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INFLUENCER VERSUS BODY POSITIVE MARKETING: Perceived Brand Personalities in the Eye of the Target Consumer

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INFLUENCER VERSUS BODY POSITIVE MARKETING:
Perceived Brand Personalities in the Eye of the Target Consumer

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ABSTRACT

One of the biggest problems that marketers face on a day to day basis is understanding the ever-changing needs and preferences of the consumer groups that they hope to reach. Recently, we have seen that many firms that aim to target the female consumers of Generation Z have utilized two marketing techniques that differ completely. While some marketers aim to persuade consumers to mimic those that they admire and/or follow on social media (i.e., influencer marketing), others aim to make consumers feel as if the brand is accepting of all kinds of people even though they might not look the same (i.e., body positive marketing). The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived brand personalities that result from these two varying marketing methods. This study implements the Zaltman Metaphorical Elicitation Technique to uncover more about these perceived brand personalities. This is an extensive interview process that aims to discover the more latent thoughts of consumers through a series of complex questions. For this study, 12 females that belong to Generation Z were asked to participate in the interview process. Prior to their participation, each participant was asked to provide 8 photographs that describe their feelings and impressions of one randomly assigned brand. The selected brand was one that implemented one of the marketing techniques and belonged to one of three product categories. During the interview, the participants answered predetermined questions about the images that they provided for their brand. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine themes that occurred within the brands using each marketing method. This study generates important nuances about the different strategies (i.e., influencer marketing vs. body positive marketing) that are revealed by using the powerful, but underutilized ZMET research technique. The consumer perceptions revealed in this research differed greatly when comparing the results between the two strategies.

INTRODUCTION

When observing the marketing strategies of firms targeting the females of Generation Z, one may notice a pattern in the branding techniques that these firms are using to capture this target market. A large portion of these companies are leaning toward one of two approaches: body positive or influencer-based marketing. Body positive marketing might include campaigns such as “Aerie Real”, a campaign launched by the well-known lingerie retailer in which they began featuring completely unphotoshopped pictures of women of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds in their advertisements. The goal of this kind of advertisement is to lead the consumer to self-acceptance and confidence in themselves. In comparison, influencer-based campaigning leans in an entirely different direction. In the context of Generation Z, this refers to when a brand partners with individuals that this target market follows, and these individuals influence the purchase habits and brand perceptions of these young consumers. The success in this method ultimately stems from consumers wanting to possess various qualities of the influencer, which is what sets it apart from body positive campaigning. This method is demonstrated perfectly by Aerie’s main competitor, Victoria’s Secret. The Victoria’s Secret brand hand-selects women referred to as “Angels”, who are often supermodels that partner with the brand to promote their product. One can conclude that both Aerie and Victoria’s Secret are working to promote extremely similar products to the same target market but in ways that are practically opposites. In addition to these firms, this trend continues among many other brands and their competitors across different product categories. Considering these variations, I would ultimately like to investigate the following question: what are the brand personalities that underlay these two differing approaches in the eye of the target consumer?

In order to discover the answer to this question, I hope to use Zaltman's Metaphorical Elicitation Technique (ZMET). This is a qualitative research method developed by Gerald Zaltman to determine the metaphors that consumers rely on to frame the surrounding world. This method will help one to understand realistic perceptions that the target consumers create as a result of these techniques. This research will be conducted with a random selection of twelve female participants that belong to Generation Z, and each participant will be assigned a brand that has implemented one of these two strategies. The purpose of this research is to reveal the true impact on consumer perception that comes along with these marketing decisions. The results of this study will be valuable to brands aiming to reach members of this generation as they will be able to understand the deeper personalities that target consumers are associating with their brand names.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Importance of a Deeper Understanding

One of the most important aspects in the field of marketing is the understanding of consumers. This understanding entails looking at how these consumers differ and how these consumers continue to change over time. Marketers make meaningful decisions every day based on what they think to be an understanding of their target consumer group; however, how well do they really know these consumers? Most of the ongoing market research consists of using methods such as questionnaires, personal interviews, and group interviews, and each of these methods predominantly depends on deriving information from verbal communication (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994). Though this verbal communication is still extremely important to marketers, this does not account for the information that is embedded in nonverbal communication. While these lists of data do deliver value information to marketers, it often fails to address the more latent

thoughts that truly drive consumer decisions. According to Coulter and Zaltman (1994), the meaning that is embedded in any message consists of 93 percent nonverbal communication. If marketers hope to truly be effective in their efforts, it is important that they also are able to reveal the information hidden behind this nonverbal communication. Marketers can gain an understanding of this nonverbal communication by evaluating consumers' thoughts and metaphors.

Though we often express our thoughts verbally, they often appear as nonverbal images in our minds (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). These neural representations can range from visual to mathematical, and these images interpreted in our brain are to be translated into verbal descriptions. At this step, these thoughts are relocated to the part of the brain where decisions will be processed. If marketers can get consumers to demonstrate these images, it is a more accurate depiction of true consumer needs and preferences, as this sometimes gets lost in verbal translation (Zaltman, 1996). This deeper understanding will allow marketers to better cater to the preferences that are not revealed in plain sight.

Along with consumers' thoughts, this nonverbal communication can also be greatly understood through the use of metaphors. According to Gerald Zaltman (1996), "Metaphor, the representation of one thing in terms of another, is fundamental to thinking and knowing". By also continuously shaping and creating, these metaphors do more than just express existing thoughts that consumers already have. In every given minute of speech, consumers have been proven to use an average of six metaphors (Zaltman, 1996). Through the evaluation of metaphors, marketers can make more accurate decisions on how to develop goods as well as market them to their target consumers (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Essentially, these metaphors

play an essential role in a consumer's cognition, and it is important that marketers recognize this if they hope to truly understand the underlying feelings that their target consumers have.

The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique

It is evident that marketers must begin to make further research efforts to understand nonverbal communication, but how does one evaluate the deeper insights of a consumer group? The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, also known as ZMET, was designed by Gerald Zaltman to reveal those latent mental models that play a significant role in decisions and to define them with the use of metaphors in such a way that marketers can take action (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). While this method not only reaches an area of information that current market research fails to address, it also makes the decision-making process for marketers more clear in terms of an action plan.

The ZMET works to deliver crucial consumer information by taking a consumer group through a detailed interview process that ultimately reveals their deeper thoughts. In a typical ZMET study, researchers will select a group of consumers that represent the demographics of what they have identified as their target consumer group. Those that fall within a given criteria are invited to join in the study, and at this step, these participants are provided with a list of instructions (Coulter et al., 2001). These instructions will typically consist of a brand name that these participants have been assigned to work with as well as direction to gather photographs that demonstrate the meaning of their given brand in their own eyes (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994). In this instruction, it is stated that these images cannot contain images of the product itself, related products, or advertising efforts from the given brand (Coulter et al., 2001). This gives researchers an opportunity to truly dig into the more latent thoughts that these consumers have about their assigned brands. After formal consent to participate and the delivery of instructions, participants

are asked to schedule an interview within seven to ten days of receiving this information (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994).

The ZMET interview process has been noted to be different from a typical interview that one might see in research. Because consumers are asked to provide photographs for the process, this allows participants to have more control over the interview. According to Robin Coulter, Gerald Zaltman, and Keith Coulter (2001), “By controlling the stimuli, informants are better able to represent their thoughts and feelings and identify issues that are both important to them and potentially unknown to the researcher”. In this study, the interviewer will take the participant through a series of steps that keep the participants’ photographs at the center of conversation.

The first step of the interview process will focus on storytelling. At the beginning of the interview, the first question that the participants will be asked is to explain how the pictures that they have provided represent the impression that their assigned brand’s advertisement has had on them (Coulter et al., 2001). Stories play a significant role in the conversations that we have every day as well as the memories that we have from various instances in our lifetime. The goal of this part of the interview is to ultimately steer the participant to tell a story that might not only cover more obvious information but also information that researchers might not normally see.

The second step of the interview process focuses on missed images. In this step, participants are asked if there are any impressions that relate to their given brand’s advertising that they could not accurately represent through images, either due to an inability to find one or limitation of expression (Coulter et al., 2001). This step forces participants to think deeper than the images that they have provided, and it allows accounts for information that might have been left out due to the seven to ten-day time constraint to identify these images. If a participant can identify an

image idea that has not already been provided, this idea should be treated as if it is one of the given photographs and used throughout the rest of the interview process (Coulter et al., 2001).

In the third step, the Kelly Repertory Grid technique as well as the laddering technique are implemented. The interviewer will begin by picking three photos from the given selection, and the participant will be asked to identify how two of the three images are similar. After the participant has identified two similar photographs, the participant will be asked how those two selected images differ from the third image in that group (Coulter et al., 2001). As the participant begins to explain the connections between the images, the interviewer is likely to uncover information that represents the consumer's deeper thoughts and feelings.

Following the third step, the fourth step uses a few selected senses, whereas participants will describe how their brand's advertising makes them feel. These participants will be asked to describe their feelings of their given brand with one description of each of the following: taste, touch, smell, sound, color, and emotional feeling (Coulter et al., 2001). When marketers go through the decision-making process in regard to advertising, they often make efforts to activate these senses in order to better connect with the target consumer. This step gives true insight to the latent thoughts of the consumer, and it allows for comparison with the previous steps in order to pull common themes.

In the fifth step, participants are asked to take an approach that is similar to the storytelling step. Participants are asked to consider the impression that their assigned brand has had on them then create an idea for a short movie that would represent this impression. When referring to still images versus moving ones, a different area of the brain will take part. This step forces consumers to activate a different area of their brain that has not yet been used in this interview process; therefore, it is likely to reveal new perspectives (Coulter et al., 2001).

In the sixth and final step, the participant is tasked with creating a summary image. This in a sense will combine all of the photos that the participant has brought in, and the participant will pull certain elements from each in order to create one single photograph (Coulter et al., 2001). Once the image is complete, the participant will then describe to the interviewer what this photograph represents regarding the advertising of his or her assigned brand. This will help the researcher to understand the general thoughts and feelings that the participant has for his or her assigned brand.

Ultimately, through a unique interview process, researchers are able to reveal a different perspective from their target consumer group. Though this process does involve an extensive and detailed analysis, it provides a new insight to market research that will allow marketers to make better decisions regarding reaching their target consumer group.

The Battle of the Two Techniques

In today's advertising, marketers struggle with the decision of whether to use influencer-based marketing or body positive marketing to best reach Generation Z. The reality is that there are compelling arguments behind both sides as well as research that might sway marketers from using these methods. Despite the contradiction, marketers continue to implement these methods to capture this audience.

Influencer-based marketing is a popular choice for marketers due to the ability of these selected influencers to sway the purchase decisions of consumers. The goal of influencer marketing is to ultimately make the consumer want to be like the influencer, and this method has seen great success from some brands. For example, Revolve, a popular e-commerce company that has recently caught the eye of consumers, saw a 33.9% increase in their income after implementing an influencer marketing strategy, bringing their net income from \$7.1 million to

\$9.6 million just in the third quarter (Clark, 2019). In addition, in a study performed on the outcomes of digital influencer endorsement, research shows that if the consumer has a positive relationship with the influencer, the influencer's endorsement of the product will have an impact on the attractiveness in the eyes of the consumer (Torres et al., 2019). This influencer-based marketing clearly has an impact on the bottom line, but there have also been arguments that it might not be the most effective method. In a study by Amanda Bower and Stacy Landreth (2001), results show that having a highly attractive model only has a positive influence on sales if it is an attractiveness-relevant product. Since influencers take on the same role as these highly attractive models, it is probable that this influencer-based marketing might only be effective with certain brands.

On the other hand, body positive marketing is making a rise in the world of advertising. We are seeing more and more brands release campaigns with models of all shapes and sizes as well as unphotoshopped content. Marketers are finding that women hope to see real women in advertising currently more than they have ever before (Mamuric, 2019). An example of the success of this method of advertising is Dove's Real Beauty Sketches campaign. This advertisement, which focused on body positivity and bettering women's self-esteem, had over 65 million views on YouTube, and it was identified as the most viewed advertisement of all time (Hobbs, 2015). However, just as with influencer-based marketing, there has been research that demonstrates why this method might not always be effective. Results show that this method of marketing can be ineffective if other brands owned by the same firm are not implementing a similar strategy (Podoshen et al., 2016). Essentially, this leads consumers to believe that these efforts are not genuine therefore having a negative impact on the brand image.

Ultimately, both methods can have a positive and negative impact on given brands if not implemented correctly. With that being taken into consideration, that leaves us with one question: which of these methods portrays a more desirable brand personality to the target consumer group?

METHODOLOGY

Assumptions of Research

Regarding this study, it is important to note the assumptions and limitations that apply to this research. Firstly, it is assumed that all participant responses are truthful and have been explained to the best of their ability. This study also assumes that all participants have been exposed to a moderately similar amount of advertising efforts from the brands used in this research. It is assumed that the participant has a general knowledge of the brand that they have been assigned. Because no incentives were offered to participants, one may assume that these participants have a genuine interest in offering helpful feedback for the sake of research.

Limitations of this research might include the lack of expertise that is often used to analyze the qualitative data revealed with the Zaltman Metaphorical Elicitation Technique. Typically, a trained group of professionals with data analysis expertise would pull results from the given data, but this study is limited to the knowledge revealed through research about proper ZMET analysis techniques. Another limitation to this research would be the time limit of the study as the research was limited to what could be completed over the course of a single academic year to serve as a capstone project. Other limitations might include participant bias in addition to relevance of the data in relation to the sample size.

Participants and Sampling

This study consisted of a participant pool of 12 females that belong to Generation Z. Not only were these females a part of this generation, but they also all fell between the age range of 18 to 24 years old, meaning every participant classified as an adult. All participants were students at the University of Tennessee Knoxville that have been exposed to advertising efforts of the chosen brands. Participants were invited to participate in this study via email. Scheduling efforts and participation directions were communicated to participants after informal consent was given to participate in the study. No indirect contact methods were used to recruit participants for this study. Participants were not offered any incentive for their participation in this research.

Data Collection

In this study, a simplified version of the Zaltman Metaphorical Elicitation Technique was utilized to collect qualitative data relating to these consumers. Upon providing a statement of informal consent, each participant scheduled an interview session, which she was informed would last no longer than one hour. Upon scheduling, each participant was randomly assigned one of six brands. Each of the brands belonged to one of three product categories, apparel, personal care, or athletic, and has utilized one of the two selected marketing methods in the past year. Three of these brands predominantly utilize body positive marketing, which were Aerie, Nike, and Dove. The other three predominantly utilize influencer marketing, which were Adidas, Neutrogena, and Victoria's Secret. Two participants were assigned to each of the 6 brands. Participants were given directions on the preparation for the interview via email. The participants were asked to provide 8 photos via email that reminded them of their randomly assigned brand. These photos could not include any pictures of the products, similar products, or the randomly assigned brand's advertising. These photos were due via email no less than 24 hours prior to their

scheduled interview, and printed copies were provided during the interview. On the day of the interview, the participants were asked to sign the previously reviewed consent form to provide formal consent prior to the interview. Participants were informed that the information would be deidentified 48 hours after the interview, and each participant was asked to provide an alternate name to be used during analysis. Each of these interview sessions was recorded via audio for further analysis. During the interview, participants were asked to explain why they chose the photos that they did through a series of eight diverse questions.

The questions that were used to collect data were a modified version of the Zaltman Metaphorical Elicitation Technique, while each question was aimed to reveal the underlying thoughts of participants. The first question that each participant was asked was to describe how each selected image related to their impression of their assigned brand. The goal of this question was to get the participant to begin to tell stories about their mental association with the brand. This question was followed by the second question, which asked the participant if she had become aware of any images that she wished she had collected. This second question is of utmost importance as sometimes participants become aware of underlying ideas that they have missed as they begin to tell stories of their own experiences. The participant was then asked for the third question to sort their images into meaningful piles and provide a label and description for each pile. Question 4 asked the participants to randomly select three images and then indicate how any two of this group was different from the third. In question 5, the participant was then asked to randomly select one image, imagine that the frame of the image was widened, and then describe what else might enter the image. Next, in question 6, the participant was asked to describe the color, taste, smell, touch, and sound of her assigned brand. The purpose of questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 were for participants to verbalize some of their latent thoughts that might not be

obvious in initial communication. After this question, the second question asking about images that the participant wished she had collected was intentionally repeated to once again give the participant an opportunity to reveal thoughts they might have been unable to represent. Finally, the participant was asked to create a diagram of key concepts that describe her impression of the brand and then describe the relationship between the concepts. After 48 hours had passed, these interviews were transcribed and deidentified in order to be further analyzed.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis began by each interview being transcribed into a written format. This step was simply important in adding ease to the rest of the analysis process. Each written transcription of the interview was then scanned for both key themes and constructs. The goal was to simply identify the constructs that these participants used to describe their thoughts and feelings about their assigned brands. From these transcriptions, a group of metaphorical phrases were identified from each individual interview. After the identification of these phrases for a single participant, the phrases were given a category based off of theme. These labels were either exact quotes from the participants or were assigned. This was done for every one of the participants, where the information was then further analyzed. In the next step, the thematic categories of a brand were compared and compiled with the other participant's responses that had the same brand. This was done with every brand as each one had two participants assigned to it. Next, the thematic categories of the brands utilizing influencer marketing were compared and compiled, while the same was done with the brand utilizing body positive marketing. The thematic categories had to occur across at least 30% of the interviews in each marketing method group in order for it to be significant. Finally, deep metaphors were derived from this

compilation of information in order to deliver insight on the perceived brand personalities of brands using either technique.

Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study were exposed to extremely minimal risk in their participation, but precautionary measures were still taken to ensure the privacy of the participants. Participants were asked to provide both an informal statement of consent via email upon agreement to participate and to sign a formal consent form prior to the interview. Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to answer any question that they did not want to answer. Once formal consent was gained, all email communication was destroyed to protect the identity of these participants, and each one was assigned an alternative name that she will be referred to throughout the study. Participants were informed that their interviews would be audio recorded. They were informed that the data would be deidentified 48 hours after their individual interview; therefore, participants were aware that they had until then to withdraw from the study. With all these actions taken, this study could be classified as minimal risk to these participants.

RESULTS

After careful analysis, the significant themes that resulted across the influencer marketing-based brands were luxury, pressure, beauty, and insecurity. Although there are other factors that contribute to these perceptions, for the purpose of this study, we can assume that the implementation of influencer marketing methods has driven these brand personalities in the eyes of the consumer. This study shows us that the image of beauty that these brands have tried to create has made their consumers feel pressured to look a certain way and fostered insecurity in

themselves. However, this method has also created a perception of luxury in these consumers as they believe the products that these brands produce are not for just anyone.

On the other end of the spectrum, the significant themes that resulted across the body positive based brands were inclusivity, authenticity, self-care, empowerment, and joy. Every participant that was assigned one of these brands noted that their efforts were inclusive. The participants believe that these brands encompass inclusivity of women of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, and backgrounds. The second most common themes were empowerment and joy. These inclusive efforts make their consumers feel confident in who they are which leads to happiness in their own skin. Next, authenticity was a theme that occurred with half of the participants, as they felt that these brands portrayed a rawer image of femininity. Lastly, self-care was a common theme across these interviews. A few of the participants mentioned mental health and mindfulness in relation to this theme, which relates back to the raw-ness that these brands are portraying. This self-care aspect comes from these women being empowered in their true selves.

Brand 1: Aerie

PARTICIPANT ONE: JENNIFER

Construct Group Theme: JOY
“Smiling and laughing”
“Super positive”
“Enthusiasm”
“Bright and fun”
“Playful”

Construct Group Theme: CAREFREENESS
“Free Spirit”
“Carefree”

Construct Group Theme: AUTHENTICITY
“Very natural”
“Rawness”
“Bare and raw”
“It’s not hiding anything”
“Transparent”
“Organic”

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“They don’t just promote the brand; they promote the people”
“Body positivity”
“All races and sizes”
“Welcoming”
“Inclusivity”
“A diverse group of happy people”
“Very happy but obviously very different”

“People-centric”
“All different sizes, shapes, and ethnicities”

PARTICIPANT TWO: ANNIE

Construct Group Theme: EMPOWERMENT
“Self-love”
“Self-care”
“Being empowered”
“I feel very confident in myself”
“Makes me feel loved”
“Feel my best”
“Fierce”
“I can do anything in them”

Construct Group Theme: JOY
“Enthusiast”
“Upbeat”
“Erase that negativity”
“Very bright”
“Energized”

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“Body positivity”

“Different people with different body types and skin types”

Construct Group Theme: COMFORT

“Comfort”

“Cozy and warm”

Brand 2: Victoria’s Secret

PARTICIPANT THREE: HAILEY

Construct Group Theme: PRESSURE
--

“The models are always fit and in shape”
--

“Always wearing makeup”

“The models always take good care of their skin”
--

“The models maintain a healthy and active lifestyle”
--

Construct Group Theme: BEAUTY

“Fashion show”

“Beautiful”

“Sexy”

“Overall beauty aspect”

Construct Group Theme: MOTIVATION
--

“Empowered”

“Strong”

“Motivated”

PARTICIPANT FOUR: BRITTANY

Construct Group Theme: BEAUTY
“Makeup, hair, and sex appeal”
“A full figured lady”
“Big breasts, big butt, tiny waist”

Construct Group Theme: INSECURITY
“The wrong idea of body image”
“Gorgeous women that are completely unattainable”
“Issues with my body because of Victoria’s Secret”
“Women as they are supposed to be”
“Very small fraction of women look like that”
“Niche idea of what women should look like”
“It should be for all women”
“The body image stuff is unacceptable”
“Make girls think they have to look a certain way”
“To be appealing to men”

“I learned at a young age that people wanted that look”
“Foster a lot of that insecurity”
“Unrealistic expectations”
“Underrepresentation of women of different body types and ethnicities”

Construct Group Theme: PRESSURE
“The people I looked up to shopped there”
“She had it when I did not”

Construct Group Theme: LUXURY
“The height of luxury”
“It just smells like money”
“Wanted to be fancy and wanted luxury”
“Spend hundreds of dollars on their stuff”
“Silk, lace, and marble”
“Spoiled”

Brand 3: Dove**PARTICIPANT FIVE: SHELBY**

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“Love your body”
“Body positivity”
“Very inclusive”
“Not putting pressure on yourself to look a certain way”

Construct Group Theme: AUTHENTICITY
“They use real women”
“It’s more relatable”
“They don’t use models”

Construct Group Theme: SELF CARE
“Health and well-being”
“Mental health”
“Self-care”
“Treating yourself”

PARTICIPANT SIX: ISABEL

Construct Group Theme: AUTHENTICITY
“A girl that is not wearing makeup”
“Real beauty”
“Authentic and genuine”
“Natural beauty”
“Don’t try to pressure them to be something else”
“Be genuine; be yourself”

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“Beautiful in themselves”
“Women of different sizes and ethnicities”
“Body positivity”
“Very inclusive”

Construct Group Theme: EMPOWERMENT
“Encouraging women”
“Celebrate women”
“Women as they are”
“Female empowerment”
“Confident”

Construct Group Theme: JOY
“Happy”
“Kind of upbeat and joyful”
“Happy in their own skin”

Brand 4: Neutrogena**PARTICIPANT 7: KELSEY**

Construct Group Theme: INSECURITY
“I wish I looked as good as she did”
“A teenager with broken out skin”
“When I had breakouts and stuff”
“Adolescence”
“Being a teenager and being adolescent”

PARTICIPANT NUMBER 8: JENNA

Construct Group Theme: INSECURITY
“Don’t entirely work for me”
“Always have women whose faces are so soft”
“How they want themselves to be portrayed”
“She would be unhappy with the way she looks”
“Sad, upset, embarrassed”
“Claim to be very natural in their ads”

Brand 5: Adidas**PARTICIPANT NUMBER 9: HANNAH**

Construct Group Theme: EXCLUSIVITY
“Commercials and global events they sponsor”
“Sponsor a lot of athletes”
“Popular brand”
“Endorsement”
“Fashion staple”
“Very trendy”
“Renowned around the world”

PARTICIPANT 10: MARY

Construct Group Theme: LUXURY
“California lifestyle”
“Influencer vibe”
“Whole foods lifestyle”
“Los Angeles feel”
“Really dressed up”
“Like Kendall Jenner”
“I think of European”

Brand 6: Nike**PARTICIPANT 11: CLAIRE**

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“Body diversity”
“As in they’re not niche”
“Community aspect to their stuff”
“Stand up for certain causes and movements”
“Strive for diversity, equality, and opportunity”

Construct Group Theme: SELF CARE
“Health reputation”
“Prioritize health and pushing your body to the limits”

Construct Group Theme: EMPOWERMENT
“Nike is a daring brand”
“Bold and daring”
“Get up and grind, no days off”
“Toughness and edge to it”
“Strong”

PARTICIPANT 12: ARIANA

Construct Group Theme: EMPOWERMENT
“In a routine and being productive”
“Getting out of bed and getting things done”
“Personal goals”
“In the zone”
“Pushing your body toward the limits”
“To be confident and push yourself”
“Make you feel confident”

Construct Group Theme: SELF CARE
“I feel more at peace”
“Healthy and what that means for your body”
“Physical mindfulness and spiritual”
“Balance and health”

Construct Group Theme: JOY
“Your day looks brighter”
“Everything looks better in life”
“Seeing brighter days”
“Noticing the little things in life”

Construct Group Theme: INCLUSIVITY
“Diverse ad campaigns”
“Represent so many social issues”

CONCLUSIONS

THEMES OF INFLUENCER MARKETING BRANDS

After careful analysis, the significant themes that resulted across the influencer marketing-based brands were luxury, pressure, beauty, and insecurity. Although there are other factors that contribute to these perceptions, for the purpose of this study, we can assume that the implementation of influencer marketing methods has driven these brand personalities in the eyes of the consumer. This study shows us that the image of beauty that these brands have tried to create has made their consumers feel pressured to look a certain way and fostered insecurity in themselves. It is important to note that 50% of the participants assigned to influencer-marketing brands revealed feelings of insecurity during their interviews while 33% revealed that they felt pressure from these brands. Both perceptions have strong negative connotations, which gives insight to the effectiveness of this strategy. However, this method has also created a perception of luxury in these consumers as they believe the products that these brands produce are not for just anyone. This perception of luxury also resulted in 33% of the participants assigned brands that use influencer-marketing techniques. This perception ties in with the idea of exclusivity that occurred amongst 16% of participants. While the idea of luxury has a positive connotation when it solely occurs, it seems to have a more negative connotation when considering its relation to the occurrence of exclusivity. In addition, 33% of these participants had a perception of beauty from these brands. When looking at the specific quotes of the participants listed above, it seems as if this beauty perception is one of glamour, whereas the participants mentioned sex appeal and full

faces of makeup. When tying this construct in with the others listed, it seems to also have a negative connotation, as the participants seem to feel pressured to meet this beauty standard upheld by these brands.

BRAND	PARTICIPANT	THEMATIC CATEGORIES
ADIDAS	Hannah	Exclusivity
ADIDAS	Mary	Luxury
VICTORIA'S SECRET	Hailey	Pressure, Beauty, Motivation
VICTORIA'S SECRET	Brittany	Beauty, Insecurity, Pressure, Luxury
NEUTROGENA	Kelsey	Insecurity
NEUTROGENA	Jenna	Insecurity

THEME	PERCENT OF OCCURRENCE
Exclusivity	16%
Luxury	33%
Pressure	33%
Beauty	33%
Motivation	16%
Insecurity	50%

THEMES OF BODY POSITIVE MARKETING BRANDS

On the other end of the spectrum, the significant themes that resulted across the body positive based brands were inclusivity, authenticity, self-care, empowerment, and joy. Every participant that was assigned one of these brands noted that their efforts were inclusive. The participants believe that these brands encompass inclusivity of women of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, and

backgrounds. This theme has a very positive connotation as consumers always want to feel as if they have proper representation in advertising and media. The second most common themes were empowerment and joy. Empowerment occurred across 66% of the participants assigned body positive brands, while joy occurred across 66% of these participants as well. These inclusive efforts make their consumers feel confident in who they are which leads to happiness in their own skin. It is apparent that both empowerment and joy are themes that have a positive connotation. Next, authenticity was a theme that occurred with half of the participants, as they felt that these brands portrayed a rawer image of femininity. This theme has a positive connotation, as participants mentioned not feeling pressured to look a certain way. Lastly, self-care was a common theme across these interviews as it occurred amongst 50% of these participants. A few of the participants mentioned mental health and mindfulness in relation to this theme. This self-care aspect comes from these women being empowered in their true selves; therefore, this theme has a positive connotation as well.

BRAND	PARTICIPANT	THEMATIC CATEGORIES
DOVE	Shelby	Inclusivity, Authenticity, Self-Care
DOVE	Isabel	Empowerment, Joy, Authenticity, Inclusivity
AERIE	Jennifer	Joy, Carefreeness, Authenticity, Inclusivity
AERIE	Annie	Empowerment, Joy, Inclusivity, Comfort
NIKE	Claire	Empowerment, Self-Care, Inclusivity
NIKE	Ariana	Empowerment, Self-Care, Joy, Inclusivity

THEME	PERCENT OF OCCURRENCE
Inclusivity	100%
Authenticity	50%
Self-Care	50%
Empowerment	66%
Joy	66%
Carefreeness	16%
Comfort	16%

Ultimately, there is a significant difference in the perceptions that come from using these two differing methods. This research not only reveals key insights about the female Generation Z consumer group, but it paves the way for future marketers in their decisions when developing campaigns for this target group. Based on the results of this study, my recommendation would be to move forward with body positive methods. These themes that were revealed amongst consumer perceptions in relation to the influencer-marketing brands had an overall more negative connotation as participants mentioned feelings of insecurity, pressure, and unattainable beauty standards; whereas with the body positive brands, participants mentioned feelings of empowerment, inclusivity, joy, and authenticity. All the underlying themes that occurred from the use of this method had a very positive connotation, while the same cannot be said about themes that developed from influencer marketing methods. In conclusion, as marketers move forward with this strategic decision-making, it is important for them to consider the benefits and consequences of each of these methods. When taking this study into consideration, I ultimately would recommend to marketers to move forward with body positive methods to better capture the females of Generation Z.

Moving forward with this study, I would like to expand across the product categories that are involved in this study to get a better insight of what these methods mean in different industries. In addition, in future research, I would like to dive into the direct impact that these methods have on a company's bottom line. Because this topic is relatively new to the world of marketing, there is so much yet to be explored about the impacts of body positive and influencer marketing.

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