Generation Z Consumers' Attitudes towards Body Diversity in Fashion Advertisements

A quantitative study on the effect of consumers' own body size to their attitude

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Abstract

This thesis is investigating how consumers’ attitudes on fashion advertisements are affected by the models featured in the advertisements, with the consumers’ own body size being taken into consideration. The topic for the thesis was formed when conducting a thorough literature search, which revealed a gap in research. My study considers consumer behavior in marketing, specifically in digital advertising, which in this case is Instagram. My study aims to identify which model body size is the most suitable and effective one when seeking to target plus-size versus skinny consumers, focusing on the female Generation Z of Finland. Ultimately, my thesis strives to help companies in attracting their desired customer base by creating positive attitudes within the consumers, which can consequently lead to increased purchase intentions.

This thesis features the characteristics of a deductive, quantitative, explanatory and cross-sectional study. The data is gathered from 82 female respondents in Finland, within the age range of 18 to 27. A survey is designed to measure their attitudes towards advertisements that feature plus-size models, versus advertisements that feature skinny models. Respondents rate their attitudes towards various Instagram advertisements, and additionally choose whether they identify themselves more with a skinny or plus-size body. The results are analyzed through the Interaction term on Repeated measures ANOVA. With significance found, I proceeded to analyze it further with Post Hoc, which then revealed six new hypotheses to examine.

The results of the analysis showed some significant changes between the attitudes of skinny respondents and plus-size respondents. Plus-size respondents showed more positive attitudes towards plus-size models than they did towards skinny models. Equivalently the skinny respondents had a more positive attitude towards skinny models than they did towards plus-size models. This is consistent with previous literature regarding perceived similarity and women wanting to see female portrayals in advertisements that they can personally relate to. Additionally, skinny models caused more negative attitudes in plus-size consumers, and plus-size models caused more negative attitudes in skinny consumers.

Fashion industry has received a lot of criticism for their use of thin and highly attractive models, but these results give some evidence and understanding to the statement that skinny models are still effective in advertising. However, this seems to only be the case when marketing for skinny consumers. When considering the plus-size consumers, their attitude was more positive towards plus-size models. That being the case, my study suggests that fashion companies should firstly determine their main target group, and whether it is skinny consumers, or plus-size consumers. Secondly, their marketing strategies should be planned accordingly, by casting the models suitable for the target group.
**Keywords:** Fashion advertising, Body diversity, Body positivity, Generation Z, Fashion industry, Instagram marketing, Social media marketing, Consumer attitudes, Purchase intentions.

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1. Introduction

This chapter presents a general introduction to my research subject. I start by presenting the background information, and follow with problematization. I explain the purpose of my leading to the research question. Finally, the delimitations and the key terms of the study are presented.

1.1 Background

Social media platforms are virtual spaces where individuals can engage with others, both in professional or social contexts (Trusov et al., 2009). Among online photo-sharing social networks, Instagram stands out as the first and the most successful one (Caliandro & Graham, 2020). Consumers place a higher dependence on social media than other types of media, which subsequently influences the individuals’ social values (Perloff, 2014). In today's digital age, social networks are vital for companies to successfully showcase their brand (Cahan et al., 2015). Companies must actively use social media to build a positive impression of their brand (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Because Instagram offers a large amount of visual content, it is a more advantageous platform for promotional images in comparison to other platforms such as Facebook (Zhao et al., 2022). It is a specifically popular platform among women between the ages of 18 and 29 (Hendrickse et al., 2020). Instagram highlights the importance of visuals, which creates great opportunities for fashion brands to showcase their products (Casaló et al., 2017).

Age is an important factor influencing consumer shopping behavior (Serravalle et al., 2022). Generation Z starts in 1995 and ends in 2010, which is a digital media-dominated era, leaving them without direct exposure to the pre-digital times (Seemiller and Grace, 2019). This generation is referred to as the digital natives (Turner, 2015), since their behavior, attitudes and lifestyle are shaped by their heavy online presence (Dimock, 2019). Social media greatly impacts how the generation views themselves, which highlights the importance of how their identity should align with the social media content they consume (Mozaffari, 2019). Generation Z often displays negative attitudes towards traditional direct marketing compared to using social media as their source for shopping (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018). 32% of the world population are a part of the generation in 2019, indicating that the generation dominates the markets at some point (Su et al., 2019).

The fashion industry has faced criticism and concerns regarding its extensive use of extremely skinny models (Taylor & Costello, 2017). This has resulted in a movement towards body diversity and body positivity. Thin models in advertisements are often considered controversial, and it has been argued that portraying models of larger body sizes would be essential (Martin & Xavier, 2010). Brands can greatly use inclusivity and diversity to their advantage (Chey, 2018). Beauty diversity can be promoted by showcasing a wide variety of body types (Lin & McFerran, 2016). Given that body positivity is a relatively new concept, its actual impact within fashion advertising is not yet fully studied and understood.
Consumers’ attitudes towards the advertisements depend on the affect and likability of the advertisement (Brown & Stayman, 1992). Different components of the advertisement affect their attitude, including the model featured in it (Kim et al., 2002). In social media, brands can influence the behavior of consumers through the decisions they make for website and mobile app interfaces (Sunstein, 2015, cited in Weinmann et al., 2016). It is clear that positive attitudes towards the ad play a significant role in influencing purchase intentions (Edell and Burke, 1987). However, it still remains unsettled how the casting of larger-sized models for advertisements affects the consumers’ attitudes.

Some differences between consumers groups’ reactions to plus-size models have been found before, with males expressing more negative attitudes towards larger models compared to females (Aagerup, 2021). With evident differences between the genders, my study only focuses on the attitudes of females. Some previous studies have highlighted the relationship between the consumer’s own body size and their responses to plus-size models (Carnevale, 2018; Hendrickse et al., 2020). Larger-sized consumers have been found to respond more favorably to advertisements featuring larger models (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). However, the investigation has not yet encompassed the digital era of social media and the digital native generation of Generation Z. The generation’s reactions to Instagram advertisements featuring plus-size models can aid the brands in influencing the generation’s attitudes. Positive attitudes have been found to lead to purchase intentions (Abzari et al., 2014). With these factors considered, consumer behavior in marketing, specifically digital advertising is an essential topic to study further. Therefore my research is positioned to study advertising on the social media platform of Instagram, and the consumer behavior and attitudes that Generation Z form towards it.

1.2 Problematization
Advertisers have long been publishing images of individuals that are made to be idealized and glamorized (Richins, 1991). This drives consumers to compare themselves, their lifestyles, and their appearances, whether consciously or unconsciously, to these perfected presentations (Richins, 1991). The portrayal of the idealized female body in advertising has remained one of the never-ending debates on the context (Groesz et al., 2002). The use of unrealistically thin models is a central issue specifically in the fashion industry (Taylor & Costello, 2017). Research shows that models are still significantly thinner than the average woman (Park, 2017). According to Gulas and McKeage (2000), marketers use "attractive models" because it forms positive attitudes amongst the consumers. Models are typically chosen with the intention of creating positive perceptions and attitudes towards the brand (Aaker, 1996). Therefore the models tend to be more physically attractive than the average individual (Baker & Churchill, 1997). Highly attractive models have been used in advertisements for the purpose of psychologically impacting the message the consumer receives, with the hopes of increasing the effectiveness of the ad (Bower, 2001).
Literature has documented the negative effects of portraying these idealized female images in media and the body satisfaction of women associated with it (Dittmar, 2007). Research has demonstrated the negative effects of thin models on females’ self-esteem and body perceptions (Richins, 1991). This can lead to destructive consequences such as increased eating disorders (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Women being exposed to thin and unattainable models and the connection between their subsequent body dissatisfaction, body-related anxiety, low self-esteem, and eating disorders has become evident through previous studies (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). In addition, Halliwell, Dittmar, and Howe (2005) reveal that when consumers are exposed to average-sized models (versus to thin models or no models), it lowered the body-focused anxiety of females with eating disorders.

The criticism for the use of unrealistically thin models has embarked a movement towards body diversity and body positivity, which aims to celebrate all sizes and shapes of bodies (Åkestam et al., 2017). When women are exposed to the thin ideal, the more the woman weighs, the less attractive they feel (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). Research shows that specifically larger-sized consumers respond favorably to the body positivity movement (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Clayton et al. (2017) state that women appreciate it more when advertisements feature larger rather than thin models. According to Carnevale (2018), plus-size consumers show more positive attitudes compared to straight-size consumers when being exposed to ads featuring a plus-size model. Consumers seek to choose brands that fit their ideas of themselves and their personality (Maehle & Shneor, 2010). When brands portray a user image that matches the consumers’ own self-concept, consumers tend to purchase from it (Sung & Choi, 2010). When consumers are able to relate to the advertisement and see themselves in the model, their attitude is influenced positively (Horton, 2003).

The plus-size segment is growing quickly in the market (Romeo & Lee, 2015), which can offer companies new business opportunities. Aagerup and Scharf (2018) argue that serving plus-size consumers is a viable strategy for the mass market. Ogden et al. (2020) suggest that if brands used more models with diverse body types in their advertisements, it could lead to more positive attitudes amongst the consumers. Some brands have started featuring larger-bodied women in their advertisements with the benefit they can gain from promoting inclusivity and diversity (Chey, 2018). Fashion brands like Aerie have taken steps to promote diversity in their advertisements. They have included plus-size individuals who were previously marginalized and excluded from fashion advertisements. By featuring a variety of body types, brands are attempting to advocate for a more inclusive and diverse perception of beauty (Lin & McFerran, 2016). However, thin models still remain as the norm in advertisements (Cinelli & Yang, 2016), and a number of literature advocates the positive impact of thin model portrayals on advertising performance (e.g. Bower, 2001; D’Allesandro & Chitty, 2011). This raises questions on the true effectiveness of different types of model bodies.

Edell and Burke (1987) state that positive attitudes lead to a purchase decision. The attitude the consumers have towards the fashion advertisement affects the brand attitude and purchase
intention (Janssen & Paas, 2014). Solomon et al. (2016) explains that our purchase intentions are driven by our desires to live up to the existing cultural expectations and ideals of appearance. Highly attractive thin models are commonly used in advertising (Bower, 2001). However, their true effectiveness is still somewhat unsure and conflicted (Bower & Landreth, 2001). It can be concluded that there are some contradicting findings on whether the use of body diversity in advertisements leads to more positive attitudes and an increase in purchase intentions.

With Instagram being specifically popular among females between the age of 18 to 29 (Hendrickse et al., 2020), I focus my study on females of Finland within this age group, and the platform of Instagram. It is essential for the fashion industry and marketers to know how effective body diversity advertising truly is for this target group, and on this platform. In addition, the consumers’ own body size has been found to have an effect on the attitudes they form towards advertisements featuring plus-size models (Carnevale, 2018). To conclude the chapter, it can be said that previous research hasn’t given answers to a newer problem in the field, encompassing fashion advertising, a popular social media marketing platform of Instagram (Whiting & Deshpande, 2014), Generation Z, and the consumers’ own body size. With contradicting findings in the previous literature on whether plus-size models are a viable strategy for this type of fashion advertising, it is worthwhile to test these factors regarding the problem. Therefore my study will provide evidence on plus-size consumers’, versus skinny consumers’ attitudes towards the integration of plus-size, versus skinny models in advertisements.

1.3 Research purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to conduct an investigation on the Female Generation Z consumers of Finland, in the context of fashion advertising on Instagram. Quantitative data is gained through an online survey, which will subsequently be analyzed in order to uncover the possible relationships between variables. The consumers’ own body size is incorporated into the research, which will help understand the effect it may have on their attitudes towards the advertising. For this purpose, an ecommerce fashion company of ASOS has been selected by the author to use in this study. Content that ASOS has directly published on their Instagram page will be used in the surveys to present to the respondents.

1.4 Research question
This study aims to answer the following research question:

*Does the Generation Z female consumers’ own body size affect the attitude they form towards Instagram fashion advertisements that feature plus-size models?*

1.5 Delimitations
The focus of this study is on an e-commerce company that is active on the social media of Instagram, and therefore Instagram content from the company Asos has been chosen as an example on the survey to present to respondents. This study is delimited to Generation Z, with this generation being referred to as digital natives (Turner, 2015), whose behavior, attitudes, and lifestyle are shaped by their online life (Dimock, 2019). With Gen Z starting from 1995 and ending in 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2019), the sample population of this study was chosen from the older half of this.

It has been observed that men tend to express more negativity than women when assessing the attractiveness of overweight women, as indicated by Harris et al. (1991). The concept of plus-size models is primarily related to women's fashion, as highlighted by Okwodu (2016). Considering the differences that have been found between females and males in relation to body diversity marketing, the emphasis of this study is exclusively towards the consumer behavior exhibited by females. Therefore the responses are gathered from women from Finland, within the age of 18 to 27.

Social networks play a crucial role in enabling businesses to efficiently market their brand, with Perloff (2014) stating that consumers rely more on social media than any other type of media. Because Instagram offers more visual content, it's seen as a better platform for promoting images compared to other platforms such as Facebook (Zhao et al., 2022). These considered, this thesis is delimited by investigating the advertising of fashion brands on the social platform of Instagram. This study solely focuses on the content that brands directly share on their Instagram page. The brands’ own Instagram posts are an influential form of marketing and can have a positive impact on consumer purchasing (Kumar et al., 2016; Poulis et al., 2019).

2. Literature review

This chapter presents the relevant literature topics. Firstly, Advertising and the parts of it that are related to this study are explained. This is followed by a presentation of the target demographic Generation Z and its characteristics. Nextly, Attitudes are further explained, in addition to their relation to my study. Lastly, the Hypothesis is developed and presented.

2.1 Advertising

2.1.1 Fashion advertising on Instagram

With the ever-increasing growth of social media, it is more crucial than ever for companies to leverage the internet as a tool for marketing (Hendrickse et al., 2020). Amongst social media platforms, Instagram is the fastest-growing one, offering promising opportunities and potential for companies to take advantage of (Ungerman & Myslivcová, 2014). In 2018, brands could spend $1 billion purely on Instagram advertising, and potentially $5 to $10 billion by 2022 (Kusumasondjaja & Tjiptono, 2019). This suggests that leveraging Instagram provides a cost-effective, yet impactful way for companies to visually market their brand and products. Instagram allows the users to repost content and easily communicate with their
followers. This makes Instagram an extremely convenient social media platform for posting fashion content (Abidin, 2016). When looking at fashion brands’ Instagram presence, 65% of the most popular brands run active accounts on the platform, and 19% of those brands have more than 100,000 followers (Whiting & Deshpande, 2014). In addition to the fashion brand’s website, Instagram can be a useful extension for marketing. This way the brand may effectively receive more customer engagement, and even sales (Barreda et al., 2015).

The content that brands directly share on their social media pages has an impact on profitability that has been found to be greater for customers who are experienced, tech-savvy, and active on social media (Kumar et al., 2016). With many young adults having a heavy online presence, it becomes vital for companies to pay attention to how they visually present their products and offerings (Perloff, 2014). Brand’s own posts on Instagram are an influential form of marketing and have been found to have a positive impact on consumer purchasing (Kumar et al., 2016; Poulis et al., 2019). Overall, Instagram has become a platform where consumers form beliefs and attitudes (Perloff, 2014). The brand content that fashion brands publish on their Instagram accounts has a notable influence on consumers. This can even create new needs for the consumers and drive them to purchase the brands’ products (Stachowiak-Krzyżan, 2019). This study has its focus solely on the attitudes that consumers form towards the fashion advertising that a brand publishes on their social media of Instagram. I consider this to be the most viable approach when taking into account the aspects of marketing in the fashion industry, and the characteristics of Generation Z and their consumption of social media.

2.1.2 Body diversity in Fashion advertising

Specifically the apparel and cosmetic industries are being criticized by consumer advocate groups and researchers (de Luce, 2001). They have been accused of portraying models in an unrealistic way, including being unreasonably thin, youthful, and highly attractive (de Luce, 2001). Advertisements that include only models who have idealized measurements have become controversial, with accusations of being non-inclusive and unrepresentative of how the female population truly is (Mzezewa, 2018). Especially the fashion industry has been criticized for their long-lasting use of extremely thin models (Taylor & Costello, 2017). Models still remain much thinner than the average woman (Park, 2017). Marketers choose "attractive models" because it creates positive attitudes within the consumers (Gulas & McKeage, 2000). The selection of models is typically driven by the goal of creating favorable perceptions and attitudes towards the brand (Aaker, 1996). As a result, these models often possess greater physical attractiveness compared to the average individual (Baker & Churchill, 1997).

A phenomenon called idealization (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002), is where society’s thin body ideals are often portrayed as the image of imaginary happiness (Gripsrud, 2002). In the past, ads have focused on presenting an ideal of beauty, which encourages consumers to purchase by provoking their worries, wants, and needs (Leiss et al., 1990). Media influences people to adopt certain views of themselves and their bodies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).
Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) highlight how society and culture can influence individuals to internalize cultural body standards, which then causes body shame and anxiety. In reality achieving the cultural ideals are often unattainable. This creates a gap between what the individual wants to look like and what they actually look like (Eisend & Möller 2007). Images are often associated to present the real world, when in reality these images are designed and edited to attract viewers and customers (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002).

Thinner female physiques and highly attractive models have widely been used in advertising. However, there is no guarantee that the most attractive model will generate the highest sales (Bower & Landreth, 2001). Additionally, it has been argued that other factors besides the model’s beauty also have an effect on the attitudes of consumers, such as a suitable match-up between the product type and the model’s beauty (Bower & Landreth, 2001). Humann (2021) emphasizes that diversity and inclusivity can have significant advantages in the fashion industry. Incorporating individuals of various body types, races, and identities ma not only benefit the brands and companies but also increase the overall satisfaction of all the stakeholders.

With obese models being a part of the latest trend of plus-size models (D’Angelo, 2015), there are differences between the responses and attitudes that different target groups form (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Men and women have different attitudes towards the ideal body type (Chapa et al., 2020). Men perceive the ideal female body thinner than what women see as the ideal female body (Fallon & Rozin, 1985). Men are notably more negative than women when evaluating the attractiveness of overweight women (Harris et al., 1991). The phenomenon of plus-size models is predominantly related to women’s fashion (Okwodu, 2016), with women finding brands worn by obese models more attractive, and men finding brands worn by skinny models more attractive (Aagerup & Scharf, 2018). Women in general have more positive views about obesity than men do (Hansson & Rasmussen, 2014). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that remarkable differences between the genders’ preferences on the size of the model exist. Therefore, this study centers solely on studying the attitudes the female demographic has towards advertisements. To distinguish a skinny and an obese model from each other Aagerup and Scharf (2018) have illustrated the two model body types (Figure 1).
2.1.3 Body positivity movement

Idealized and glamorous representations of people have been seen in marketing for a long period, which has led consumers to compare their own bodies to these images, either consciously or unconsciously (Lou & Tse, 2020). Alongside the widespread idealization of thinness, a body positivity movement has started to gain popularity. "Femvertising" refers to female empowerment advertising. With the increasing popularity of femvertising, contemporary brands consider it a successful approach to target female audiences. Body positivity advertising is a form of femvertising, which incorporates a diverse range of body sizes and shapes (Åkestam et al., 2017).

Due to the controversy caused by thin models in advertisements and the movement towards realistic body size representations, it is argued that portraying models of larger body sizes is of the essence (Martin & Xavier, 2010). The rise in social media usage and the development of critical thinking among consumers have made them more expressive about their opinions, and this has forced companies to begin to act on their unsatisfied customer bases (Luzon, 2019). As a result of the body positivity movement, it has become an accepted social norm to avoid expressing negative opinions of overweight people (Holman, 2008). Body positivity aims to celebrate and embrace diverse body types, regardless of the size, shape, or features.
The growing body positivity movement on social media confronts the conventional standards of "ideal" body appearance portrayed in advertisements. The movement helps women to overcome their negative body images and the feeling of not meeting beauty standards (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021). The movement has its emphasis on the functionality and the healthiness of the body (Sastre, 2014). The rise of the body positivity movement has made a growing number of individuals to gravitate towards brands that promote self-acceptance, as observed by Pascual (2023). In today's digital age, social media and the internet have widely embraced and advocated for the notion that thinness is not the sole standard for body acceptance, as noted by Pascual (2023).

Some clothing brands are broadening their size ranges, and numerous campaigns are initiated towards body diversity. Many brands have shown their commitment to the body positivity movement by showcasing less edited images and featuring a diversity of models who are more close to real-life representations of people (Alnuweiri, 2018). With the growing trend of inclusivity and diversity, some brands have started featuring larger-bodied women in their advertisements (Chey, 2018). Models with larger bodies have started to make appearances on the covers of some of the world's most popular fashion magazines and advertising campaigns (Yeboah, 2020). Aerie, among other fashion brands, has started to showcase diversity by including plus-size individuals in their advertisements (Lin & McFerran, 2016). Additionally, another example is the Savage X Fenty lingerie collection that was launched in 2018. The collection enforced models of many different shapes, ethnicities, and sexualities, and therefore received excessive support from the audience (Hakeem, 2020).

By showcasing a diverse array of body types, these brands seek to advocate for a more inclusive and varied concept of beauty, as noted by Lin and McFerran (2016). Given the relatively recent emergence of body positivity as a concept, its actual efficacy in fashion advertising still remains a subject that is not fully explored. It is notable to mention that even though the body positive advertisements that companies have published might seem authentic, they are often not truly inclusive and still follow the narrative of what an ideal beauty standard is (Ell, 2021). As a result, individuals who originally initiated the movement are still marginalized, especially those who do not fit into the specific sizes and ethnicities, as Ell (2021) points out.

### 2.1.4 Instagram as a social media platform

Social media platforms are networks where users can engage with each other online. Communication and engagement can happen for professional or purely social purposes, as highlighted by Trusov et al. (2009). Multiple different social networks exist, but Instagram currently stands out the most successful one, as documented by Caliandro and Graham (2020). Users can choose to create their own content or solely consume content generated by others, as outlined by Tiggeman et al. (2020). Women between the age of 18 to 29 are especially keen on using the application (Hendrickse et al., 2020), which makes it a great marketing platform for companies to use when targeting people within this age. Fashion brands find Instagram to be extremely important, considering that fashion products are best
promoted through visual content (Casaló et al., 2017). Instagram offers a large supply of visual content, and new content is created constantly. Zhao et al. (2022) states Instagram to be more effective for advertising images than other platforms, such as Facebook.

Instagram can highly affect the consumers’ behavior and attitudes (Bandura, 2001). It is argued that consumers rely more on social media than any other type of media, and it can heavily influence individuals and their social values (Perloff, 2014). Social media is free to use, and brands can greatly use it to their advantage for promoting their products. Social media plays a vital part in influencing the perceptions that consumers form towards brands (Cahan et al., 2015).

Companies that are present on social media tend to have a better brand image than companies who are not (Cahan et al., 2015). When companies engage with potential customers on social media, they can create positive associations towards their brand (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Kordrostami and Laczniaik (2021) mention the portrayal of females on digital platforms should be further studied. Moreover, it is suggested that the impact that diversity marketing has on consumer purchasing behavior (Kordrostami & Laczniaik, 2021).

The use of Instagram can lead to more impulsive purchases (Xiang et al., 2016). Research has found various factors that trigger consumers to purchase, such as promotional advertisements, and photographs or videos posted by the brands. (Handayani et al., 2018). In addition, recommendations from friends and opinion leaders affect the behavior of consumers (Xiang et al., 2016). Social media works well when wanting to engage with customers, especially in the case of apparel brands (Cao et al., 2021). Different platforms can be used for different kinds of interactions, and therefore the brand should know the purpose and goals of their marketing (Cao et al., 2021). For example, Facebook works well for providing information to the users, but Instagram is a viable choice when the goal is to market a new product, or reach new customers (Cao et al., 2021).

These considered, it can be stated that Generation Z females have a heavy use of Instagram, and especially fashion brands can use the platform to their advantage. This makes it crucial to test how consumers react to body diversity in advertisements on that specific platform. A gap in research can be found regarding these advertisements on social media, especially Instagram.

### 2.2 Generation Z
Lissitsa and Kol (2016) mention that the consumers’ identities influence their shopping behavior. Different generations have different experiences and these can affect the patterns in their purchases (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016). 32% of the world population are a part of Generation Z in 2019, which indicates that the generation dominates the markets at some point (Su et al., 2019). Considering the size of this generation, companies can find a great number of potential customers from it (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Therefore in the following part the Generation
Z and its characteristics will be further explained. The intention is to explain their consumer behavior further, and show some specific characteristics of the generation.

Seemiller and Grace (2019) state that Generation Z (Gen Z) starts in 1995 and ends in 2010. The Millennial generation spans from 1981 to 1994, with Gen Z beginning right after them, in 1995 (Seemiller and Grace, 2019). Some clear differences between these generations can be seen. The commercialization of the internet started in 1995, which indicates that Gen Z grew up with digital media and hasn’t experienced the pre-digital times the same way as Millennials (Seemiller and Grace, 2019). The behavior, attitudes, and lifestyle of Gen Z have been shaped by the internet (Dimock, 2019). The generation is often referred to as digital natives (Turner, 2015).

“Gen Z lives in a world fueled by media and infused with content”, as stated by Mozaffari (2019). Due to the generation’s high use of social media and the internet, they are an extremely globalized and international generation (Çora, 2019, p. 913). Furthermore, Çora (2019) mentions that the generation is highly educated, and even the most educated generation so far. According to Çora (2019), Gen Z is more open-minded than the preceding generations.

Generation Z has some differences in their consumer behavior compared to other generations. The generation has a great self-esteem and they have trust in their own talents (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018). This makes Gen Z more resistant and negative towards traditional direct marketing (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018). When it comes to fashion purchases, social media can serve as a great source of information regarding brands or new products. Gen Z spends a great amount of their free time on social media, and new content from fashion bloggers and celebrities is constantly published. In addition to social media, Gen Z uses films and shows as their sources for new fashion and trends (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018).

Since Gen Z heavily uses social media, this makes it a great platform to reach this generation. When consumers associate themselves with the brand’s personality, it can result in purchase intentions (Thilina, 2021). This makes it important for brands to develop marketing strategies that match the wanted customer group. Compared to previous generations, Gen Z is highly aware and educated, which can easily create critique and skepticism towards the brand’s advertisements (Kelton, 2019). Pittaway (2020) states that including diversity in the brand’s marketing is necessary in order for the brand to gain customers from younger generations. Gen Z consumers have grown up surrounded by the internet and constant marketing. Gen Z can easily identify blatant advertising from brands (Chen, 2018; Fromm & Read, 2018).

Gen Z is the newest generation to enter the workforce (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Age is an important factor that influences the consumers’ behavior (Serravalle et al., 2022). It is crucial for companies to understand the different aspects of their wanted target group in order to meet their customer needs and attract them through advertising. The social content posted by brands should be planned according to the wanted target group (Mozaffari, 2019).
This study will focus on data collection from women in Finland only within this generation. This is done to strengthen the generalization of the answers to provide information on the specific geographic country’s Gen Z females’ attitudes. The sample group of my study is females in Finland aged between 18 and 27, with this being the older half of Generation Z. Given the significant role that social media plays in the lives of Generation Z, it is crucial to acknowledge the most viable marketing strategies that can be used on these platforms. The objective of this study is to study the attitudes that Generation Z forms towards fashion advertisements on Instagram. I seek to gain a collective perspective that includes the factors of Generation Z, social media, and fashion marketing. This can subsequently contribute to the broader research on consumer behavior and digital advertising strategies.

2.3. Attitudes
2.3.1 Consumer attitudes
An attitude reflects a person's thoughts and feelings about something (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). Whether the consumer likes a product or not, is based on the attitude formed towards the product (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). The attitude that consumers form towards advertisement can be explained as the individual's favorable or unfavorable response to a specific advertising stimulus during an occasion of exposure (MacKenzie et al., 1986). Lutz (1985) states that the consumers’ response to an advertisement can be categorized to either favorable or unfavorable.

When a consumer forms an attitude towards the ad, it is often based on its likability (Brown & Stayman, 1992). The attitude is shaped by different components of the advertisement, including the model, celebrity endorser, color, layout, and textual message (Kim et al., 2002). Consumers find factors such as the fashion brand’s trust and credibility important when considering buying from them (Naeem, & Ozuem, 2021). In today’s era of digital media, social media plays a huge role in the increase of online purchasing (Naeem, & Ozuem, 2021). My study has its focus on one of the most visible elements in an apparel advertisement, which is the model. Consequently my study will measure the response consumers have towards an ad that uses body diversity within the models, and whether it creates a favorable or an unfavorable attitude.

It is notable to mention that the unique characteristics of a consumer can affect their behavior (Lye et al., 2005). These can be their economic status, occupation, social class, culture, and lifestyle (Lye et al., 2005). When the consumer notices an issue that they want to solve, they begin to consider which product they need to purchase in order to solve it (Lye et al., 2005). Each consumer has their own personal criteria for making purchase decisions, and many purchases are made based on irrationality and impulsiveness (Haq & Abbasi, 2016). This indicates the consumer’s attitude towards the advertisement is not always rational (Cornwell et al., 2005). Consumers can behave illogically and emotionally towards marketing stimuli, which can cause them to spend irrationally (Cornwell et al., 2005). When the customer encounters stimuli, such as promotional incentives, their attitude is largely influenced by
other factors, such as their environment (Cornwell et al., 2005). These aspects considered, my study is solely concerned with the goal of collecting the general opinion and attitude of the female Generation Z demographic of Finland. The goal of this is to see their collective perspective, in addition to the possible differences that consumers with a skinny body type and consumers with a plus-size body type may have in.

2.3.2 How attitudes lead to purchase intentions
In the digital world, brands can use websites to their advantage when influencing the behavior of users (Sunstein, 2015, cited in Weinmann et al., 2016). Therefore, it is crucial for companies to understand the behavioral effects their designs may have (Weinmann et al., 2016). Bairrada et al. (2019) suggest that brands should use emotional strategies in order to create a relationship with their customers. The marketing of the brand does not have to be only about showcasing the product. The brand can also focus on creating good relationships with the consumers (Bairrada et al., 2019).

Purchase intention precedes the actual buying process (Ghosh, 1990). Positive attitudes can lead to purchase intentions (Edell and Burke, 1987). When companies build a positive brand association, this can lead to more purchase intentions (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). The attitude consumers form towards fashion advertisements additionally impacts their attitude towards the brand (Janssen & Paas, 2014). In addition, consumers’ want to achieve the existing beauty standards and ideals affect their decisions to purchase (Solomon et al., 2016).

These insights from previous research highlight the established connection between attitudes and purchase. However, whether the use of plus-size models is the best strategy to positively influence attitudes, is not settled yet. My study will provide new establishment on the effectiveness of body positivity marketing on Instagram across the Finnish market of Generation Z female consumers. By testing the attitudes that consumers form towards advertisements featuring different sized models, companies can use the information to their advantage for improving the business and increasing purchases.

2.3.3 Previous attitudes on body diversity in fashion advertisements
Women's perception of their own attractiveness decreases when they see models of the thin ideal (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). This is heightened when the woman has a higher body weight (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). Models that have an average body size are proven to form more positive attitudes within the consumers (Bower & Landreth, 2001). Posting more body diversity content in the brands’ accounts could mitigate any unfavorable perceptions held by consumers, especially those of the overweight category, as suggested by Stewart and Ogden (2021).

Consumers think that there are too many models who present the thin-ideal, and models of other shapes should be included (Diedrichs et al., 2011). Using body diversity in
advertisements could make more women feel included. This way consumers could get a more accurate visualization of how the clothing would appear on themselves. This could lead to an increase in their purchase intentions, as noted by Diedrichs et al. (2011). Differences between the attitudes of females and males towards different models exist. The use of plus-size models is mainly related to marketing for women (Okwodu, 2016). A study by Aagerup and Scharf (2018) found that brands advertising with obese models works well for females, whereas skinny models are considered more attractive by males. Particularly women have criticized brands that use models whose bodies are generally not attainable for people (Pascual, 2023). With these gender differences noted, this study excludes males and focuses purely on investigating the female gender.

When considering the attitudes towards body diversity from a marketing perspective, companies could greatly benefit from it. Featuring models with diverse body types in advertisements can result in more positive consumer attitudes (Ogden et al., 2020). Companies should take into consideration the expectations and preferences that consumers have. Consumers tend to choose brands that align with their own personality (Maehle & Shneor, 2010). If the consumers’ expectations are not met, they may form negative attitudes towards the brand (Roy et al., 2022).

Discrimination can create negative feelings towards the brand (Ferrell et al., 2019). Consumers’ attitudes are affected by multiple things, including negative incidents (Pullig et al., 2006). Pullig et al. (2006) states that negative publicity can stem from performance or values. Performance concerns the brand's capacity to offer good products for the consumers. For instance, if the brand offers a fashion product with quality problems. However, values are a more related focus for my study. These revolve around publicity related to social and ethical concerns, which thereby encompass the concept of body diversity (Pullig et al., 2006).

The fashion industry does claim that average-size models do not attract consumers. It has been stated that plus-size models might encourage unhealthiness and obesity (Diedrichs et al., 2011). Body positivity has been a topic of criticism where some believe the movement is normalizing obese and unhealthy bodies (Murthar, 2018). However, consumers believe that there are too many thin models, and more diverse models should be used (Diedrichs et al., 2011). It can be concluded that previous research has found contradicting attitudes and results on whether the use of plus-size models is a viable marketing strategy, which emphasizes the importance of studying the topic further.

Multiple factors may play a role in what type of attitude they form towards the ad, and these should not be disregarded. These may be characteristics of the consumer, including their gender (Aagerup, 2021), the consumers’ own body size (Maehle & Shneor), or their age and nationality. In addition, factors within the ad itself may have an effect on the attitude, such as the product type, the model, colors, layout, or textual message (Kim et al., 2002). In order to contribute to the issue more, it may become beneficial to solely use a specific target demographic, and a specific marketing platform. In the case of my study these are the Generation Z females in Finland, and fashion advertisements on the platform of Instagram.
2.3.4 The role of consumers’ own body size on their attitudes

For a long time, highly attractive models have been used in advertisements (Bower, 2001). However, the results on how effective they truly are are still not entirely settled (Bower & Landreth, 2001). Including unattainably thin models in advertisements could destroy their effectiveness when consumers compare themselves to the beautiful ad models, therefore causing negative feelings (Bower, 2001). In addition to this, the market for plus-size fashion is experiencing constant growth. This creates great opportunities for companies to expand (Romeo & Lee, 2015). Advertisements featuring plus-size models can be effective for the mass-market as well (Aagerup & Scharf, 2018).

Looking at previous research, some studies have been conducted on the effect that the consumers’ own body size has on their attitude towards advertisements. A study by Hendrickse et al. (2020) indicates that plus-size consumers who have a high self-esteem tend to react more favorably towards plus-size models. Carnevale (2018) highlights that there is a relationship between the consumer’s own body size and their attitude towards models. This was seen in plus-size consumers reacting more positively towards plus-size models than straight-size consumers did (Carnevale, 2018). This aligns with consumers preferring brands that fit their own self-perceptions and how they view themselves (Maehle & Shneor, 2010).

Horton (2003) highlights the concept of perceived similarity, which is about consumers being able to see themselves in the model. This indicates that when consumers can relate to the model it affects their attitude positively (Horton, 2003). A study of Yu et al. (2011) suggests that larger models attract especially plus-size consumers. The body positivity movement has received a positive response particularly from individuals who are larger (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Additionally, Carnevale (2018) suggests that a female consumer is more likely to purchase a lingerie product if the model’s body size represents their own. This suggests that differences between products may exist. However, my study will have its focus on gaining a general attitude towards the fashion industry’s Instagram advertisements. Therefore 3 different categories of dress, swimwear, and jeans are included on both skinny and plus-size models. This helps in removing the possible bias of respondents forming their attitude solely based on the product type, such as swimwear or lingerie.

The marketing of the brand can become much more efficient when the purpose of marketing and the strategy chosen is clear, including the target group and the marketing channel used (Cao et al., 2021). Analyzing how consumers’ body sizes impact their reactions to advertisements featuring plus-size models requires investigation not solely restricted to traditional media, but should also encompass advertisements displayed on social media platforms. Cao et al. (2021) state that different platforms offer different types of interaction between the company and the consumer. Therefore the company should carefully plan their marketing to fit their customer group and the advertising platform in question. Social media work well for fashion companies wanting to engage with their customers (Cao et al., 2021).
After reviewing the literature surrounding the topic of fashion advertising, it can be stated that more research is needed when it comes to the shopping behavior of females in connection to their own characteristics, which in the case of my study are their own body sizes. In order to understand these two consumer groups with a different body type, it is essential to look into the attitudes they form towards advertisements. Understanding the most effective ways of marketing on social media becomes especially crucial with Generation Z. They are referred to as the digital natives, and they have experienced the body positivity movement through social media. By looking at advertisements on social media platforms, the aim is to test how featuring plus-size models can make a difference in consumers’ attitudes, especially those in Generation Z.

2.4 Societal relevance
The societal relevance of the issue comes out through previous literature which has extensively highlighted the negative effects of featuring idealized female images in media, and the subsequent impact on women's body satisfaction (Dittmar, 2007). Numerous studies have shown the consequences of using thin models on the self-esteem of females, which has led to harmful outcomes such as increased eating disorders (Richins, 1991; Thompson & Stice, 2001). When women see thin and unattainable models, their body-related anxiety increases and their self-esteem decreases (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Furthermore, Halliwell, Dittmar, and Howe (2005) found that when consumers are presented with average-sized models, it significantly reduces the anxiety of females who suffer with eating disorders.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) centers around the company aligning its brand with societal values, and emphasizing consumer well-being while considering the interests of the company and its stakeholders (Vaaland, Heide & Grønhaug, 2008). Corporate Social Responsibility should be integrated into the company's operations, including their marketing strategies and its casting of models. Brands can strive to be more socially responsible through their use of body diversity, which could therefore improve their brand image and reputation (Nittle, 2018). For example, when a brand initiates a campaign using models of every color and body shape, it can lead to a positive impact on the brand’s equity (Tomlin, 2016). A brand can become more likable through their use of models of different body types, ethnicities, and sexualities (Hakeem, 2020). Advertising is an essential part of the company’s business operations affecting their profits, but it is crucial to consider how the choices of marketing strategies have an effect further than only the company in question. This highlights the importance of studying the use of models in advertisements and their subsequent effect on consumers and the society.

2.5 Hypothesis development
Based on a thorough literature review, a hypothesis was implemented for testing:
**Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads.

With this being the primary hypothesis, and whether it is accepted, more aspects of the phenomenon will be examined through follow-up tests.

![Figure 2](image-url) A presentation of the hypothesis, showing how the consumer’s own body type positively affects their attitude towards a model with the same body type.

### 3. Methodology

*In this chapter, I present the choices for the study’s methodology. The goal of this chapter is to bring understanding on why these methods were chosen, and how they fit the rest of the paper. I begin by presenting the suitable ontological and epistemological choices. Nextly, deductive versus inductive approaches are explained, in addition to quantitative versus qualitative. This is followed by a presentation of the research design and the data collection.*

#### 3.1 Ontological

Before conducting my research, I considered different methodologies. Ontology relates to the fundamental nature of reality and the social actors in question (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) state that there are two primary ontological approaches. Objectivism suggests that social reality is a phenomenon that is not affected by social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The other main approach is constructivism, which can be considered the opposite of objectivism. Constructivism highlights that social actors do affect the social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

I believe objectivism to be the most appropriate ontological approach for my thesis. Constructivism focuses on the social interaction in social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which does not align as well with the purpose of my thesis. Although interaction is a central
part of this thesis, the focus is not necessarily between two social actors, but between the consumer and the fashion advertisement. Although there are arguments that can be made for the importance of constructivism, I argue objectivism to be more suitable for my thesis.

Collis and Hussey (2014) explain that the ontological assumptions behind positivism are that the social reality is objective and external to the researcher. This further strengthens my reasons for selecting objectivism as my ontological stance. My research will use answers that social actors provide independently. Social actors, which are the respondents, do not interact with other social actors, but simply provide their attitudes towards images.

3.2 Epistemological
After deciding on the ontology for my thesis, I considered the epistemological approach (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The epistemological approach in business research is a way of studying and understanding reality. It provides information on how the data should be conducted and how the research question should be answered (Bell et al., 2019). Common epistemological paradigms are the positivist one and the interpretivist one (Saunders et al., 2019).

The interpretivist paradigm is commonly used for creating new theories (Saunders et al., 2019). The goal is to provide rich interpretations of social environments (Saunders et al., 2019). However, since my research is mainly based on previously established theories, the interpretivist paradigm is not the most suitable choice. This made me consider the positivist paradigm instead.

The positivist paradigm relies on the assumption that social reality is objective and singular, which means that the reality is not affected when it is investigated. Generally, when a research uses positivism, it also uses the deductive approach (Collis & Hussey, 2014), which is further explained later in my paper. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) state that a positivist paradigm “enables researchers to have more statistical reliance and generalization leading to development of universal laws and findings”. This matches the goals and the purpose I have for my research. With positivism, using surveys or other tools is the best way to gather data because the reality is viewed objectively (Bell et al., 2019).

Understanding consumer attitudes and the factors influencing it can be challenging. In order to explore how consumers’ perceptions of their own bodies impact attitudes, this study is employing the positivist research approach, with the help of an online survey.

3.3 Research approach
Different research approaches exist for scientific research. Bryman & Bell (2011) suggest deductive and inductive as the two primary ones. Additionally, the research approach can be categorized into quantitative and qualitative.
3.3.1 Deductive vs. inductive approach
A deductive approach represents the relationship that theory and research have (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When a research is done through the deductive approach, existing theories and knowledge are used to draw conclusions to the new research results. Deductive research often starts with presenting established theories and then moving towards own results. Deductive approach is a common method for quantitative studies, where the aim is to test and confirm hypotheses (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The inductive approach is the opposite of the deductive one. When an inductive approach is used, new theories are created based on the empirical findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Inductive approach is more commonly used in qualitative research.

In this study, the research question was formulated based on existing concepts, which were subsequently tested through the data I collected. There are multiple different concepts and statements regarding the attitudes towards advertisements, and this information from previous literature provided some factors to test in my study. Therefore the approach I adopted for my thesis is deductive.

3.3.2 Quantitative vs. qualitative research
Quantitative research emphasizes quantification of the data. In quantitative research the relationship between theory and research is often deductive (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Quantitative research is often more structured than qualitative research. One of the goals in quantitative investigation is to make generalizations with the study results, which can consequently aid a broader audience (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

The qualitative approach is mostly used when non-numerical data is collected (Saunders et al., 2019). One of the main goals with qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding about the subject (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Qualitative research goes close to the source of data, for example through an in-depth interview with the participants (Holme & Solvang, 1997). This was not the aim of my study, and therefore I disregarded the qualitative research choice.

I consider the quantitative method to be more relevant to my study, since I want to numerically measure the respondents’ attitudes through a survey. Since the perceptions of body positivity marketing and the attitudes of individuals can vary largely, a quantitative method can efficiently show possible patterns and preferences within the results.

3.4 Research design
The research design is the framework of collecting and analyzing data for the study. It provides structure for choosing and using the methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Yin (2003)
categorizes research into three main types: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. The choice of the design should align with the purpose of the thesis.

Saunders et al. (2019) state that exploratory research works well for uncovering new insights and understanding the problem better. Exploratory research design can be a good choice in case the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding on the issue. With descriptive research, the aim is to describe a certain phenomenon and collect information about it (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) state that descriptive research goes deeper into describing the issue than exploratory research does.

With explanatory research the main objective is to study the relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2014). The data retrieved from results can be analyzed with statistical tests (Saunders et al., 2014). The focus of my thesis is to study the possible connection between the consumers’ own body size and their attitude towards the advertisements. Since my objective is to find possible relationships between the variables, I consider explanatory research the most suitable choice for this. With explanatory research, I am aiming to explain the relationships between the variables by firstly collecting data on them, and subsequently analyzing the results statistically.

3.5 Data collection
3.5.1 Literature search
To begin my research, I conducted an extensive literature search and review. The general objective of a literature review is to gain knowledge in that topic or area of research (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). Firstly, I identified the research topic for my study. This was followed by reviewing the literature. Some gaps in research were found, which resulted in deciding a more specific focus for my research project.

In order to find literature related to my study topic, I used some specific keywords. The main keywords identified were: Fashion advertising, body diversity, body positivity, generation Z, fashion industry, Instagram marketing, social media marketing, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions.
I found literature using different databases, such as the Umeå University database, which grants access to a great number of scientific articles through other scientific databases. Other databases I used were Emerald Journals, ScienceDirect, and Springer Journals. In addition, I used Google Scholar to ensure that no relevant literature was left out. Before writing the literature review on my thesis, I made sure that all essential concepts and topics were included. When reading on the topic and the same sources started reoccurring, the aim was to summarize the findings from these. After finishing a thorough literature review, I found some gaps within the literature, which helped shape the direction of my research.

3.5.2 Survey
I collected the data by sending out online surveys. In order to ensure the efficiency of the survey, I sent out a pilot survey before the final one. A link was shared with the participants, so that they can easily access the survey with their phones or other devices. The survey was shared through Facebook groups, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The survey was designed to measure the attitudes the respondents form towards Instagram fashion advertisements that use plus-size models versus to advertisements that use skinny models, and whether the consumer’s own body size affects their attitudes.

This data collection method was a suitable choice for my study because a survey is easily available and almost anyone can be able to participate in it. In a questionnaire, each respondent is asked to answer the same questions, which efficiently collects responses even from a larger sample. (Saunders et al., 2019) My study uses a cross-sectional design which collects data at a specific point in time. Another choice could have been the longitudinal design, which observes data over an extended period. With a cross-sectional design relationships between different variables can be measured, but the cause of these relationships can not always be defined (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For my study, I used a single cross-sectional design. A single cross-sectional design uses only one sample at one specific time, whereas a multiple cross-sectional design would use more samples (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The single cross-sectional design helps me create the satisfactory knowledge I need for answering my research question. This should result in either proving or disproving the assumptions I have relating to the attitudes of the different consumer groups.

In order to measure the attitudes of participants, they are asked to rate how they feel about advertisements featuring thin and plus-size models. Participants were asked to rate how positively they feel about skinny, and plus-size models respectively. The rating is done on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with a higher score meaning a more positive attitude. Participants are shown photos of Instagram posts (derived from ASOS) featuring skinny models and plus-size models. To ensure the accuracy of responses, the participants are asked to rate three different posts with skinny models and three different posts with plus-size models. In addition, the photos chosen for the survey include a skinny model and the plus-size model wearing equivalent outfits, which are swimwear versus swimwear, dress versus dress, and jeans versus jeans. With the use of the three different product types, a possible bias caused by a certain product (such as swimwear) is avoided. In order to avoid the response bias of encouraging the participants to choose a certain answer, the photos are shown to participants in a random order, and not in an evident comparative skinny versus plus-size display. The photos are displayed in Figure 3. The objective of this study is to measure a straightforward favorable/unfavorable attitude, and therefore constructing a multi-item scale about one Instagram advertisement would be unnecessary. Consequently, participants rate their attitude towards each ad separately.

In order to measure the effect that the consumer's own body size has on the attitude towards the plus-size model, the participants are asked to categorize themselves either into plus-size, or skinny. This is done with the help of Figure 1. Illustration of the two body types by Aagerup and Scharf (2018). For descriptive purposes, the participants are asked a
demographic question about their occupation, whether it be a student, working full-time, working part-time, or unemployed. In addition, they are asked to estimate the frequency of their use of Instagram, whether it be every day, 3-6 times a week, 1-2 times a week, every second week, or less than above. In order to ensure that the participant belongs in the wanted sample group, they are asked questions regarding their age, country of residence, and gender.

To conclude, the survey is designed to test how the consumer’s own body size effects the attitude they form towards the advertisements featuring a plus-size model, versus a skinny model.

Figure 3. Posts featuring skinny models and plus-size models, shown to survey participants.

3.5.3 Sampling of respondents
A lot of marketing research has a goal of gathering information about the characteristics of a certain population (Malhotra, 2010). This can be achieved through either a census or a sample. A census involves studying the whole population, while a sample uses a representative group. Conducting a study on a whole population can be time-consuming and expensive especially when the population is large (Malhotra, 2010). In this thesis, I used a sample from the population instead of conducting a study on the entire population. I use an online survey, where each respondent is asked the same set of questions. A survey is an efficient way to collect responses from a large sample (Saunders, 2019).

For my study, I used a convenience sampling method for selecting respondents. Through convenience sampling, respondents who are easily accessible to the researcher are chosen (Bell et al., 2019). This can help in achieving a high response rate. My research has its focus on studying consumers who belong to Generation Z, and who are familiar with social media. This generation is referred to as digital natives (Turner, 2015), with the knowledge they have and the great amount of time they spend in different online groups and social media platforms. This makes convenience sampling through these groups and social media an extremely viable and efficient choice. Additionally, this sampling technique helped in reaching the highest possible number of respondents within the limited timeframe.

The sampling was aimed only at females in Finland aged between 18 and 27, with this being the older half of Generation Z. By sending out the online survey through Facebook groups, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram, the respondents were efficiently reached. The correct people were reached by selecting groups that are popular amongst Generation Z females in Finland on these platforms, such as “Naistenhunone” on Facebook. The survey was promoted, accompanied by a message specifying who could participate in it. Additionally, personal groups of the author, such as a student group on Whatsapp, were used. Throughout the process I kept track of the response rates. When I noticed a larger fraction of the responses to be from females with the skinny body type, I specifically requested females who identify themselves as the larger body type to answer my survey. This resulted in gaining close to equal amounts of responses from both body types.

3.5.4 Study setting
The setting for this study is Finland, and therefore the existing beauty ideals of the consumers in Finland should be taken into consideration. Finland is a country that is located in Northern Europe, and it has 5,5 million inhabitants. Its capital is Helsinki, and it has three neighboring countries, which are Sweden, Russia, and Norway (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Beauty ideals may have variations from country to another, or culture to another. Keskinen et al. (2019) note that the Nordic countries are extremely homogeneous in terms of their cultures and populations. When looking at the consumers and their behavioral patterns in Finland, they are known to consume in a practical and frugal manner (Autio, 2006). Considering the appearance-related ideals of Finland, Autio (2006) states some specific characteristics, such as people wanting to be ordinary. Making a scene and showing off is
avoided to a great extent. Advertisements of popular Finnish brands, such as Lumene, are often seen highlighting natural beauty, healthiness, and youthfulness. The Western beauty standards revolve around thinness (Rice, 2010), which could suggest that the Western consumers, including the Finnish ones, would prefer thin models in advertisements. The beauty standards within young people are becoming more and more connected to their consumption of different media (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). This has resulted in the global beauty standards becoming more homogeneous (Widdows, 2018).

3.5.5 Sampling of the company and the advertisements

For this study, a company called ASOS was chosen. The company is based in London but operates online. ASOS sells a variety of fashion items and face and body products, aimed at a target audience of 20-something fashion lovers, offering them over 850 partner brands, in addition to their own brands (ASOS PLC, 2023). Their official Instagram account has 14.6 million followers and they post new content on their feed daily (Instagram, ASOS, 2023). The company offers ASOS Brands in more than 30 sizes, providing all sizes the same prices. They are committed to promoting body positivity and a healthy body image by working with more than 200 models who are selected to represent their audience. They avoid conforming to any stereotypes, and the models’ appearances are not digitally altered (ASOS, 2023).

Subsequently, the Instagram page of ASOS was sampled in order to find the suitable advertisements for my study. I found it appropriate to select six different pictures in order to be able to generalize. Three of the pictures feature a skinny model, and three feature a plus-size model. The pictures were chosen based on judgmental sampling, which enables the researchers to choose the appropriate images to fit the research question (Malhotra, 2010). The illustration of the two different body types by Aagerup and Scharf (2018) (Figure 1) helped when choosing the representative advertisements. The criteria for the posts was that they need to include at least one model, the model needs to be female, and that the comparable photos of both of the body types (skinny versus plus-size) need to have similar outfits in them. The chosen posts were firstly saved by the author, and then added into the survey to present to the respondents.

3.5.6 Pilot testing of the Survey

A pilot survey can be conducted in order to ensure that all aspects of the survey are suitable and understandable, such as the text and the questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011). I want to make sure that respondents find everything easy to understand. I want to avoid any confusion or misunderstandings. Pilot testing has been recognized as a crucial part for successful research (Kent, 2007). Pilot testing helps in checking language and the variety within responses, it helps in evaluating how the survey would work in practice (Kent, 2007).

The main goal of my pilot was to check if the survey was clear and understandable for the respondents. Thus, I mainly wanted to identify possible errors and see if the questionnaire
measured my intended factors. Pilot surveys were conducted with five respondents who belong in my wanted sample demographic of females in Finland aged between 18 and 27. After sending out the pilot studies for respondents, I asked them to give me feedback and provide tips for possible alterations. It took the respondents an approximate 5 minutes to answer the questions in the survey.

The respondents' general comments were that the survey was good and interesting. The most recurring critique I received was on the controversy of asking respondents to categorize their own body type. The controversy stemmed from the fact that there are only two body types to choose from in the survey, when in reality many different bodies exist. For example, Camerino et al. (2020) suggest that instead of the two body types, there are three main ones, which are ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph. Camerino et al. (2020) categorize body types as follows: ectomorphs are long and lean, mesomorphs are muscular and athletic, and endomorphs are rounder and larger and have no muscles. Additionally, individuals may have a combination of these various body types. For example, an ecto-mesomorph body type means that the body is thin, but toned (Weber & Van Mullem, 2020).

However, with most of the previous literature in my framework emphasizing a distinction between purely a slim ideal body type, and a larger body type, and with the advertisements of ASOS using these 2 body types on average, it is not necessary for my study to consider more body types. Therefore, I do not consider this a problem since these items are used similarly in the work of previous authors. Therefore this is something that was not changed, and my items are meant to measure a similar concept as the identified previous literature.

In addition, one change regarding my chosen photos was made. Two pilot respondents commented on the fact that the advertisements including plus-size models are mostly revealing and sexual, while the advertisements with skinny models were not as much. This resulted in me changing the dress advertisement with the plus-size model into another similar advertisement, but with a less revealing dressing. Consequently the comparable advertisements of plus-size models and skinny models became more accurate.

3.5.7 Data analysis
It is essential to choose the appropriate data analysis method for the study. Different data analysis methods require different data collection approaches, and it is essential to retrieve the relevant information so that the data analysis can be conducted. Different variables might be used in the study, and obtaining the correct and suitable variables is crucial for conducting a successful data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

According to Hinkle et al. (1994), descriptive statistics can help in presenting a summary of the sample and the measurements used. Descriptive statistics can categorize and summarize numerical data. This can be done by using different statistics tables and parameters, such as a histogram, the mean, or the standard deviation (Hinkle et al., 1994).
I analyze my results through a statistical software called Jamovi. To examine my research question, a repeated measures analysis (ANOVA) is conducted. ANOVA is the analysis of variance, where the repeated measures can be used to compare means across one or more variables that are based on repeated observations. In addition, the model can include zero or more independent variables. The idea of the test is that at least 1 dependent variable has more than one observation (Allen, 2017). With ANOVA repeated measures, I assess if mean differences exist on variables by model’s body type (Thin vs. Large). Additionally, the respondent’s own body type is taken into consideration. This is done based on their answers to the survey question which asked them to choose the body type they identify themselves with more, whether it is Body type 1 (skinny) or Body type 2 (plus-size). In practice on the software, the factor is the body type, and the repeated measure is the mean value of thin advertisements and mean value of plus-size advertisements. After seeing the results from the interaction term, my primary hypothesis “There is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads” can be answered. In case the interaction is significant, I proceed to use the Post Hoc test as a follow-up.

With significance shown in the data regarding interaction, I use the Post Hoc test as a follow-up, which helps me understand where the differences are exactly in the data. Post Hoc is usually used with the intention to uncover specific differences between three or more group’s means when the ANOVA test is significant (Zhang et al., 2019). This allows me to analyze whether the skinny respondents’ respond differently towards skinny models versus plus-size models. Vice versa I will draw conclusions on whether the plus-size respondents respond differently towards skinny models versus plus-size models. With this information, I will be able to draw conclusions relating to my research question and hypothesis. If the p-value is 0.05 or smaller than 0.05, I can accept my hypotheses. If my hypotheses are accepted, I can conclude that differences exist within the groups.

3.5.8 Quality criteria
In order to ensure the study’s quality, various measurements must be taken into account. In quantitative research, validity and reliability should be taken into consideration (Bryman et al., 2008). Additionally, the concepts of generalizability and replicability can extend the applicability of findings and ensure that the study can be reproduced with similar results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since my research is quantitative in nature, I will consider these aspects throughout my study.

Validity ensures that the measurements are used accurately to capture the intended aspects of variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In my research, I used various tests and analyses to make sure that the employed measurements do reflect the characteristics I want to study. Different methods can be used to assess this validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011), such as comparing with external sources. A causal link between two variables should be established and the questionnaire should measure the accurate concepts (Saunders et al., 2019).
The external validity is concerned with how the findings can be applied to other contexts or groups (Saunders et al., 2019). My thesis was specifically designed to examine the attitudes of females in Finland, which suggests that the results can only be applied to Finland, or similar contexts.

Construct validity regards the ability to derive relevant hypotheses from the theoretical framework (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The hypothesis of my study originates from the findings from the relevant existing literature. Moreover, the construct validity can be ensured by questioning how well the set of questions match the rest of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). Construct validity has been ensured throughout the research process, which can be seen starting from a thorough and relevant literature review, resulting in the formation of the primary and following hypotheses. The survey has been precisely planned to measure the constructs in question, which in the case of my study are the attitudes of consumers from the two different body type groups.

Reliability is about getting consistent results in case the same study was conducted in different situations (Saunders et al., 2019). If a study is repeated but the same results are not achieved, it creates issues with reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition, transparency has been argued to be an important factor for enabling replication of a study (Dale, 2006). In this study, it has been a consistent goal to remain as transparent as possible to ensure replicability, and the ethicality of the study. The steps of conducting my study and writing my thesis are transparently presented. In addition, the instructions related to the survey are clearly presented when sending out the surveys, and the respondents are allowed to ask any possible questions that may arise.

3.5.9 Ethical considerations
Ethical issues should be considered in both qualitative and quantitative research (Patel & Davidsson, 2015) The researcher of the study must take these considerations seriously to avoid the participants being harmed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The respondents participating in the study should not get negatively affected due to their contribution to research. This could happen through causing stress or physical damage to them (Bell et al., 2019). This makes it crucial for researchers to make wise choices regarding data collection methods. In order to prevent any conflicts or negative consequences, it is essential to consider the needs of the participants (Midgley et al., 2013). Maintaining confidentiality is essential when conducting research that can be considered ethical. This is about honoring the privacy of the participants and their answers (Kaiser, 2009). Whether the respondents of the study stay anonymous or not, it needs to be made clear to the participants. In case the participant wants to remain anonymous their request should be respected (Giordano et al., 2007).

All participants answering my survey remain completely anonymous. Their identities are kept confidential. Additionally, I make sure that I keep the research transparent to the respondents, and explain the procedures and purpose of my study. Additionally, I make sure that no participant is aware of who the other participants answering the survey are. Participants do
not communicate with each other, which avoids possible external influences or biases. I will not present any in-depth information about the participants, and their answers will not be traceable to them.

Lack of informed consent is another principle to consider for ethical research. This refers to the respondent taking part in the study entirely voluntarily (Bell et al., 2019). No participant participated in my study out of their own will, and I informed them that they have the right to withdraw their participation any time during the survey in case they want.

The participants' privacy should not be invaded at any point. The respondent needs to give the researcher the consent to use their data in the study. There is a possibility that a respondent decides to not answer some questions, or answer questions wrongfully. This can happen if they see the question as too private or sensitive (Bell et al., 2019). I avoid this by keeping all the participants anonymous.

Deception relates to the researcher presenting their study as something else than what it is in reality. This can happen if the researcher gives false information to the participants or misleads them on purpose (Silverman, 2011). I do not consider this criterion as an issue for this thesis, since full transparency and accurate instructions have been given to the participants. All these steps are taken to respect the well-being of all participants and to conduct a study that follows all the ethical principles.

4. Findings
This chapter presents the findings I received from my data collection. Firstly, the distribution of various demographics is presented. This is followed by a presentation of the results from the statistical tests performed. These results are divided into firstly answering my primary hypothesis with the help of Interaction term, secondly answering my six following hypotheses with the help of Post Hoc, and lastly presenting the confidence intervals retrieved from Estimated Marginal Means. These findings were collected through a survey that was answered by 82 females in Finland who belong to the older half of Generation Z.

4.1 Demographics
The participants were asked to select the age group they belong to, with the options of 18-22, and 23-27. This was done with the intention of verifying that the respondent truly belongs to the age range that I have designed the study on, which is the older half of Generation Z. With 82 responses in total, 47 respondents (57.3% of the sample) were the age of 23-27, whereas 35 respondents were the age of 18-22 (42.7% of the sample). This creates a fairly equal distribution in order to present the older half of Generation Z accurately.
Other demographic aspects asked in the questionnaire were the respondents’ country of residence and the gender they identify with. 100% of the responses stated Finland as their country of residence, and 100% stated their gender as female, which ensured the respondents’ belonging to my desired target demographic. In addition, the respondents were asked to choose their occupation, or the one they felt is the most suitable option. The options were student, working full-time, working part-time, or unemployed. 54.3% (44 responses) stated their occupation as student, which is something to be expected from the age range of 18-27. All in all, the distribution of the responses ensured that responses were received from all occupation categories, in order to avoid getting answers from only a certain occupation group with possibly biased opinions.
Additionally, the respondents were asked to evaluate the frequency of their Instagram use. The options were Every day, 3-6 times a week, 1-2 times a week, Every second week, and Less than above. 73.2% (60 responses) stated that they use Instagram on a daily basis. The second most recurrent category was 3-6 times a week, which was 23.2% (19 responses) of the responses. Only 2 people stated their use to be 1-2 times a week, 1 person answered Less than above, and 0 answers were received for Every second week. Overall, this distribution of responses verified that the sample in question has used Instagram, and are familiar with the platform. This ensures that the respondents are aware of how the platform generally works, and moreover have been exposed to Instagram posts before.

![Chart 3. Distribution of the respondents’ frequency of Instagram use](image-url)

One of the most crucial questions in the survey was regarding the own body size of the respondents. As stated, multiple variations of different body types do exist, but the question was formed to specifically ask the respondents to choose the body type they identify the most with. The two different body types were clearly presented through images, in order for the respondent to be able to select the most representative one. The option Body type 1 represented the skinny body type, whereas the option of Body type 2 represented the plus-sized body. The Body type 1 received 54.9% (45 responses) of the responses, and The Body type 2 received 45.1% (37 responses). A near to equal distribution of both body categories helps me draw more accurate conclusions to analyze the relation between the consumers’ own body size and their attitudes towards the advertisements.
4.2 Results from statistical tests

Once the responses from the sample were gathered, the attitudes that consumers had towards advertisements could be examined in connection to their own body type. This was done on the statistical software Jamovi. With 6 pictures, and 82 respondents in total, 492 attitudes towards advertisements were gathered. I conducted the following tests to examine the results of my study.

4.2.1 Interaction term

Firstly, I check the interaction term through Repeated Measures ANOVA. In case the interaction is significant, I proceed to use the Post Hoc test as a follow-up to understand where the difference is in the data.

Repeated Measures ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within Subjects Effects</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad type</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.305</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad type * Body type</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90.913</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>711.1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares*

Table 1. The Repeated Measures ANOVA presented, with the interaction term circled.
Hypothesis: There is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads.

Mean square: 90.913

P-value: <.001
→Hypothesis is accepted.

With p-value being less than 0.05, the interaction term is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads.

4.2.2 Following hypotheses
A significance was found in the interaction term on Repeated Measures ANOVA, and therefore I follow this up with Post Hoc, in order to see where the differences are in the data. With the help of Post Hoc, I present six different hypotheses that I examine further.

**Post Hoc Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Ad type</th>
<th>Body type</th>
<th>Ad type</th>
<th>Body type</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Ptukey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thin ad type</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.539</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin ad type</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.992</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin ad type</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.461</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>-2.39</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large ad type</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.547</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>-2.88</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large ad type</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Thin</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.000</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>-9.13</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large ad type</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.453</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>-7.14</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Post Hoc Tests, presenting results to six different hypotheses.

1. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models.

Mean difference: 1.539
P-value: <.001
→Hypothesis is accepted.
With p-value being less than 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models.

2. **Hypothesis**: There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

Mean difference: 0.992  
P-value: <.001  
→Hypothesis is accepted.

With p-value being less than 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

3. **Hypothesis**: There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

Mean difference: -0.461  
P-value: 0.087  
→There is no empirical support for the hypothesis.

With p-value being more than 0.05, the result is not considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is no clear difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

4. **Hypothesis**: There is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

Mean difference: -0.547  
P-value: 0.026  
→Hypothesis is accepted.

With p-value being less than 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

5. **Hypothesis**: There is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
Mean difference: -2.000
P-value: <.001
→Hypothesis is accepted.

With p-value being less than 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

6. **Hypothesis**: There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

Mean difference: -1.453
P-value: <.001
→Hypothesis is accepted.

With p-value being less than 0.05, the result is considered statistically significant. The data indicates that there is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.

**4.2.3 Estimated Marginal Means**

Additionally, I have formed a table and figure to present the Estimated Marginal Means, showing the confidence intervals of my data results. The empirical data is plotted with a 95% Confidence Interval level.
Table 3. Estimated Marginal Means, presenting the confidence intervals of my data results.

5. Discussion
Next, for the purpose of my thesis I will take a deeper look into the attitudes that the two different body type groups provided in the survey. I will take into consideration the responses of skinny consumers and plus-size consumers, and the possible differences between them. I start by discussing my primary hypothesis and the following six hypotheses. Lastly, I connect the empirical findings into previous research.

5.1 Hypotheses
5.1.1 Primary hypothesis
To begin with, I studied the hypothesis of "There is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads" through interaction term on Repeated Measures ANOVA.
With all the information analyzed and discussed, the paper’s hypothesis, formed based on the research question, is found to be accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a difference in how different body types perceive different ads. This information made me proceed to further testings with Post Hoc. With the help of Post Hoc, I was able to reveal six different statements that I could examine further and form into hypotheses.

5.1.2 Following hypotheses

1. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models.
   This hypothesis was accepted, with the results indicating that consumers with a thin body type form more positive attitudes than plus-size consumers do towards thin models.

2. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
   This hypothesis was accepted, which suggests that thin consumers form more positive attitudes towards thin models than they do towards plus-size models.

3. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
   This was the only hypothesis that was rejected. The results show that thin consumers have a similar reaction towards thin models, as plus-size consumers have towards plus-size models. In conclusion, this only gives more proof to the statement that people prefer to see their own body type in advertisements.

4. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
   This hypothesis was accepted. These results indicate that plus-size consumers have more positive attitudes towards advertisements with plus-size models than they do towards advertisements with thin models.

5. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how large consumers perceive ads featuring thin models compared to how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
   This hypothesis was accepted, which shows how plus-size models in advertisements are more appealing to plus-size consumers than they are for consumers with a thin body type.

6. **Hypothesis:** There is a difference in how thin consumers perceive ads featuring large models compared to how large consumers perceive ads featuring large models.
   This hypothesis was accepted, which gives evidence on plus-size models in advertisements causing more negative attitudes in thin consumers than they do in plus-size consumers.
5.2 Discussion in relation to previous research

The attitudes that consumers hold towards advertisements can be favorable or unfavorable. The goal of my study was to measure the reactions that consumers have towards an advertising stimulus during an occasion of exposure (MacKenzie et al., 1986). It has been stated that consumers’ attitudes towards the advertisement are shaped by different components of it, including the model, celebrity endorser, color, layout, and textual message (Kim et al., 2002). My study had its focus on the model, by measuring the respondents’ attitudes towards six different advertisements, with three of them featuring a plus-size model and three featuring a skinny model. An essential aspect I took into consideration was the respondents’ own body size. It has been stated that when the consumers form a positive attitude towards an advertisement, their intention to purchase is positively affected (Janssen & Paas, 2014). Consumers’ purchase intentions are strongly linked to the attitudes they hold towards them, which indicates that the consumers’ attitudes are an important factor to study in order to improve the sales of a company.

5.2.1 Plus-size consumers’ attitudes towards advertisements

It has been previously stated that plus-size consumers exhibit more favorable attitudes towards advertisements that feature plus-size models (Hendrickse et al., 2020). My study proves this to be true when considering the social media platform of Instagram and the Finnish Generation Z females as well. My study revealed that plus-size consumers have a notably more positive attitude towards plus-size models than they did towards thin models. This indicates that plus-size consumers prefer the body type they personally identify more with.

These results align with the concept of perceived similarity, which is based on the consumers seeing similarity between themselves and the model in the advertisement (Horton, 2003). In addition, Yu et al. (2011) state how larger-sized models should especially attract plus-size consumers. Consumers choose brands that match the image they have about themselves (Sung & Choi, 2010). These previous studies line up with the results of my study, which takes into consideration the context of Instagram ads and the Generation Z females in Finland.

5.2.2 Skinny consumers’ attitudes towards advertisements

With the skinny respondents exhibiting a more positive attitude towards the advertisements featuring the body type they personally identify with more, it can be concluded that these results again align with the information from earlier studies. Previous research has stated how consumers prefer brands that fit their ideas of themselves (Maehle & Shneor, 2010).

Carnevale (2018) suggests that the advertisement model’s body size should represent the body of the consumer. This could consequently increase the purchase intentions. When the model represents the consumer’s body, they can get a better idea of how the clothes look like
on them (Diedrichs et al., 2011). When consumers perceive similarity between themselves and the model (Horton, 2003), it can positively affect their attitude (Yu et al., 2011). In my study, this came true both in the case of skinny consumers, as well as the plus-size consumers. It can be concluded that both plus-size consumers and skinny models tend to form more positive attitudes towards models who represent the body type they identify themselves with. Additionally, skinny consumers tend to form negative attitudes towards plus-size models, just like plus-size consumers tend to form negative attitudes towards skinny models.

With the Generation Z females of Finland in question, the results of my study provide evidence on how using skinny models in advertisements may still work in some instances, which in this case are the skinny consumers. Consequently, this gives evidence to the fact that brands should take into consideration whether they want to target the consumers of plus-size bodies, the consumers of skinny bodies. With skinny consumers preferring the models with a skinny body type, this may provide some confirmation and understanding on the long-lasting use of skinny models within the fashion industry. The purpose of highly attractive models in advertisements has been to psychologically impact the consumers, which would make the ad more effective (Bower, 2001). Skinny models have been used with the intention of forming positive attitudes amongst the consumers (Gulas & McKeage., 2000). Based on the results of my study, it can be concluded that the skinny models do work, but only in the case of skinny consumers. In contrast, plus-size models receive a more positive reaction from the consumers who identify themselves as plus-size. Therefore, it may become useful for the marketer to consider whether their target group consists of skinny consumers, or plus-size consumers.

6. Conclusions and implications
This chapter concludes the study, and answers the research question. This is followed by introducing some managerial, societal and ethical implications. Lastly, I present the limitations of my study, and some recommendations for future research.

6.1 Conclusions
The purpose of my degree project is to study how body diversity in fashion advertisements on Instagram affects the attitudes of female Generation Z consumers in Finland. An important factor incorporated into the study is the effect that the consumer’s own body size has on their attitude. Previous research results were found to be quite contradicting, with the fashion industry claiming that the use of skinny ideal models is still the best strategy, while some research collected on consumer opinions claimed that consumers prefer to see diversity in advertisements. Therefore I focused on testing how the factor of the consumer’s own body size influences their attitude towards the advertisement. Additionally, I wished to contribute insights for companies and marketers that could improve their advertising activities. I conducted a quantitative explanatory study to test the effect the consumer’s own body size has to their attitude. I sent out online surveys that were answered by Generation Z females in Finland, and was finally able to answer my research question of:
Does the Generation Z female consumers’ own body size affect the attitude they form towards Instagram fashion advertisements that feature plus-size models?

Previous research, and the data I collected provided an answer to the research question. The findings of my study revealed that the consumer’s own body size does have an effect on the attitude they form towards the fashion advertisement that includes a plus-size model, or respectively, a skinny model. The model promoting the clothes is one of the main components in the advertisement, and should therefore be taken into careful consideration when planning the advertisement.

Through the analysis of my study, it became evident that skinny consumers formed more positive attitudes towards skinny models than they did towards plus-size models. This also came true with plus-size consumers, as they formed more favorable attitudes towards plus-size models than they did towards skinny models. Additionally, the results revealed that skinny consumers formed more negative attitudes towards plus-size models than they did towards skinny models. This was the case with plus-size consumers also, with them forming more negative attitudes towards skinny models than they did towards plus-size models. It became evident that the consumer prefers to see a model in the advertisement presenting the same body type that they personally have. It is important that the consumer feels like they can relate to the model in the advertisement, and that the model’s body type represents their own. This should result in the consumers forming a positive attitude towards the advertisement, which can consequently increase their intentions to purchase from the brand.

6.2 Managerial implications

After analyzing and discussing the empirical findings of my study, I proceed to provide some recommendations. These managerial implications can help people whose work touches upon the subject of body diversity, consumer attitudes, and advertisements. The recommendations I provide can aid people who work in similar contexts as the company I used in my study, ASOS. Since I delimited my research to study the content that fashion brands directly share on their Instagram, I believe that my contributions and recommendations can bring great value to a large number of fashion companies who are active on Instagram, or who want to build their Instagram presence further.

This becomes useful especially for companies aiming their advertising towards Generation Z females in Finland. Additionally, the recommendations I provide could work in other geographical contexts that are similar to Finland, since my study was conducted within Finland. The results of my study may apply to other Nordic countries, since their cultures and populations are extremely similar to Finland (Keskinnen et al., 2019). Additionally, the World Happiness Report could be considered a factor when planning further practical application. The report uses data from more than 150 countries worldwide (Helliwell et al., 2022). The World Happiness Report 2022 indicates a similar “evaluation of life” between Finland,
Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden and Norway, ranking them on top of the list (Helliwell et al., 2022).

The model presenting the product is often the most visible component in a fashion advertisement, and should therefore be taken into thoughtful consideration. The results of my study revealed that consumers typically prefer when the advertisement features a model who has the same body type that the consumers personally identify with. A skinny consumer has a more positive attitude towards skinny models, and a plus-size consumer has a more positive attitude towards a plus-size model. Additionally, skinny consumers portray more negative attitudes towards plus-size models, and plus-size consumers portray more negative attitudes towards skinny models. Fashion companies and marketers can use this information to their advantage. They should firstly determine their main target group, and whether it is skinny consumers, or plus-size consumers. Secondly, the marketing strategies should be planned accordingly, by casting the suitable models for the target group.

It has been argued that it is important to portray models of diverse body sizes in advertisements (Martin & Xavier, 2010), and it can help companies increase the satisfaction of their customers (Luzon, 2019). When looking into the concept of the Body positivity movement, companies could use this to their advantage by including a diversity of body types in their advertisements.

My study revealed that plus-size consumers have a preference for plus-size models, and skinny consumers have a preference for skinny models. My study featured only advertisements that have one model in them. However, I believe it could be useful to include multiple models with varying body types in the advertisements so that the overall satisfaction and positive attitudes among the customers could be enhanced. This could be especially beneficial in case the brand has a target group of varying customers with many different body types. Incorporating more diverse models in their advertisements, or initiating a body positivity campaign can help brands improve their brand image and reputation (Nittle, 2018).

6.3 Societal and ethical implications
The results of this thesis and the implications relating to it do not only influence the fashion brands and the marketers. When decisions are made regarding fashion marketing and the casting of models, the consumers and the society at large is subsequently affected. When considering the consequences of how companies choose to advertise, the societal and ethical side of these actions should be considered as well.

When looking at the results of my study, skinny models do still work when targeting the skinny consumers. However, what should be recognized is how the use of skinny models affects the society at large. The ethicality of using unattainably thin and highly attractive models should be considered. Previous research has proven women’s exposure to thin models to lead to negative feelings and eating disorders (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Therefore I
believe ethical standards should be set when creating advertisements. This could lead to a decrease in eating disorders and other mental harm of the consumers. Even though skinny consumers tend to prefer the skinny models, brands could still find ways to advocate for the greater good by striving to be more socially responsible through the use of body diversity. It has been noted that when brands use body diversity in their advertisements, they can have positive long-term effects towards their brand (Nittle, 2018). This could consequently have a positive impact on their brand equity (Tomlin, 2016), and the brand could receive more favorable responses (Hakeem, 2020).

The results of my study suggest that skinny consumers have a preference for skinny models, which gives some understanding to the long-lasting use of skinny models in advertisements. Additionally, the fashion industry has suggested that featuring skinny and highly attractive models in advertisements is a more effective strategy than the use of average-sized models. However, this statement does not take into consideration the ethical and societal issues at large, but simply the effectiveness these models have had towards the company’s sales and success. I believe the true psychological effects of the use of skinny models should still be considered, and studied further. Therefore I believe that official guidelines and ethical standards set by the government may become necessary, in order to avoid the possible psychological harm and negative consequences.

6.4 Limitations

For my study, I chose Instagram posts that a fashion company has shared on their own page. In addition, my study only uses the Instagram posts of the ecommerce fashion company ASOS, which becomes another limitation to the study. The results could be different if other companies or another social media was used for the study. In addition, the Instagram content was sampled through judgmental sampling in order to select the posts with the most suitable characteristics to fit my research question. For this purpose the criteria of the posts was to include a female model, and for the comparative skinny model versus plus-size model posts to have similar outfits in them. This makes my study limited to these factors, and therefore the results may have been different if other Instagram content from ASOS, or from a completely different company was selected for this research.

I chose the participants for my study through a convenience sampling method, which involves selecting available respondents who are easily accessible to the researcher, so that a high response rate can be achieved (Bell et al., 2019). Even though this sampling method is commonly used in business research, it may still not always be generalized to the broader population (Peterson & Merunka, 2014). Even if the new sample seems to be similar, their personal attitudes may differ from my sample. For this reason, I believe the result may have some differences if another sampling method is used.

My study only focused on gathering the attitudes that females in Finland form towards advertisements. Therefore it is important to keep in mind how a different context may offer
different results. Previous literature has established how attitudes lead to purchase intentions, which highlights the importance of how consumers’ attitudes are an essential part of not only the advertising process, but also how they can affect the success and profits. Conducting my study in Finland provides a valuable foundation of information regarding the issue, but the problem should be considered within the broader context as well. Consumer attitudes are an aspect every company should take into consideration when planning their strategies in advertising, no matter their target group. However, these attitudes may differ when considering the differences between countries, cultures, and contexts.

6.5 Recommendations for future research
Numerous ways exist for conducting similar research but with some minor variations. To begin, I propose a future recommendation for research to focus on other types of diversity than body diversity. A lot of new research is needed for different types of diversity and different minority groups. For example, the representation of different ethnicities within fashion advertisements could be studied further. I have noticed this to be lacking, especially with fashion advertisements in Finland.

The connection between the women’s exposure to thin models and their consequent negative thoughts has become evident through previous research. I believe it would be useful to study the negative effects of featuring thin models in advertisements further in more detail. It should be considered whether the negative effects differ for example between different body types, or between genders. Based on the findings of my research, which indicate that individuals with skinny body types tend to prefer skinnier models, I would suggest conducting a more comprehensive investigation on the genuine psychological impacts or reasons behind these preferences.

In addition, I find it worth mentioning how during the pilot testing of my study, some respondents commented on the fact that I only present two body types to choose from. Previous research on body diversity has heavily focused on these two contrary body types, but a suggestion for future research would be to conduct a more detailed research. This could encompass the concept of perceived similarity (Horton, 2003), and more body types to choose from, for example the ones suggested by Camerino et al. (2020), which are ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph.

Previous research has indicated that women find brands worn by obese models more attractive (Aagerup and Scharf, 2018), and males express more negative attitudes towards larger models than females do (Aagerup, 2021). With my study having its focus on solely females, the results may have been different in case I included males in my sample too. Additionally, it may be of interest to know whether plus-size male consumers prefer to see advertisements featuring plus-size male models, or skinny male models. Women and their behavior is an important factor to study on their own in advertising, but it is equally important to take into account marketing strategies targeting men. Therefore I would suggest
future research to take the male gender into consideration, since the results from my study can not be directly applicable to both.

Instagram was the social media platform used for this study, and therefore another future research suggestion would be to conduct a study but on another platform. This would help in seeing if the consumers’ attitudes differ based on the platform, for example when a video platform, such as Youtube is used. In addition, the study could be done on advertising content from a different brand than ASOS, in order to see if the results would differ. With ASOS offering mainly affordable fashion, the study could be conducted on a luxury brand with a higher price range.

My last suggestion for future research would be to conduct the same study with a larger number of respondents. My study consisted of 82 respondents, but the higher the response rate, the more accurate the results would be. This would help see whether the attitudes of the respondents would still be the same when a larger sample group of females in Finland was used.
7. References:


ASOS PLC. (2023) This is ASOS. Available via: https://www.asosplc.com/this-is-asos/our-platform/ [Accessed August 10, 2023].


[Accessed August 10, 2023]


Instagram. (2023). ASOS. 


8. Appendix
Appendix 1. Survey
Survey: Attitudes towards body diversity in fashion advertisements

Disclaimer: Participation in this study is voluntary, and all survey responses will remain completely anonymous. Only one answer per question is required and allowed, please choose the one you find most suitable. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes. Thank you!

1. 1. How old are you? Select age group.

   Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

   - 18-22
   - 23-27

2. 2. What is your country of residence?

   ___________________________

3. 3. What gender do you identify with?

   Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

   - Male
   - Female
   - Non-binary
   - Other
4. What is your occupation?

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

☐ Student
☐ Working full-time
☐ Working part-time
☐ Unemployed

5. How often do you use Instagram?

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

☐ Every day
☐ 3-6 times a week
☐ 1-2 times a week
☐ Every second week
☐ Less than above
6. Based on these two body types, which one do you identify yourself with more?

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

☐ Body type 1
☐ Body type 2
7. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Мерките vain yksel solkio.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively
8. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively
9. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively
10. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively
11. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively
12. Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, how you feel about the advertisement.

Merkitse vain yksi soikio.

Very negatively

1

2

3

4

5

Very positively