without making any deeper organisational changes. Consumer research confirms that younger audiences are especially attuned to the gap between a brand's stated values and its actual practices (Gupta, 2019).

2.5 Research Gap

Existing scholarship offers rich insight into how individual brands have engaged with body positivity, but there is limited analysis of how such campaigns

simultaneously affect consumer trust, purchase behaviour and psychological wellbeing within the Indian urban market. This study addresses that gap by combining quantitative survey data with chi-square hypothesis testing to provide both statistical and interpretive depth.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design appropriate for investigations aimed at characterising attitudes, awareness levels and behavioural tendencies within a defined population at a specific point in time. The research integrates quantitative survey data with open-ended qualitative responses to obtain both statistical breadth and interpretive depth.

3.2 Sampling Strategy and Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to a convenience sample of 100 respondents in Pune, India. The survey was disseminated through social media, email and messaging platforms. The instrument comprised fifteen items including yes/no questions, five-point Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions and two open-ended prompts. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot group of eight respondents to confirm clarity prior to broad distribution.

3.3 Respondent Profile

Table 3.1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (n = 100)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	56	56.4%
Gender	Male	44	43.6%
Age Group	15–25 years	54	54.1%
Age Group	25–35 years	16	16.4%
Age Group	35–45 years	21	21.3%
Age Group	45 years and above	8	8.2%

3.4 Statistical Tools

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and proportions) were used to summarise response distributions. Pearson's chi-square test of independence was

applied to examine associations between categorical variables. A significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted throughout.

3.5 Key Terms

Table 3.2: Key Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Body Positivity	A social movement advocating acceptance of all bodies irrespective of size, shape, colour, gender, or ability.
Familiarity	The level of respondent awareness of brands that promote body positivity.
Diverse Representation	Inclusion of varied body types, ethnicities, genders, ages and abilities in brand communications.
Token Diversity	Superficial inclusion of a minority representative without systemic organisational change.
Performative Activism	Brand adoption of social cause language for commercial benefit without substantive commitment.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

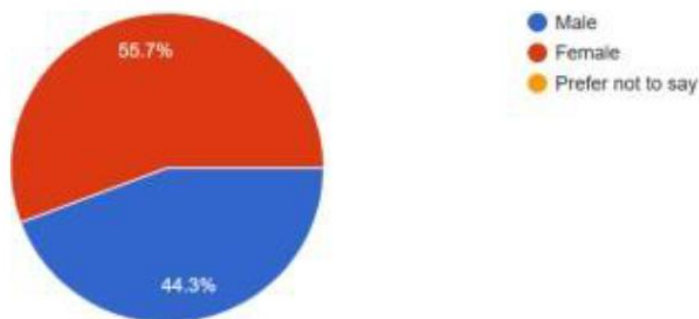
This chapter presents a question-by-question analysis of the survey data collected from 100 respondents.

Each item is examined through descriptive statistics with its corresponding figure, followed by an interpretive discussion. Chi-square tests are reported at $\alpha = 0.05$ where applicable.

4.1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents (n = 100)

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	56	56.4%
Male	44	43.6%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total	100	100.0%



- The survey captured Male and Female respondents.
- The breakdown of respondents by gender is represented in the pie chart above.

Figure 4.1: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

Female respondents constitute the slight majority at 56.4 percent compared with 43.6 percent male. The near-equal split lends reasonable balance to the

dataset. Body image discourse and body positivity campaigns have historically been more prominently directed at women and prior research confirms that

women report higher exposure to and engagement with such content (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). This distribution, therefore, reflects the topic's

differential salience across genders rather than a sampling artefact.

4.2 Age Distribution of Respondents

Table 4.2: Age Group Distribution of Survey Respondents (n = 100)

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
15–25 years	54	54.1%
25–35 years	16	16.4%
35–45 years	21	21.3%
45 years and above	8	8.2%
Total	100	100.0%

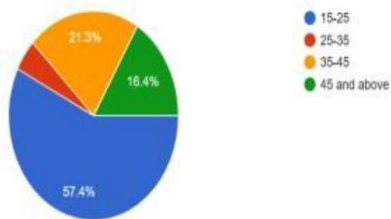


Figure 4.2: Age Group Distribution of Survey Respondents

The dominant cohort is the 15–25 age group, representing 54.1 percent of respondents. This is consistent with the convenience sampling method, which disproportionately reaches digitally active young adults through social media and messaging platforms. The 35–45 group accounts for a notable 21.3 percent, suggesting body positivity awareness extends beyond younger demographics. The relative under-representation of respondents aged 45 and above (8.2%) is a limitation that future research should address.

4.3 Awareness of the Concept of Body Positivity

Table 4.3: Respondent Awareness of the Body Positivity Concept (n = 100)

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes — Aware	91	91.8%
No — Not Aware	8	8.2%
Total	100	100.0%

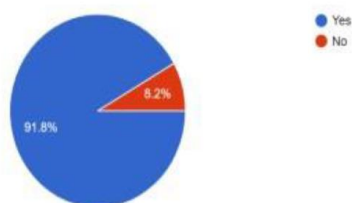


Figure 4.3: Awareness of the Body Positivity Concept

An overwhelming 91.8 percent of respondents confirmed awareness of the body positivity concept. This near-universal recognition underscores the extent to which the movement has transitioned from a grassroots activist position into the cultural mainstream. The high awareness level also implies that brands participating in body positivity campaigns are communicating to an informed and critical audience. The 8.2 percent who were unfamiliar were primarily concentrated in the 45-and-above age bracket.

4.4 Age Groups Most Influenced by Body-Positive Campaigns

Table 4.4: Perceived Most-Influenced Age Groups (n = 100)

Perceived Most-Influenced Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Young Adults (18–30)	46	45.9%
Teenagers (13–17)	38	37.7%
Middle-aged Adults (31–50)	8	8.2%
Seniors (51+)	8	8.2%
Total	100	100.0%

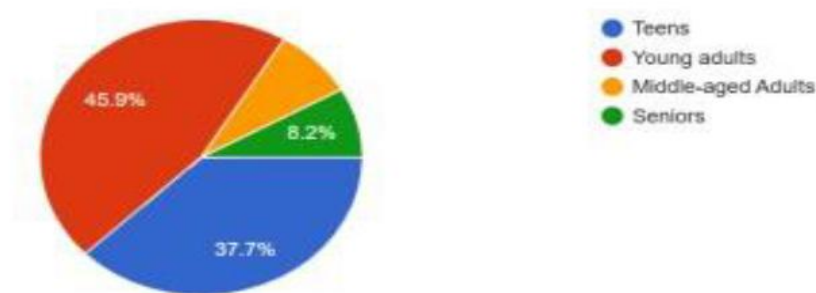


Figure 4.4: Age Groups Most Influenced by Body-Positive Campaigns

Respondents overwhelmingly identified young adults (45.9%) and teenagers (37.7%) as the primary audiences for body positivity messaging, together accounting for 83.6 percent of responses. This perception aligns with documented patterns of social media consumption: adolescents and young adults

spend the most time on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, where body-positive content circulates most intensively (Geerkens, 2019). Qualitative responses from the open-ended questions later challenge this assumption by explicitly calling for the inclusion of older bodies in brand campaigns.

4.5 Familiarity with Brands That Promote Body Positivity

Table 4.5: Respondent Familiarity with Body-Positive Brands (n = 100)

Level of Familiarity	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Familiar	28	27.9%
Somewhat Familiar	48	47.5%
Not Familiar	25	24.6%
Total	100	100.0%

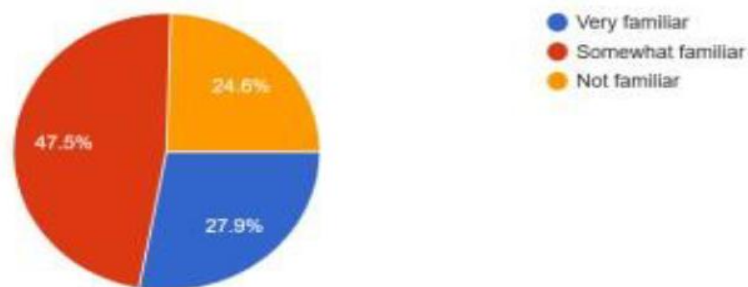


Figure 4.5: Familiarity with Body-Positive Brands

The combined 'very familiar' and 'somewhat familiar' categories account for 75.4 percent of responses, establishing that a clear majority of the sample has meaningful exposure to brands associated with body positivity. Approximately one in four respondents (24.6%) reported limited familiarity.

Because brand familiarity was demonstrated to be a significant predictor of purchase behaviour (chi-square $p = 0.0000056$), extending brand awareness into less-familiar consumer segments represents a commercially viable opportunity.

Table 4.5a: Chi-Square Test — Hypothesis H₁ (Brand Familiarity vs. Purchase Behaviour)

Test	Variables	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
H ₁ : Familiarity vs. Purchase Behaviour	Brand Familiarity × Purchase Decision	0.0000056	Reject H ₀ ($p < 0.05$)	Higher brand familiarity is significantly associated with greater purchase intent. H ₁ is supported.

4.6 Brands Most Recalled in Connection with Body Positivity

Table 4.6: Brands Spontaneously Recalled in Connection with Body Positivity (n = 100)

Brand	Mention Count (approx.)	Rank
Dove	12	1st
Nike	4	2nd
Aerie	3	3rd
Glow & Lovely	3	3rd
Jockey	3	3rd
Skims	2	4th
Nykaa	1	5th
Victoria's Secret	1	5th
Don't know any	4	—

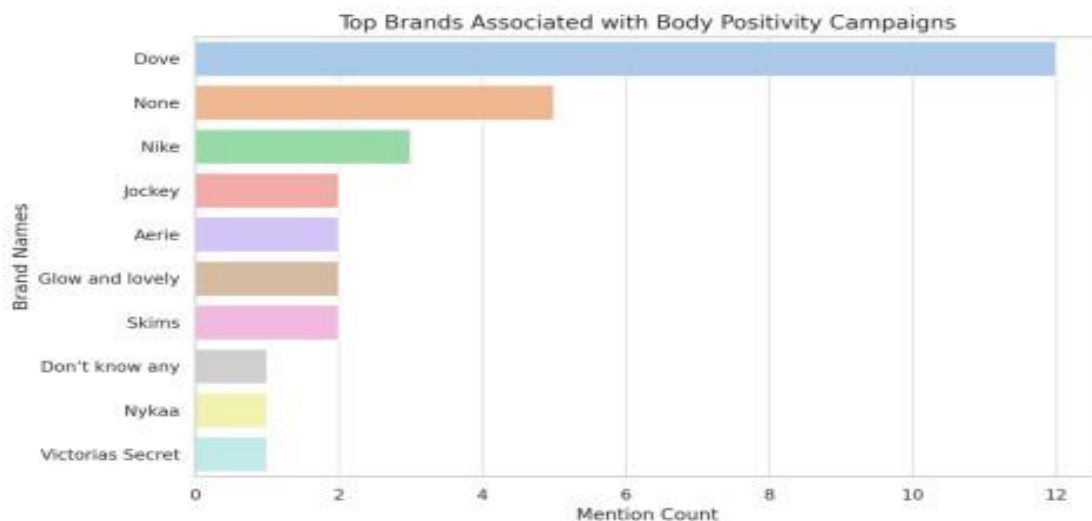


Figure 4.6: Top Brands Associated with Body Positivity Campaigns

Dove dominates unaided brand recall by a substantial margin, consistent with its twenty-year history of campaigns built on diverse and authentic beauty representations. Nike's second-place position reflects its inclusive athletic advertising. The presence of

Glow & Lovely and Jockey — both brands with strong market penetration in India — signals that domestic consumer are attuned to body-positive messaging from brands encountered in everyday retail settings.

4.7 Perceived Importance of Brand-Led Body Positivity Promotion

Table 4.7: Perceived Importance of Body Positivity Promotion by Brands (n = 100)

Importance Rating	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Important	47	47.5%
Somewhat Important	36	36.1%
Neutral	13	13.1%
Not Very Important	3	2.1%
Not Important at All	1	1.1%
Total	100	100.0%

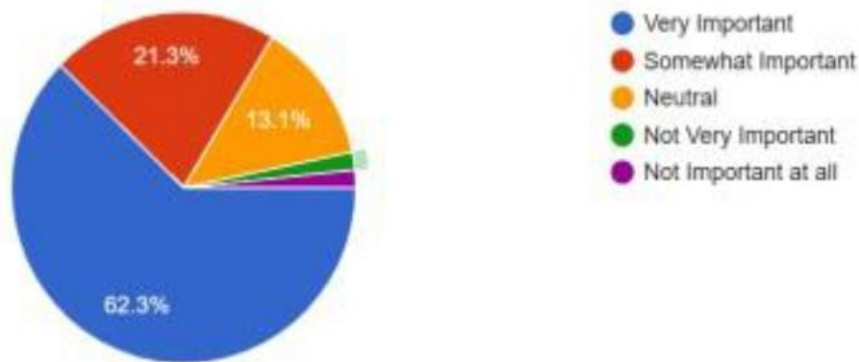


Figure 4.7: Importance of Brand-Led Body Positivity Promotion

A combined 83.6 percent of respondents consider brand-led body positivity promotion either 'very important' or 'somewhat important'. Fewer than four percent dismissed the issue as unimportant. From a strategic marketing standpoint, brands that fail to

engage with body positivity are choosing to diverge from a strong and broadly held normative expectation — a decision that carries reputational risk in an era when consumers actively scrutinise brand values (Gupta, 2019).

4.8 Perceived Motivation Behind Brand Body Positivity Campaigns

Table 4.8: Consumer Perception of Brand Motivation (n = 100)

Perceived Motivation	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Genuinely Care About the Cause	16	16.4%
Mainly for Marketing / Commercial Gain	39	39.3%
Both (Genuine Care and Marketing)	44	44.3%
Total	100	100.0%

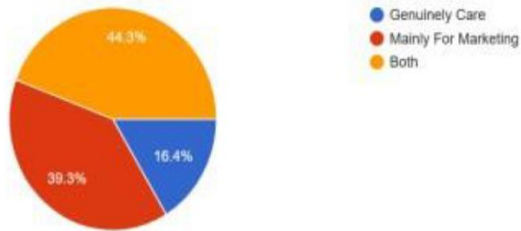


Figure 4.8: Perceived Brand Motivation — Genuine Care vs. Marketing

This item reveals the most critical tension in the dataset. Only 16.4 percent of respondents believe that brands promoting body positivity are genuinely motivated by the cause. A combined 83.6 percent harbour some degree of scepticism, either believing campaigns are primarily marketing exercises (39.3%) or that they blend authentic advocacy with commercial strategy (44.3%). This ‘authenticity deficit’ represents a defining challenge for the industry.

Table 4.8a: Chi-Square Tests — Hypotheses H₂ and H₃ (Gender and Age vs. Perceived Motivation)

Test	Variables	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
H ₂ : Gender vs. Perceived Motivation	Gender (Male/Female) × Motivation (3 categories)	0.191	Fail to Reject H ₀ (p > 0.05)	Gender does not significantly influence how respondents perceive brand motivations. H ₂ is not supported.
H ₃ : Age Group vs. Perceived Motivation	Age (4 groups) × Motivation (3 categories)	0.921	Fail to Reject H ₀ (p > 0.05)	Age does not significantly influence perception of brand motivations. H ₃ is not supported.

The chi-square results for H₂ (p = 0.191) and H₃ (p = 0.921) both exceed the $\alpha = 0.05$ threshold. This indicates that scepticism regarding brand authenticity is demographically uniform — it does not vary significantly by gender or age. The authenticity problem is therefore sector-wide and demands structural solutions rather than demographic-targeted communication.

4.9 Aspects of Body Positivity Brands Should Prioritise

Table 4.9: Consumer Priorities for Brand Body Positivity Focus (n = 100)

Priority Aspect	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Representation of Diverse Body Types and Sizes	54	54.1%
Fighting Unrealistic Beauty Standards	26	26.2%
Mental Health Awareness	18	18.0%
Other / Miscellaneous	2	1.7%
Total	100	100.0%

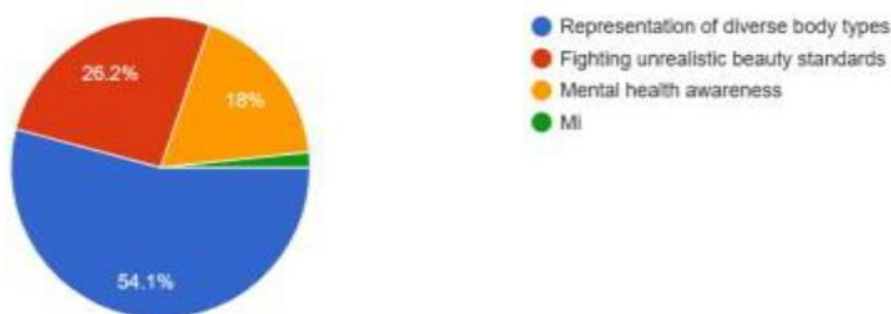


Figure 4.9: Aspects of Body Positivity Brands Should Focus On

Diverse body representation is the clear priority, selected by 54.1 percent of respondents. This is consistent with existing literature documenting consumer demand for authentic inclusion across size, age, ethnicity, disability and gender identity (Estrina, 2021; Kaya, 2024). The second most cited priority —

fighting unrealistic beauty standards (26.2%) — indicates that consumers are acutely aware of the role digitally altered images play in distorting body image. The 18 percent who prioritised mental health awareness reflect a growing view that body positivity is a dimension of psychological wellbeing.

4.10 Purchase Behaviour Driven by Body Positivity Campaigns

Table 4.10: Purchase Decisions Influenced by Body-Positive Brand Messaging (n = 100)

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes — Purchased because of body positivity	41	41.0%
No — Did not purchase for this reason	59	59.0%
Total	100	100.0%

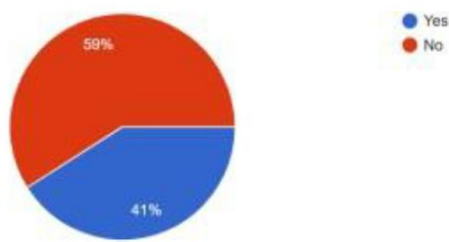


Figure 4.10: Purchase Influenced by Body Positivity Campaigns

Approximately 41 percent of respondents confirmed having made at least one purchase decision based on a brand's body positivity positioning. While 59 percent have not been converted in this way, the 41 percent figure is commercially substantial. The chi-square result ($p = 0.0000056$) demonstrates that awareness-building and sustained inclusive brand messaging are direct antecedents of consumer purchasing. Body positivity, when credibly executed, functions as a commercial driver, not merely a reputational one.

4.11 Influence of Body Positivity Campaigns on Appearance Confidence

Table 4.11: Self-Reported Influence of Body Positivity Campaigns on Confidence (n = 100)

Influence on Confidence	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes — Positively	75	75.4%
No Impact	25	24.6%
Yes — Negatively	0	0.0%
Total	100	100.0%

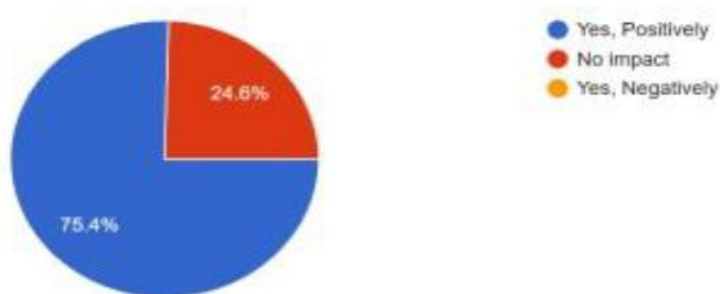


Figure 4.11: Impact of Body Positivity Campaigns on Appearance Confidence

The majority of respondents (75.4%) reported a positive effect on their confidence in their own appearance as a result of body positivity campaigns. Critically, not a single respondent reported a negative effect. This is a psychologically significant finding: it suggests that body-positive advertising functions as

an effective and benign wellbeing intervention, in stark contrast to conventional beauty advertising, which has documented negative self-esteem effects through upward social comparison (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

4.12 Emotional Connection to Brands Featuring Diverse Body Types

Table 4.12: Emotional Connection to Brands Representing Diverse Body Types (n = 100)

Level of Agreement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	46	45.9%
Agree	20	19.7%
Neutral	33	32.8%
Disagree	1	1.6%
Total	100	100.0%

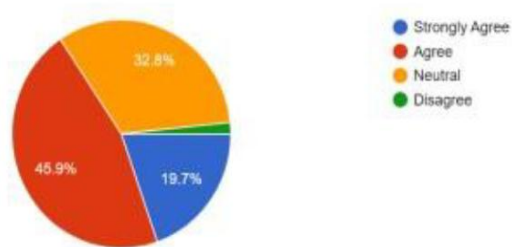


Figure 4.12: Emotional Connection to Brands with Diverse Representation

A combined 65.6 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel a stronger emotional connection to brands whose advertising features diverse body types. This finding has direct implications for brand loyalty strategy: emotional connection is a well-established precursor to repeat purchase, positive word-of-mouth and resistance to competitive switching (Gupta, 2019). The 32.8 percent who chose a neutral response may reflect respondents who hold inclusive values but have not yet consciously experienced the emotional resonance that diverse representation can generate.

4.13 Perceived Effectiveness in Challenging Beauty Standards

Table 4.13: Perceived Effectiveness of Campaigns in Challenging Beauty Standards (n = 100)

Effectiveness Rating	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	36	36.1%
Somewhat Effective	44	44.3%
Neutral	18	18.0%
Not Very Effective	2	1.6%
Not Effective at All	0	0.0%
Total	100	100.0%

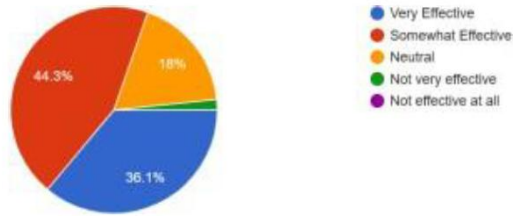


Figure 4.13: Effectiveness of Body Positivity Campaigns

A combined 80.4 percent of respondents viewed body positivity campaigns as at least ‘somewhat effective’ in challenging conventional beauty standards. No respondent considered them entirely ineffective. The 18 percent who adopted a neutral position likely recognise that while campaigns have shifted discourse, structural change in industry practices has not yet followed. Perceived effectiveness is closely tied to the consistency respondents observe between what brands say and what they demonstrably do.

4.14 Consumer Recommendation for Greater Brand Focus

Table 4.14: Consumer Recommendation for Brands to Invest More in Body Positivity (n = 100)

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes — Would Recommend Increased Focus	91	91.8%
No — Would Not Recommend	8	8.2%
Total	100	100.0%

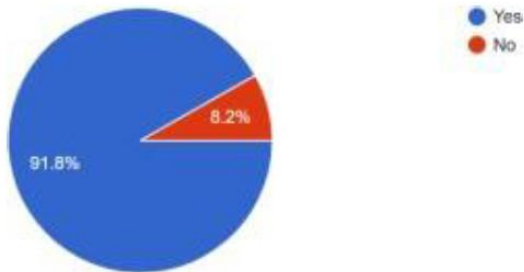


Figure 4.14: Recommendation for brands to focus more on body positivity

An emphatic 91.8 percent of respondents recommend that fashion and beauty brands increase their focus on body positivity in the future. This figure mirrors the awareness rate from Section 4.3, suggesting a coherent relationship between knowing about the movement and wanting brands to support it more actively. Together, these responses constitute a clear consumer mandate.

4.15 Consolidated Summary of Key Findings

Table 4.15: Consolidated Summary of Key Findings

Survey Item	Key Statistic	Principal Implication
Awareness of body positivity (Q3)	91.8% aware	Movement is mainstream; campaigns reach an informed audience
Brand familiarity level (Q5)	75.4% familiar	Solid awareness base; 24.6% remain a reachable gap
Familiarity → Purchase (H ₁ , Chi-Square)	p = 0.0000056 (significant)	Brand awareness directly drives purchase conversion
Importance of brand promotion (Q7)	83.6% rate it very/somewhat important	Inclusivity is a strong consumer expectation, not a niche preference

Survey Item	Key Statistic	Principal Implication
Brands genuinely care (Q8)	Only 16.4% believe brands are genuine	Severe authenticity deficit across the sector
Gender vs. motivation (H ₂ , Chi-Square)	$p = 0.191$ (not significant)	Scepticism is demographically uniform by gender
Age vs. motivation (H ₃ , Chi-Square)	$p = 0.921$ (not significant)	No age group is more or less trusting of brand intentions
Purchase influenced (Q10)	41% confirm purchase influence	Credible campaigns drive measurable sales outcomes
Campaigns boost confidence (Q11)	75.4% positive; 0% negative	Body-positive ads improve wellbeing with no observed harm
Emotional brand connection (Q12)	65.6% agree/strongly agree	Diverse representation is a loyalty driver
Perceived effectiveness (Q13)	80.4% rate campaigns as effective	Movement shifts discourse; structural change lags
Future focus recommended (Q14)	91.8% endorse a greater focus	Clear consumer mandate for sustained inclusive commitment

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Authenticity Paradox

The central finding of this study is the gap between what consumers value — a genuine, ongoing commitment to body diversity — and what they observe in brand behaviour. This ‘authenticity paradox’ is well supported by cause-related marketing research, which shows that consumer scepticism grows as the commercial benefit to the brand becomes more visible (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). The fact that scepticism does not vary significantly by gender ($p = 0.191$) or age group ($p = 0.921$) makes clear that this is not a niche grievance. It is a structural problem and the solution lies in changing what brands do rather than simply how they communicate.

5.2 Familiarity as a Bridge to Trust

The strong association between brand familiarity and purchase behaviour ($p = 0.0000056$) offers a constructive pathway for brands willing to make long-term investments in body positivity. Familiarity functions as a proxy for trust built through consistent,

credible messaging over time. Brands such as Aerie and Fenty Beauty, which have maintained inclusive positioning across multiple campaigns and product decisions, demonstrate that sustained authenticity generates consumer loyalty. For established brands, the transition requires clear and verifiable signals of organisational change — including ending retouching practices and expanding size ranges.

5.3 Body Positivity as a Wellbeing Intervention

The finding that 75.4 percent of respondents report greater confidence in their appearance after exposure to body positivity campaigns raises the stakes for brands in this space. When brand messaging contributes positively to self-esteem, it takes on social responsibilities that extend well beyond conventional marketing ethics. Conversely, superficial campaigns that celebrate diversity in advertising while maintaining exclusionary product practices may cause psychological harm by generating expectations the actual brand experience cannot meet.

5.4 The Intersectionality Gap

Open-ended responses repeatedly called for representation that goes well beyond size inclusivity. Respondents highlighted the absence of older adults, people with physical disabilities, individuals with visible skin conditions and those from non-Eurocentric beauty traditions. This aligns with the growing emphasis in academic literature on intersectionality, which recognises that body image experiences are shaped by the combined effects of gender, race, class, disability status and age (Kaya, 2024). Brands that equate body positivity solely with size inclusivity overlook both a significant dimension of the movement's meaning and a substantial portion of their potential market.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are directed at fashion and beauty brands seeking to engage with the body positivity movement in credible and sustainable ways. They are grounded in the findings of this study and in the broader body of scholarly literature.

6.1 Move from Representation to Organisational Integration

Inclusive advertising is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own. Brands must embed body diversity at every consumer touchpoint: product design, size range, packaging, in-store displays, customer service training and corporate communications. The gap between an inclusive campaign and a product line limited to standard sizes will continue to erode trust for as long as it persists.

6.2 Eliminate Deceptive Image Manipulation

Brands should make public commitments to transparent photo policies that prohibit the digital alteration of body shapes, skin texture or proportions. Elevating such commitments to an industry standard would reduce the normalisation of unattainable images and enhance the credibility of body-positive messaging across the sector as a whole.

6.3 Pursue Intersectional Representation

Casting decisions should reflect the genuine diversity of the consumer population, encompassing people of all ages, ethnicities, gender identities, disability statuses and body types. This requires assembling creative teams — including directors, photographers and art directors — who bring diverse lived perspectives to their work.

6.4 Partner with Mental Health and Advocacy Organisations

Collaborating with accredited mental health organisations gives brands the credibility to communicate body positivity messages with greater depth and conviction. Such partnerships signal that a brand's commitment extends beyond appearance to encompass the psychological wellbeing of its customers. Joint campaigns, community programmes and educational content offer vehicles for genuinely value-driven engagement.

6.5 Engage Consumers as Co-Creators

User-generated content campaigns that invite real customers to share their body-positive experiences produce authentic social proof that no professionally produced advertisement can replicate. Brands that amplify consumer voices — particularly from underrepresented communities — demonstrate the kind of respect that builds lasting trust and deepens emotional connection.

6.6 Sustain the Commitment Year-Round

Open-ended survey responses frequently criticised brands for engaging with body positivity only during specific campaign cycles or awareness months. A credible commitment should be evident across all seasons, product categories and markets. Brands should establish internal accountability mechanisms — including public reports on diversity and inclusion metrics — to ensure that their commitments remain verifiable rather than merely aspirational.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research examined the role of fashion and beauty brands in promoting body positivity and produced findings that are both encouraging and sobering. Consumers are not passive recipients of brand messages. They evaluate campaigns critically, distinguish genuine advocacy from profit-driven performance and make purchasing decisions accordingly.

The significant association between brand familiarity and purchase intent ($p = 0.0000056$) confirms that credible, sustained engagement with body positivity yields measurable commercial returns. At the same time, the fact that only 16.4 percent of respondents believe brands are genuinely motivated by the cause sends a clear signal: the industry has a great deal of work to do in building authentic trust.

The body positivity movement has already transformed the visual landscape of fashion and beauty advertising in ways that would have been difficult to imagine two decades ago. The growing visibility of diverse bodies on runways, in beauty campaigns and across social media has shifted public discourse in meaningful ways. But discourse alone does not produce structural change. As long as brands promote inclusive imagery while preserving exclusionary product lines, retouching practices and homogeneous creative teams, the gap between promise and practice will remain apparent — and consumers will continue to call it out.

The path forward is demanding, but it is clear: embed inclusivity into every dimension of the organisation, measure and publicly report progress, partner with communities and mental health experts and sustain commitment beyond seasonal campaigns. Brands that follow this path will not only advance the social goal of equitable beauty representation — they will also earn the consumer trust and loyalty that deliver lasting commercial advantage. Body positivity, executed with integrity, is not a trend. It is a strategic imperative for any brand that wants to be seen, valued and trusted by the full diversity of its consumers.

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