



DOES BODY IMAGE MATTER IN MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS?

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Abstract

Over the years marketing campaigns have used traditional models representing a limited body image to attract consumers and influence purchasing decisions. However, marketers today are faced with the task of marketing to a new demographic segment called millennials. Body image is a topic that is brought up in the media along with marketing campaigns. In order to explore how body image effects how millennials make decisions regarding purchasing it is important to gather opinions from millennials through conducting a survey, researching the effects of past and present marketing campaigns, and looking at why millennials are different from past generations. When given a survey over 50% of millennials stated that body image was important to them. There are also a variety of brands including L'Oréal, Lane Bryant, and others that have shifted to including a more diverse set of models. Many also stated that they wished to see more diversity in marketing campaigns. With body image being important today amongst millennials it is important for marketers to take into consideration these behaviors. Marketers should incorporate diversity and focus on improving body image with their marketing campaigns.

Introduction

In an Instagramming, Snapchatting, and Facebooking world there are many factors that can arise in society. From political issues to personal problems such as lifestyles and negative body positivity. The issue of body image is a concern due to the high-tech society that we live in and experience. Consumer behavior is another changing aspect in our society and world. With the rise of a new group of consumers called millennials. Millennials have access to a world of social issues with their connectivity on social media platforms. Due to this fact they are becoming the focus of market research and analysis because they are the future generation of consumers. Not only are they a new generation of consumers but they will have a lasting impact

on future consumers. Millennials are more focused on experience and the digital age making them vulnerable to the impact that body image has on their lives. Body image involves a variety of factors from size to gender to self-esteem. It also has been a current topic with businesses adding more diverse models into their advertisements and marketing strategies. There has also been a rise of body positivity influencers on social media and in pop culture. It is important for marketers to explore how they can reach more millennials by adding in positive body image aspect to their marketing campaigns. This paper is going to explore how there is a connection between millennials and body image, along with how marketers can better serve the interests of millennials through adding more diversity into their marketing campaigns.

Millennials

In a changing world filled with consumers of all ages, races, genders, origins, and other varying demographics it is important to consider newer generations that are emerging. Demographics are characteristics about consumers that help to segment them into groups by backgrounds and interests. Segmenting demographics helps to target existing and potential consumers that can be reached. By understanding these demographics, it is a vital tool for marketers to determine how to target new audiences and gain new consumers. One of these generations is the Millennial generation or generation Y. Those born in this generation are born after 1980 up to the early 2000s. According to the Business dictionary “Many parents of this generation were "Baby Boomers," thus making it the largest generation since the boomers.” (Business Dictionary, 2018).

Marketing to millennials is an important task because they make up a large part of the population. According to an article by Neil Patal “Millennials make up 25% of the United States population” (Patal, 2017). This means that millennials are an ideal target market because

there is potential to gain more market share for businesses. It also means that they are a prime audience to appeal to and to study for consumer behavior purposes. It is also estimated that by 2020 millennial spending power will reach \$1 trillion dollars and they will cover 30% of retail sales (Gray, 2015). Millennials are a newer generation that will also influence future generations as they raise families and instill values, beliefs, and other consumer behavior factors into the future generations. Millennials are also considered to be well educated with “one-third of older millennials having earned at least a 4-year college degree” (Patal, 2017). Being well educated can lead to better jobs which then can lead to increased ability to purchase products and services. This also shows that millennials like to be informed and make solid purchasing decisions. Millennials are also very experience and cause driven consumers. They are more likely to buy products or services that have some kind of cause support associated with them such as part of their proceeds going towards clean water in emerging countries or towards organizations that help with social causes.

Millennials have grown up in a highly technology-based society. Millennials are considered to be “plugged-in and synced across their devices” (Ehlers, 2017). They are a tech driven generation that relies on social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter for information about various aspects of life. With these platforms comes the use of images to express feelings, celebrations, goals, and other life events. Social media platforms can also be used as tools to market to millennials it can be considered “the heartbeat of marketing to millennials” (Ehlers, 2017). There is an increase in concern with body image and with creating filtered or altered photos. Increases in social media also contribute to new platforms that marketers can use to introduce and intrigue millennials with products and services. Social media can have an impact on how millennials make decisions, “34% of Millennials say that social

media helps them make a purchase decision”(Patal, 2017). In this social world it is important to design social media campaigns that attract millennials to a company’s products and services. It is also a good idea to move from traditional marketing media such as printed advertisements to more digital media. It is also beneficial to make a positive impact on millennials with positive reviews and posts on social media platforms because they help with millennial decision making.

Body Image

Body image is a large topic that does not just cover body size or shape. The definition of body image is how one sees themselves in their own bodies, whether it is in the mirror or other ways. It encompasses a variety of factors including age, gender, size, and other factors involving image and how people appear to others. Fashion, beauty, and fitness are other factors involved with body image. Body image has an internal effect and external effect on people. Internally it can either lead to empowerment or negative consequences such as mental negativity. Externally it deals with the physical appearance of the person. People can alter themselves externally to reach their ideal body image or at least one that they see as fitting in with society standards and ideals. In a media driven society media can also have an impact on body image and how one sees themselves compared to others. Seeing actors, actresses, or models in the media can lead to issues with body image. According to an article by Live Life Get Active “The media is a powerful tool that reinforces cultural beliefs and values, and while it may not be fully responsible for determining the standards for physical attractiveness, it makes escaping the barrage of images and attitudes almost impossible” (Live Life Get Active, 2016). This make it vital to emphasize body positivity in today’s society so that it does not lead to negative body image which can lead to extreme dieting, exercise compulsion, eating disorders, plastic surgery, and steroid use, and other negative consequences. Sadly about 20 million women and 10 million men in the United

States suffer from eating disorders because they let negative body images and standards dictate how they feel about their own body image (Layne, 2016). Body positivity comes with learning that not everyone is a size 0 and the value in the body and size that a person has. It also involves learning what a healthy body is and that physical appearance is not all that makes up who a person is. In our society there is also a false perception that being fat or over weight means a person is lazy and does not eat healthy, however there are many reasons a person can be overweight. This brings I the statement that people should not judge books by their covers. Body image is an issue in our society because it is shaped by social norms and constructs.

Millennials and Body Image

One might wonder how body image has anything to do with millennials? As previously discussed millennials are highly influenced by media especially social media because they have grown up in a technology driven society. They are also a consumer group that has to make decisions based off of cultural and societal norms that they are exposed to through the media and their lifestyles. Whether millennials know it or not they have some impact from body image. According to an article by HR News, “Young women are seven times more likely to worry about their figure than their career” and “one in four millennials state they care more about their body image than career” (HR News, 2017). The same study also showed that “More specifically, 42 percent say they would take the cut for a flat and/or toned stomach, while 27 percent would trade some salary for a thigh gap” (Caldwell, 2017). This is a significant impact that body image has on the lives of millennials. Not only does it affect their decisions about job advancement, but it has a farther-reaching effect on the financial stability of these millennials. Body image to one in four millennials could lead them to quit jobs, take jobs that they feel fit their body image more, and be self-conscious in the workplace. This also shows that millennials do care about body

image and how other see themselves. There is a photographer by the name of Teri Hofford whose clients consist of mainly millennials for her boudoir photoshoots. These photo shoots are meant to help millennials love and accept their body images.

Millennials are exposed to many different influences in our society. From negativity from social media followers about posts that they do not accept to positive feedback in the same context. There are also all of the new diets and fads that are posted or talked about on media. It creates a pressure on millennials to look their best and to do anything that they have to do to look that way. It puts stress on body image and body positivity. Some college campuses that host mostly millennial student, have groups or organizations that focus on body positivity. On the University of Wyoming campus for example there is the Real Women Real Bodies group that focuses on accepting one's body and embracing flaws. It also provides some education on body positivity. Marketing campaigns have also been starting to change due to millennial interests. "And for millennials raised on the internet, having a diversity of different types of bodies in the spotlight is a boon for general body positivity" (Thorpe, 2018). This goes to show that marketer have noticed that millennials are affected by body image and are making changes to accommodate this consumer group.

Body Image and Marketing

Recently, there has been a surge in campaigns focused on body image and diversity. More diverse models of all body images have been added into advertisements and marketing campaigns. Some brands that have focused on body image in the past are Dove and Lane Bryant. Lane Bryant has ended photoshopping giving their consumers the chance to view models with stretchmarks, cellulite, and other body features. Lane Bryant also carries a clothing line that caters to larger body types and sizes. Dove has launched advertisements and campaigns to

promote body positivity and the use of more real and diverse models. In 2004 they launched one of the first campaigns that featured un-photoshopped models of all body images and sizes. This campaign was called the “Real Beauty” campaign. Some of their more recent campaigns however have not been very successful due to poor placement of models in their campaigns but they have caused people to notice the use of different models. In the spring of 2014 one of American Eagle’s sub brands Aerie launched the “Aerie Real” campaign featuring a larger lingerie line and plus size models in their advertising. Director of the SJSU Gender Equity Center, Bonnie Sugiyama states that “Millennials are much more aware of how marketing and manipulation work and all this B.S that people are told to be one way or not another way,” and “I think this generation is really looking at being themselves” (Franco, 2016). This shows that marketing has an impact in millennial decision making and that a change from traditional marketing with limited models and body image is occurring. Also, millennials are “the largest generation in the U.S. labor workforce, according to Pew Research Center” (Franco, 2016). This means that they are a huge part of business planning including planning marketing strategies for companies and businesses.

Body image in marketing doesn’t only affect women but also men. There have been some cosmetic campaigns that have recently featured male models in their campaigns. Body image is not restricted to any type of person it encompasses a variety. Male consumers are a unique demographic with the fact that most people associate body positivity with female models in advertising campaigns, but male consumers can also be affected. “Men, too, can be sensitive to idealized images of young, healthy (and often muscular) males used in marketing campaigns” (Gatrell, 2015). As marketers it is important to take into account all the demographics in a target audience in order to develop campaigns that lead to purchasing.

Breaking from normal and traditional marketing can also cause a rush of consumers buying products of magazines that feature “real” models in them and advertisements. An example of this happening is “when fashion label Rum and Coke launched a campaign featuring ‘larger’ black women, consumers of all sizes rushed to buy its products” (Gatrell, 2015). The sense of rebellion, newness, and different can often attract consumers instead of detracting them. In this case the consumers saw something different in the advertisement which then created a sense of intrigue that sent them to purchase these products.

There is also a social responsibility when using body image especially positive body image in creating marketing content. It shows consumers that a business actually cares and that they are trying to change negative connotations towards body image into positive ones. With body image have an impact on consumers both in an internal and external sense it is important to highlight acceptance, beauty, and a positive outlook on body standards and image. Using advertisements that break free from the traditional industry approaches can even be said that “The use of ‘ordinary’ models might make a real difference to enhancing positive self-image and healthy behaviors among consumers and workers alike” (Gatrell, 2015). This can lead to positive response from these consumers by having “such an approach – challenging the stereotypical industry view about body image and appearance – might just improve the bottom line” (Gatrell, 2015). There is an overall benefit not just to consumer by breaking from tradition but also to the businesses profitability and reputation.

There has recently been pushes and changes from brands, models, and other social influencers on promoting body positivity and diversity. One example is that some advertisements are featuring untouched models. This means that they have not been photoshopped and cropped down to the point where natural body features are eliminated. Another trend is brands such as

Revlon and Pantene using multiple models of different body types in their ads and not just one standard model. On social media there has also been an increasing amount of body positivity influencers who post frequently about body image issues and who fuse words to downplay negative comments about their posts. One of these influencers is Ashley Graham, a plus size model who has been breaking barriers in the modeling world. She has been featured as a judge on America's Next Top Model, released her own clothing lines that embrace curves and all body types, been featured in Sports Illustrated, and in different advertisements. She has a strong Instagram and social media presence as well. Another body positivity influencer is Tess Holiday, a plus sized model who has written her own book about overcoming negative body image issues, has modeled for clothing brands in fashion week shows, and has developed a hashtag called #effyourbeauty standards. There are many other body positivity and beauty influencers that have been make leaps and strides in social media platforms as they show people how to embrace their flaws and overcome traditional body standards. A few other names to mention can be Jefferey Star, Manny Mau, Hunter McGrady, Diana Sirokai, and so many more. Another trend is male beauty influencers such as Jefferey Star, Manny Mau, James Charles, and other who are breaking the stereotype that cosmetics and makeup are only for women to wear. They post funny and intrigue video critiques of different beauty brands and whether or not they get a seal of approval. For Ashley Graham she has been noted for "the confidence she exuded on and off the runway, inspiring many young females that they were beautiful just as they were: (Layne, 2016). She like many influencers have been criticized for their body image and if they have had any changes in that image during the years. They have overcome the negativity with releasing statements about being happy, healthy, confident, and proud of who there are no matter what changes in their appearances. These influencers also include unique hashtags for followers to use that promote

body positivity or embracing flaws and body image features. Some examples of these hashtags are #HonorMyCurves, #CelebrateMySize, #ImNoAngel, and much more. These hashtags have broken out on the internet and generate thousands of followers. A final example to use is a recent movie that was released here in 2018 called “I Feel Pretty”. This movie features popular comedic actress Amy Schumer. It covers a woman who is self-conscious about her body image and tries everything from exercise to YouTube videos to try to enhance her body image. She ends up with a head injury that helps her to view herself as pretty and become more confident in her body to the point where she does not let anyone get her down and applies to her dream job. In the end she has another head injury that sends her back into her old self-conscious ways, but she realizes that her personality is more powerful than her beauty and there is a happy ending. This movie illustrates the struggle that many women go through when they are self-conscious about their body image but also shows that what matters is what is on the inside and not what is on the outside. Some countries and cities such as London have banned the use of advertisements that promote negative body images. There are also some places that have banned underweight models used in runway shows and ads for clothing brands. Keith Weeds a chief marketing officer with Unilever has also made that comment that “The time is right for us as an industry to challenge and change how we portray gender in our advertising” (Cooper, 2016). This shows that even corporations have shifted their traditional marketing approaches to trying to make their campaigns more inclusive to all aspects of body image. Social media, movies, tv advertisements, and print ads can all have an impact on how one views their body image. However, with the new changes and movements in marketing campaigns and the media are steps toward embracing body positivity.

Survey Results

Market research can be a helpful tool in gathering data about consumer groups in the market. For this project a survey was conducted to a group of 79 University of Wyoming students on their opinions on body image, purchase decision making and body image, and what they would like to see changed in marketing campaigns. These students ranged from 19 years old to 36 years old in age which is the common age range for millennials. They were primarily business undergraduate students in an Introduction to Marketing class. In the group there were 48 male respondents, 29 female respondents, and 2 who preferred not to answer. The class standings of the respondents were 1 freshman, 30 sophomores, 33 juniors, and 15 seniors. These respondents came from Wyoming, Colorado, other states in the United States, and a few from countries outside of the United States. The appendix contains Figures 1-9, that illustrate responses to the different questions in the survey.

The results from the survey reflected that most respondents were concerned about body image however it was pretty neutral on how body image affected purchase decision making. When asked how important body image was to the group 55% responded with important and 15% with very important. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

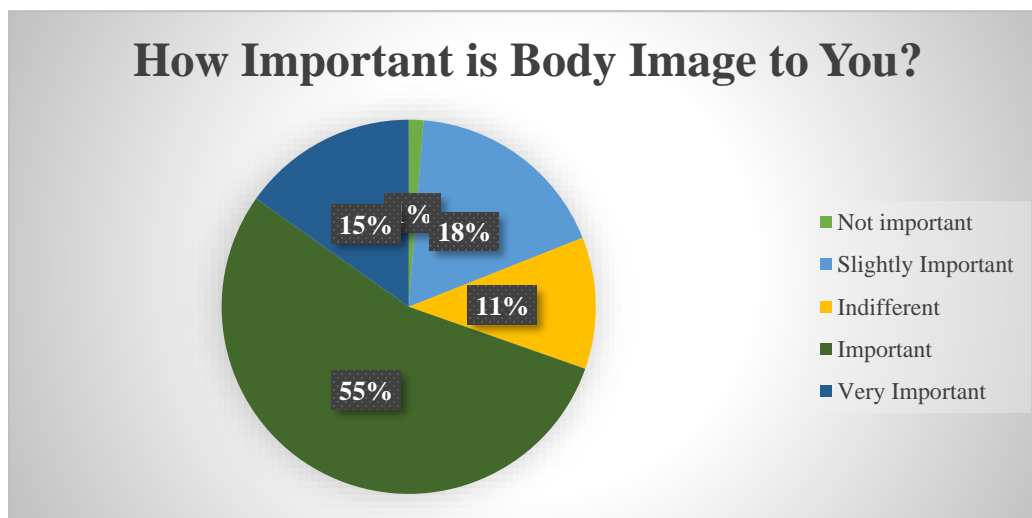


Figure 1

This reflects that body image is a concern in this millennial group and that they think that body image is an important consideration in their lives. This is also an interesting statistic because over half of the survey respondents where therefore it shows that male millennials view body image as important or very important. Another survey finding is that ironically when asked how important social media is in influencing purchasing decisions only 22% of respondents responded with important and 1% responded with very important. There was 29% who responded with slightly important. This is an interesting break down because millennials are considered to be technology “saavy” and social media connected individuals. The percentages still illustrate that there is some influence from social media on the respondents. The Figure 4 below illustrates these percentages.

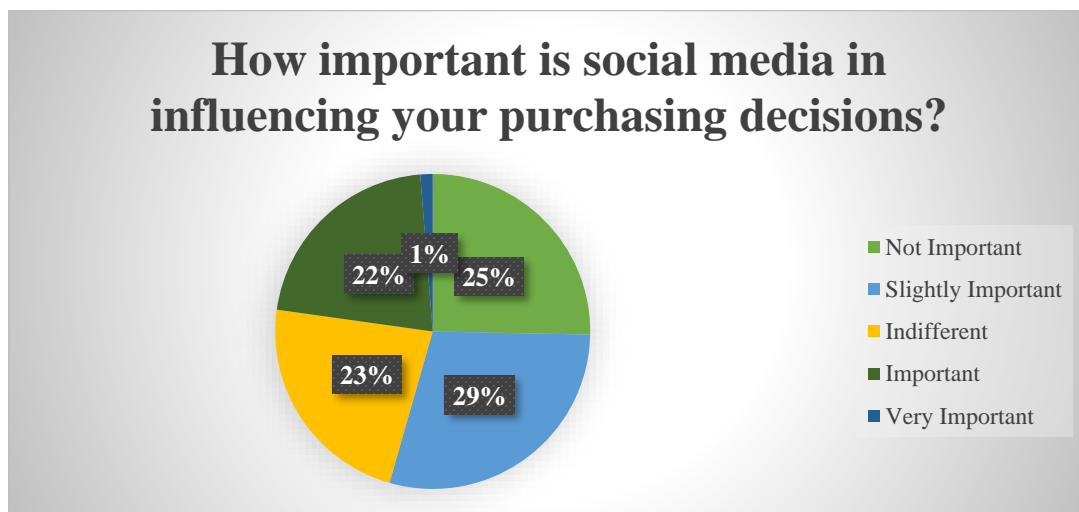


Figure 4

When asked the question “How often do you compare your body image to others?” respondents responded the most with 63% stating that they occasionally compare their body image to others. There were 13% who responded that they compare their body image to others all of the time. This shows that the respondents do feel conscious about their body image when it compares to other. It also suggests that they want to be accepted among peers. Creating

marketing campaigns that feature a variety of models can make them look more inclusive and help the issue that these millennials compare their body image to others at least occasionally.

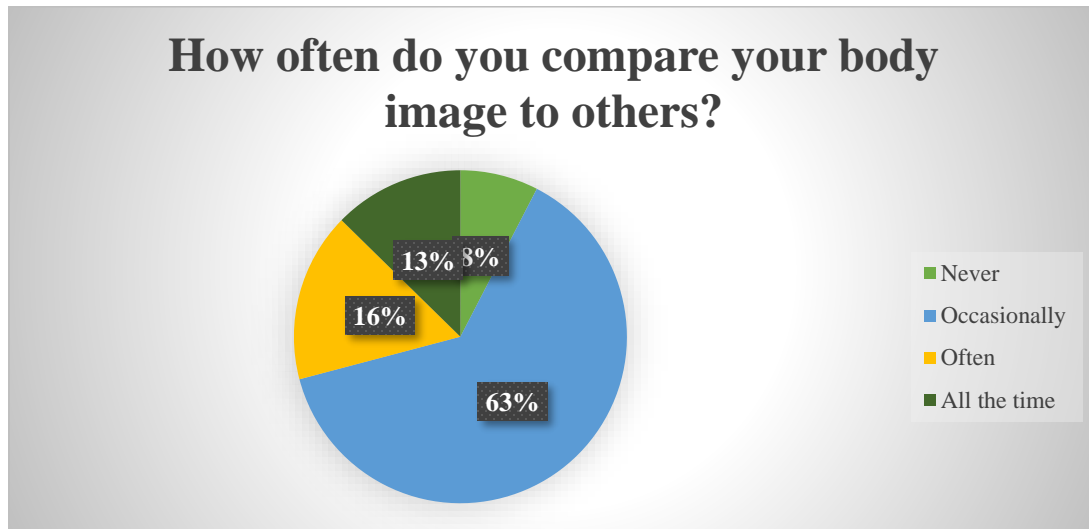


Figure 6

These are some of the figures and statistics that show that body image is a factor in the lives of these millennials. The other figures featured in the appendix illustrate more neutral or indifferent opinions on how purchasing connects with body image and the use of more diverse models. It was interesting discovering that some respondents were very opinionated about body image when it came to themselves but were indifferent or neutral when it came to the use of body image in marketing campaigns and purchasing decisions. This shows that body image is an issue but not as big of an issue in purchase decision making as it could have been.

One section of the survey featured a qualitative written response to the question “In marketing campaigns what would you like to see changed regarding models used?”. The majority of the responses featured a statement about adding everyday models or more diverse models into marketing campaigns. Below are some significant statements regarding the use of more diverse models in marketing campaigns featuring the respondents' gender, age and class standing.

- “I would like to see more diverse models who look like everyone else.” (Female, Age 20, Senior)
- “Models should represent all races genuinely.” (Male, Age 20, Junior)
- “Stop trying to use extremely skinny female models. And stop using buff male models. People don’t look like that, especially when the models are photoshopped further to look “perfect”.” (Male, Age 20, Junior)
- “More life like. “ (Male, Age 19, Junior)
- “More realistic people” (Male, Age 21, Junior)
- “I think using non-celebrities and normal body types are good” (Male, Age 21, Junior)
- “Plus-sized models would be a good addition because it would allow certain people to feel represented. This should be encouraged in all aspects: race, religion, LGBTQ, etc.” (Male, Age 19, Sophomore)
- “I do not have much of a preference. Honestly I feel drawn to more attractive models because I want to look more like them, but I like the social campaigns of normal people as models.” (Female, Age 19, Sophomore)
- “I think campaigns like Aerie are going in the right direction with variety.” (Female, Age 20, Sophomore)
- “more diversity, since not everyone fits one mold” (Male, Age 22, Junior)
- “Healthy looking people rather than malnourished” (Male, Age 21, Junior)
- “More inclusive model types” (Female, Age 20, Sophomore)

- “More of a variety of models- every race, ethnicity, body size/shape, etc.” (Female, Age 20, Sophomore)

These are only a few of the responses that pertain to adding more diversity, inclusivity, and everyday models to marketing campaigns. There were some responses about indifference or that there is no impact on model use in marketing campaigns. There was also a few discouraging the use of plus size models because they are viewed as unhealthy and promoting unhealthy lifestyles. It was also interesting that the majority go the comments on diversity and changes came from a more male demographic group because typically there is a stereotype that males prefer the sexier models used in campaigns. It is a significant finding because it illustrates that both male and females care about changes in marketing campaigns with models used. Overall though most respondents pushed for more diversity in marketing campaigns which reflects that change is a recognized concept in today’s society. It also reflects that this millennial survey group cares about what is featured in their marketing campaigns.

Future in Marketing/Conclusion

In a world that is constantly changing it is important to acknowledge trends and patterns that are occurring. Millennials are the future with marketing. They are a diverse group but will ultimately cause decision to be made that affect the future generations. These future generations are the future consumers that will need to be analyzed a targeted by businesses for profitability and consumer interest. In order to help attract these future generations it is vital to gain consumer interest with the millennial generation. One of the major issues in the millennial generation is their acceptance and perceptions of body image. Body image is a problem and everyone at one point in their lives are faced with. Educating the world to accept a diverse array of body images is a message that is communicated through the use of marketing.

The future of marketing is always changing, just like marketing is always changing to cater to new demographics and psychographics. However, marketers should take into consideration the affects their campaigns have on millennials. It is also important to add in a more diverse variety of models for their marketing campaigns. This diversity needs to come in the form of using less photoshopping, adding in more everyday models, using an array of genders, and using models that more people can relate to. Some additions can be having multiple models of different body images in an advertisement or commercial, using more male models in cosmetic ads, using more older women in clothing and cosmetic campaigns, and using the social media influencers that millennials follow in ads. Using these different models and representatives is important for brands to show young men and women that it is alright to be different and that everyone is unique in their own ways. Another way to help promote body positivity is to use some of the hashtags related to body image in current campaigns to show a more social movement push towards a better representation of body images and body positivity in the different industries that use them. It also helps to promote body positivity and works towards reducing negative consequences that are associated with negative body image. This will also help to add in an awareness of the issue at hand and promote living healthier mental and physical lifestyles.

Body image will always be a topic that society will struggle with, but with the help of marketers changing their marketing and advertising campaigns to portray a more inclusive and diverse subject group, it will help alleviate this problem and show other that everyone is beautiful in their own ways. To leave off in the words of Maya Angelou, “If you are always trying to be normal you will never know how amazing you are.”

Appendix

Figure 1

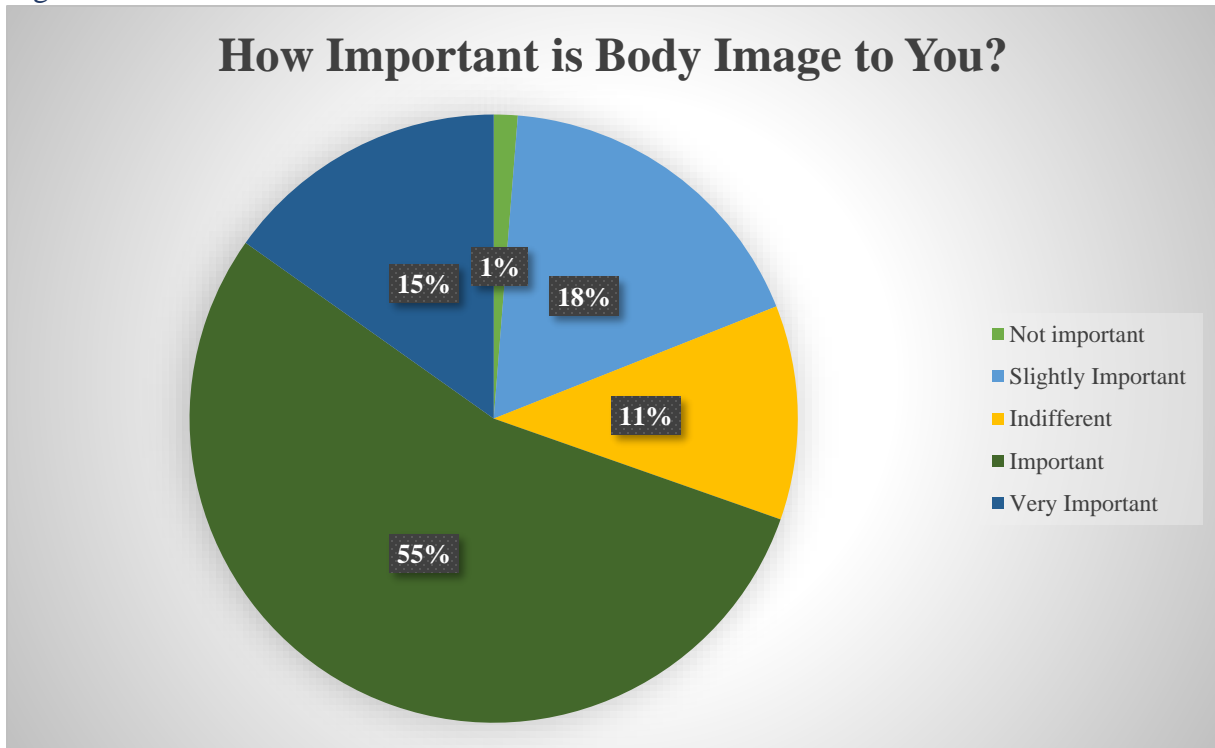


Figure 2

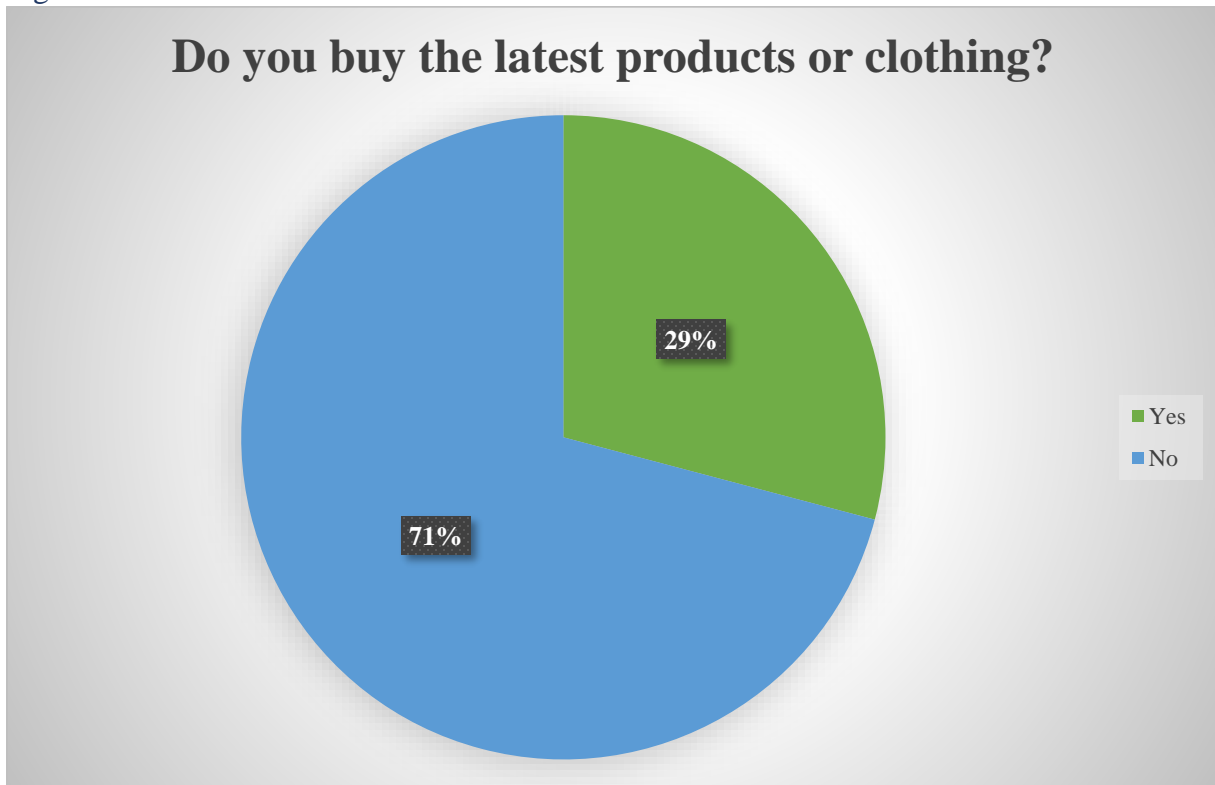


Figure 3

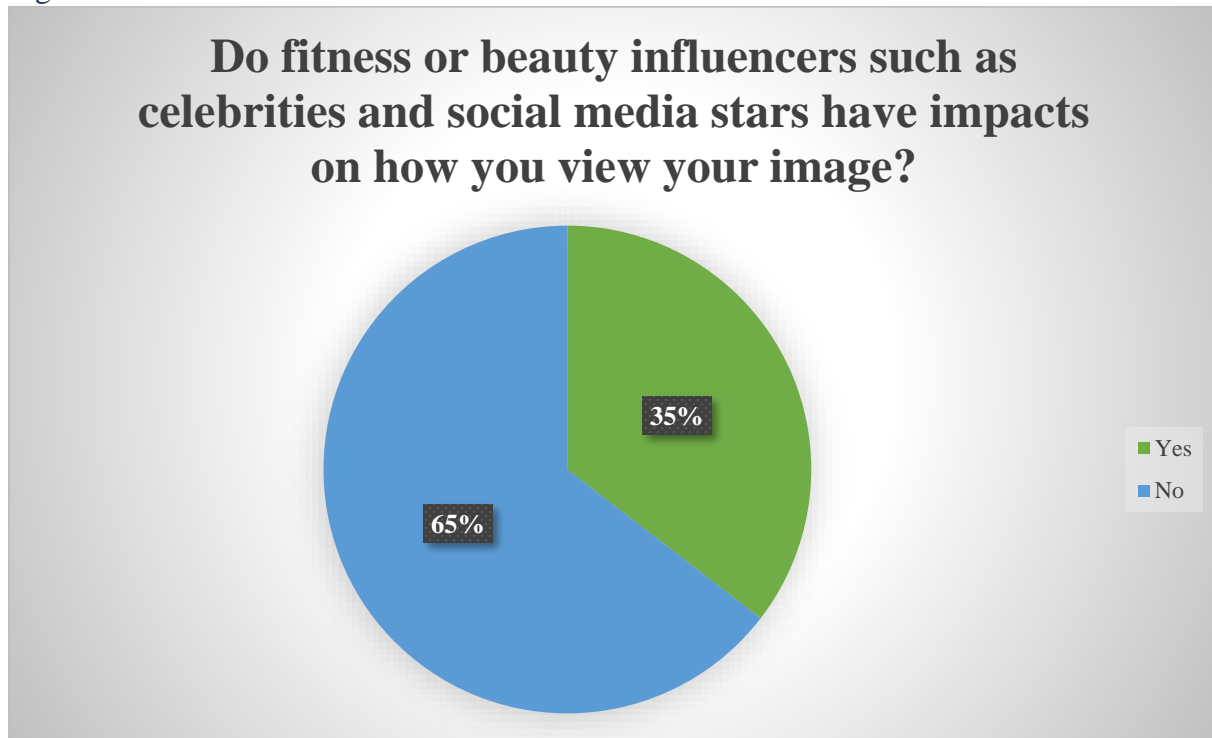


Figure 4

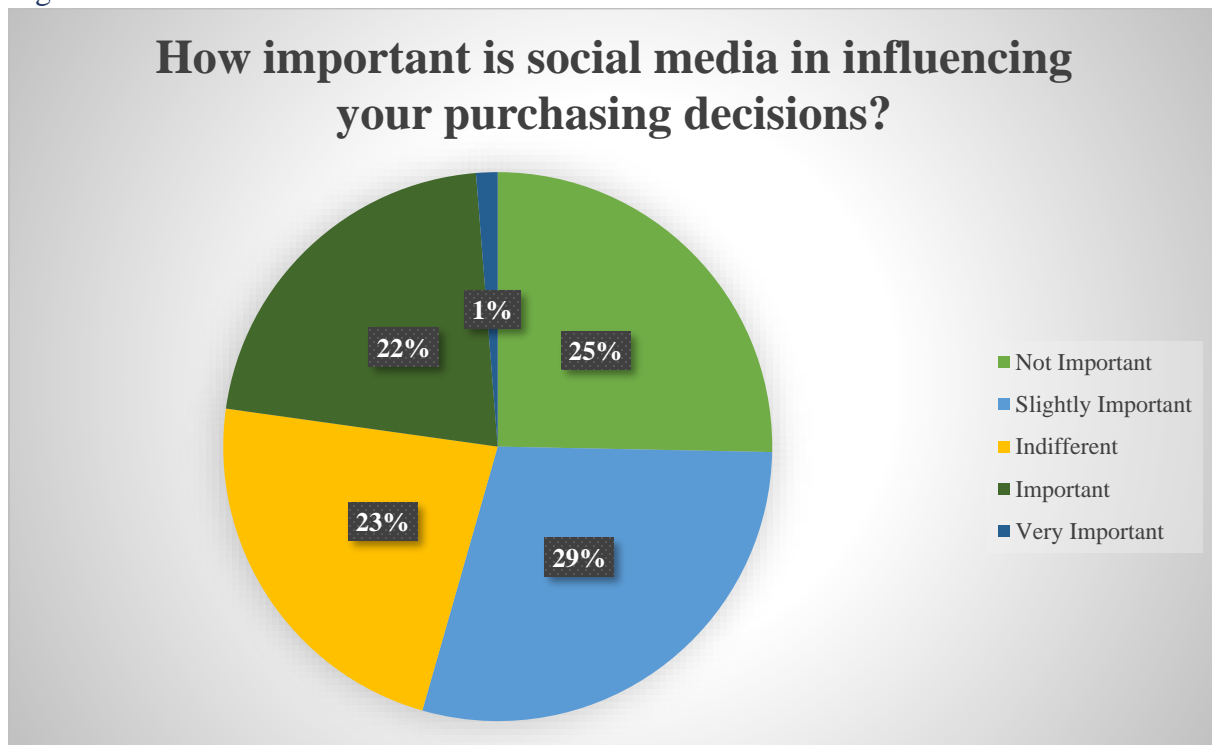


Figure 5

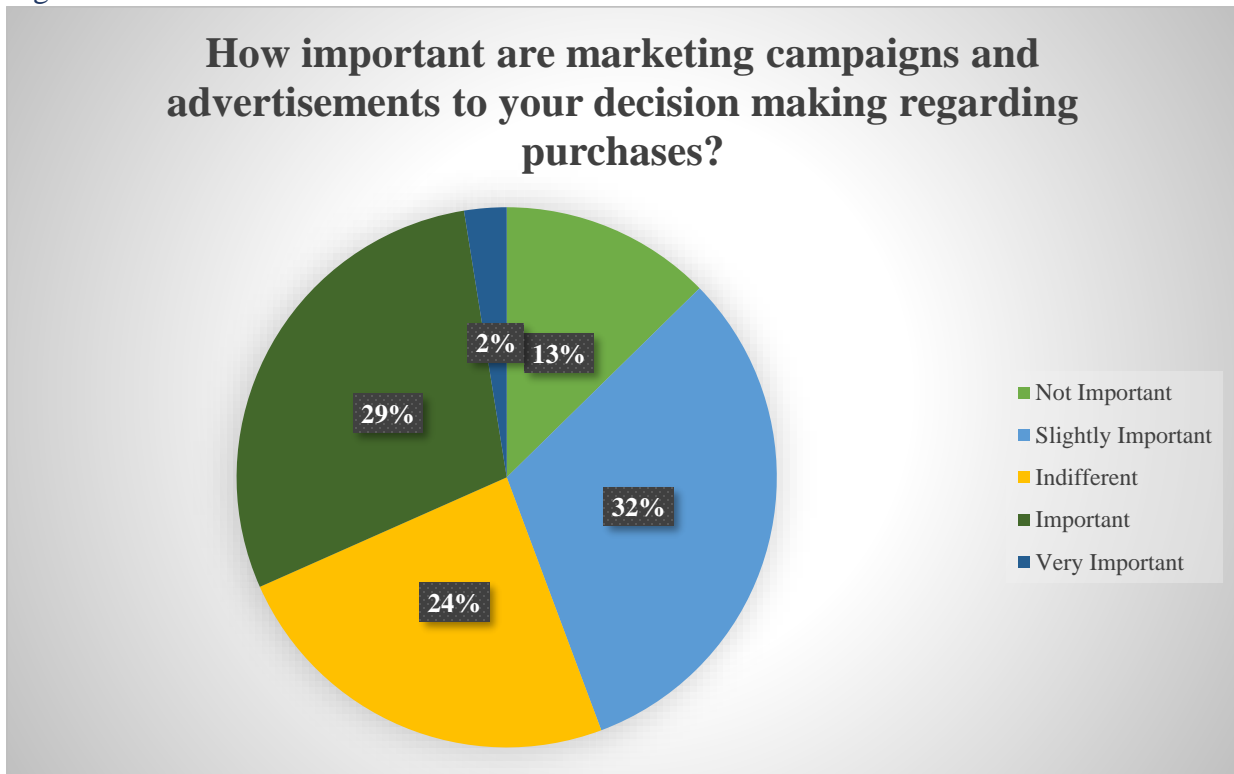


Figure 6

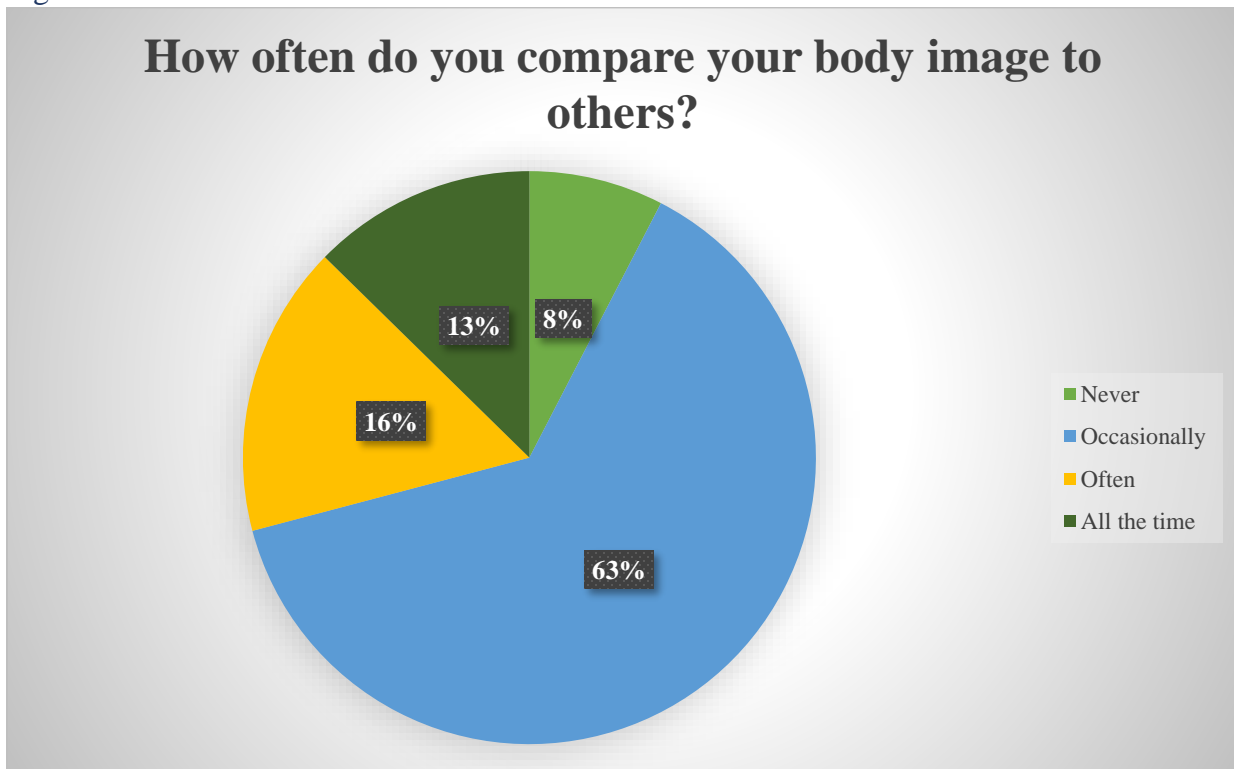


Figure 7

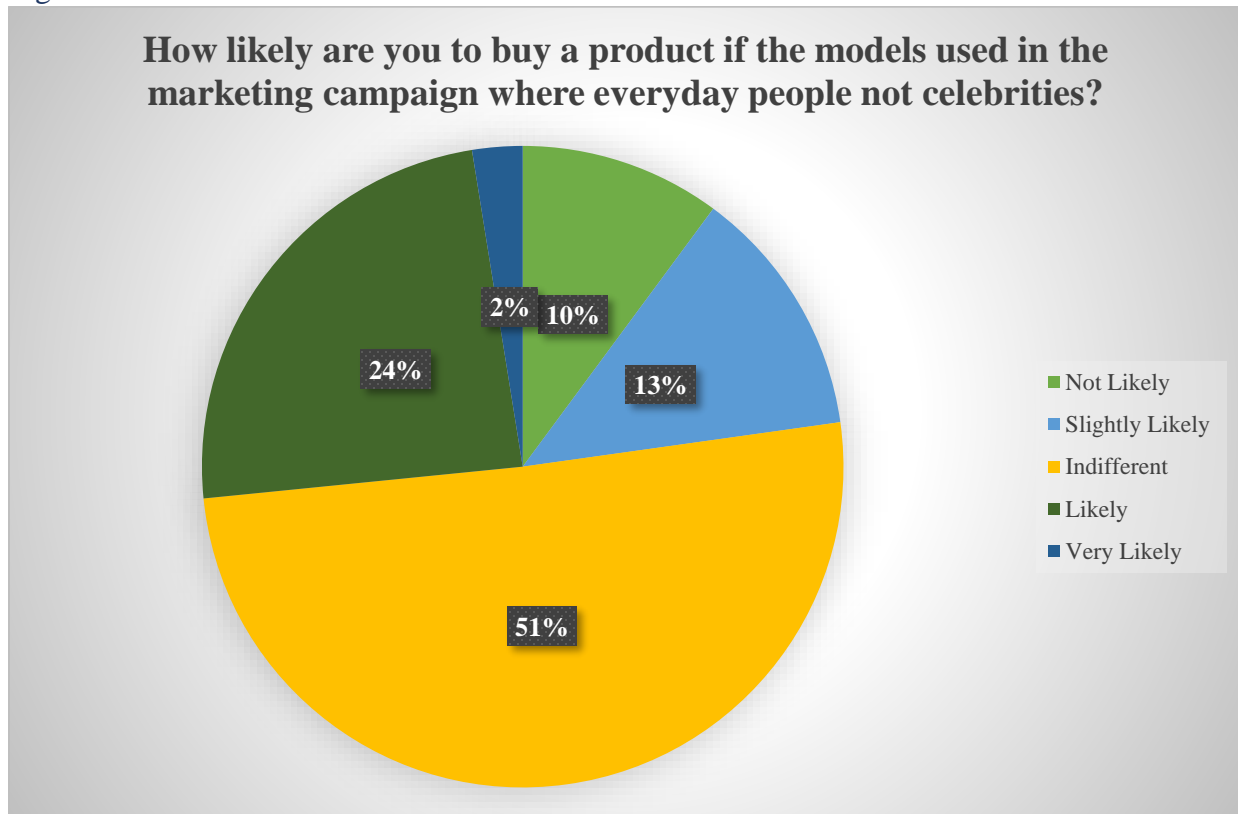


Figure 8

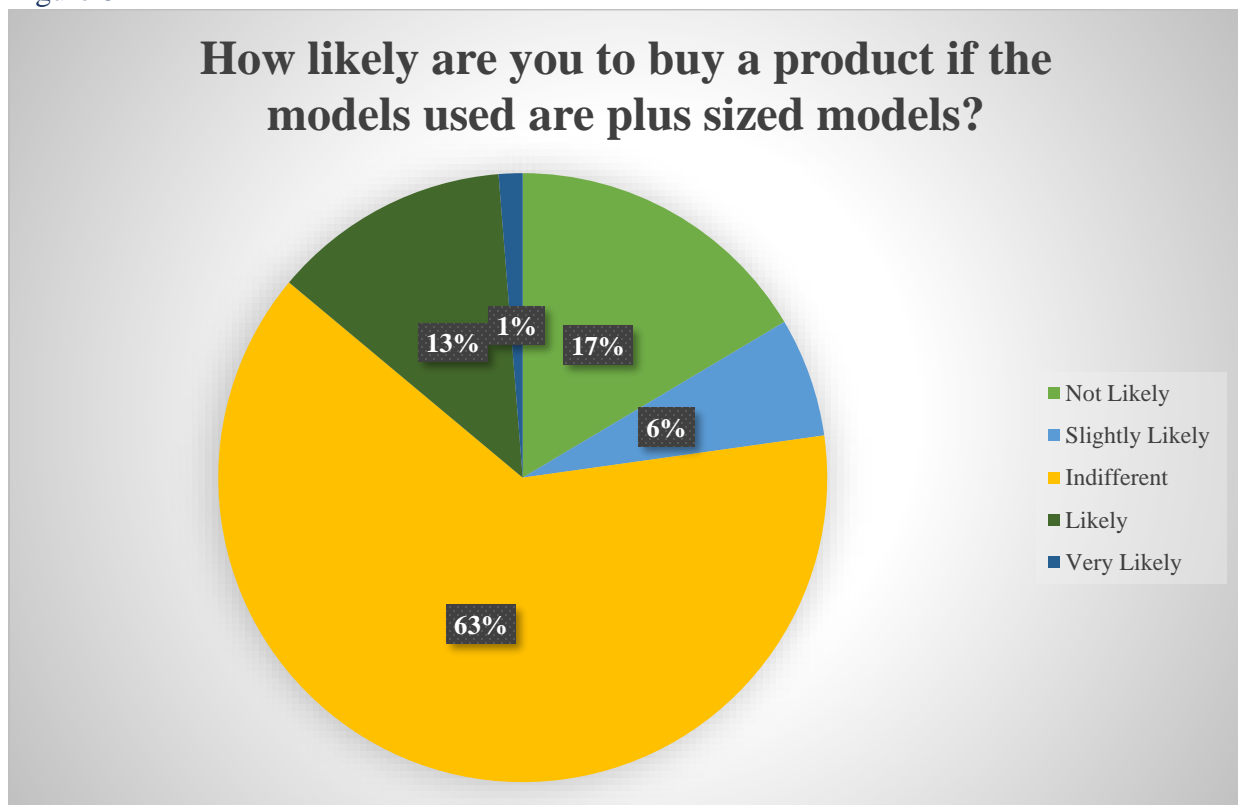
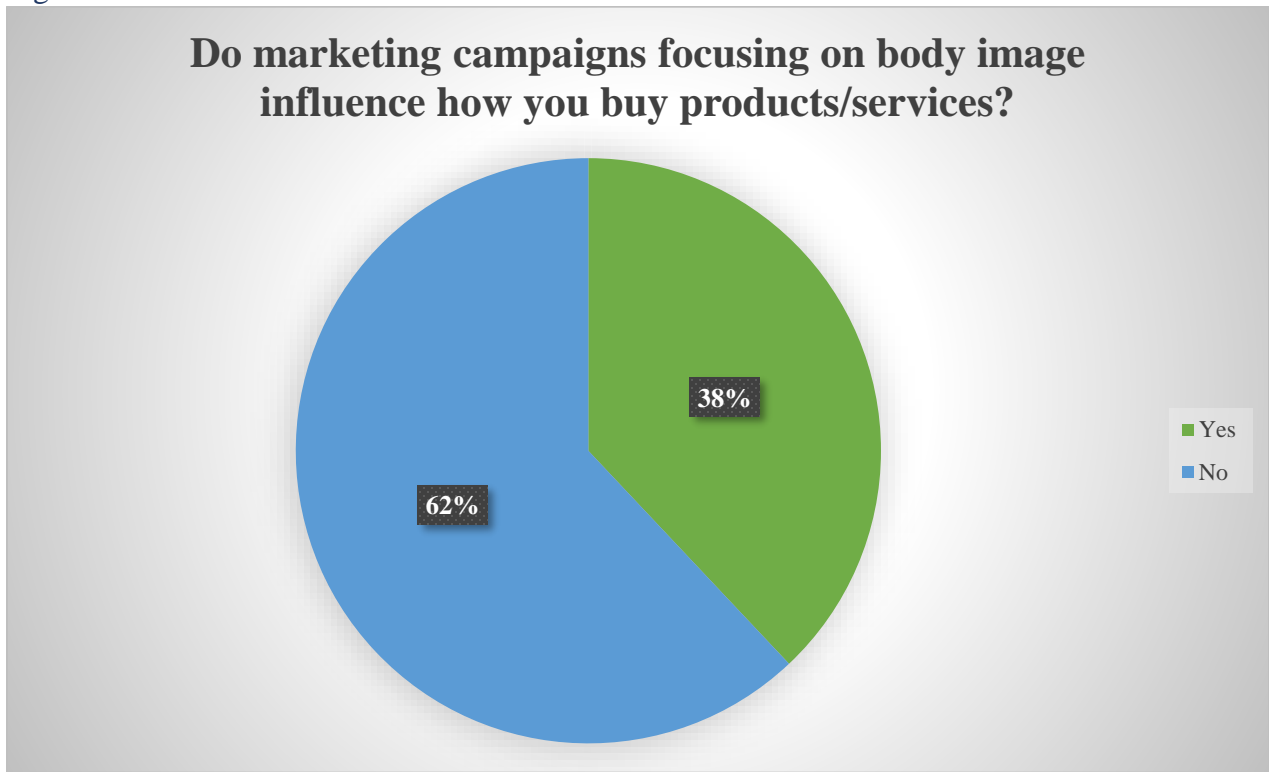


Figure 9



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- Samson, S. (2016, October 28). Empowerment photographer helps Winnipeg millennials see bodies as beautiful | CBC News. Retrieved March, 2018, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-photographer-bodyimage-millennial-1.3819091> Young women feel immense pressure from social media to represent

themselves in the best way possible online, according to a qualitative report called eGirls, eCitizens.

Thorpe, J. (2018, April 19). This Is How Fast It Takes For A Single Image To Completely Warp Your Beauty Standards. Retrieved April, 2018, from <https://www.bustle.com/p/why-do-beauty-standards-change-this-study-shows-that-just-one-image-can-warp-your-beauty-standards-79973>The dominant standard of female beauty in Western media may have vacillated slightly over the decades, but for the majority of the 20th and 21st centuries, symmetrical, toned, white, and thin women have been advertised as the "ideal" by mainstream media. Increased visibility for diverse body types has ramped up significantly in recent years, showing that obviously there isn't just one kind of female body that's beautiful.