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Supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance in commercial brand campaigns created during a pandemic: Social and marketing aspects

Abstract

Commercial brands are increasingly running campaigns supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance in response to social events, trends, and expectations related to social responsibility. By conducting such campaigns, brands try to pursue social and marketing objectives. The pandemic period was associated with increased problems and strengthening of social trends regarding self-acceptance and self-esteem. Therefore, the importance of actions related to these issues is of particular social relevance today. The pandemic conditions may have been reflected in the content and features of advertising campaigns and the associated consumer expectations and attitudes. In recent studies, far too little attention has been paid to intentional supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance in commercial brand campaigns. The article responds to an identified need for research concerning key messages and characteristic features of contemporary self-esteem advertisements, which may be linked to the specific social context. The important research issue is also the marketing and social value of advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance. The article aims to identify key messages and features of commercial brand campaigns created during the pandemic that support self-esteem and self-acceptance. It also attempts to assess such campaigns in terms of their social and marketing value. These objectives were accomplished by using qualitative and quantitative methods. The research procedure involved three stages: desk research based on studies from the pandemic period regarding self-acceptance and self-esteem issues, a collective case study of cam-

paigns of three brands supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance and a diagnostic survey using an online questionnaire on the consumer perception of such campaigns and their value judgments resulting from expectations, motives, and impact assessments. The research is placed in the context of a pandemic, but the trends identified, key messages and features of the self-esteem campaigns, and assessment dimensions may remain relevant in the future.

Introduction

Commercial brands are increasingly running campaigns supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance in response to social events, trends and expectations related to social responsibility. They try to change consumers' attitudes and behaviours by stimulating self-positive feelings and fostering social acceptance of diversity. By conducting such campaigns, brands pursue the goals inherent in social campaigns and their marketing objectives.

The pandemic period was associated with increased problems related to self-acceptance and self-esteem, as evidenced by the results of various social studies. Therefore, the importance of actions related to these issues is of particular social relevance today. The pandemic period was also accompanied by a strengthening of social trends related to self-esteem and self-acceptance. These conditions may have been reflected in the content and features of advertising campaigns, as well as the associated consumer expectations and attitudes.

Previous studies have reported that consumers often compare themselves to the images presented in advertisements, which impacts their self-esteem and self-acceptance. There is a considerable volume of published studies describing the effects resulting from the stereotypical or idealised portrayal of people in advertising. Much of the previous research has focused on the negative impact of ads on self-perceptions. However, some studies indicate an impact of non-stereotypic commercials on positive behavioural changes.

In recent studies, far too little attention has been paid to intentional supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance in commercial brand campaigns. Few past studies in this regard focused on using consumers' feelings of self-esteem to evoke positive feelings towards the brands. Nowadays, advertising more often changes in response to social changes and growing expectations for brands related to social responsibility. The article responds to an identified need for research concerning key messages and characteristic features of contemporary self-esteem advertisements, which may be linked to the specific social context. An important research issue is also the social and marketing value of advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance.

The research addressed two major objectives. The first was to identify key messages and features of commercial brand campaigns from the pandemic period that support self-esteem and self-acceptance. It was also determined whether they are linked with trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem issues, the am-

plification of which was observed during the pandemic period. This was achieved through desk research and content analysis based on the collective case study of marketing campaigns by three purposefully selected commercial brands. The second objective was to assess self-esteem advertisements regarding their perceived marketing and social value. The attempt at such an assessment was based on the analysis of the online survey results on the consumer perception of the advertisements and their value. The survey covered three aspects of value judgments: expectations, motives, and impact assessments.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the key messages and features of contemporary self-esteem advertising? Are they linked to the social context and specific trends whose amplification was observed during the pandemic period?

2. How do consumers assess the value of advertisements supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance?

— What is the perceived impact of advertising on the perception of others and self?

— How do consumers rate the saturation of ads supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance?

— How do consumers evaluate advertising in terms of attention to supporting the self-acceptance of various groups? Whether or not the assessment differs for specific groups?

— What are the expectations related to supporting specific areas of self-acceptance and self-esteem? Does the assessment of expectations related to the need to support self-acceptance differ between the areas?

— How do consumers perceive social and marketing motives for running self-esteem campaigns?

— What is the perceived social impact of self-esteem advertising?

— What is the perceived impact of self-esteem advertising on brand image?

The research is placed in the context of a pandemic, but the trends identified, key messages and features of the self-esteem campaign, and assessment dimensions may remain relevant in the future. The study offers important insights concerning social and marketing aspects of contemporary advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance. It also points to opportunities for further research which can develop knowledge in the important area of socially responsible advertising.

1. Theoretical framework of the research

1.1. Self-esteem and self-acceptance concepts

Self-esteem is one of the most widely studied concepts in the social sciences (Bleidorn et al., 2018), reflected in hundreds of scholarly articles and books that appear each year (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). In simple terms, self-esteem is a reflection of how

individuals perceive themselves and their sense of worth, so it expresses "the way people generally feel about themselves" (Brown and Marshall, 2006, 4). Zeigler-Hill (2013) support the rationale of defining self-esteem in broad terms as an intrapersonal, subjective evaluation that reflects an assessment of one's worth and value. According to the American Psychological Association, self-esteem reflects the cumulative perception of the qualities and characteristics contained in one's self-concept and the degree to which they are perceived to be positive (American Psychological Association, n.d.-b).

Yang et al. (2016) highlight that self-esteem is influenced by both psychological and social contexts (intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives). Self-esteem results from a personal assessment of how well an individual is doing in areas they deem important. However, people's thoughts and feelings about themselves reflect also how they believe they are perceived and evaluated by others (Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs, 1995). Some researchers state that the self-esteem system is a subjective monitor of the degree to which the individual is accepted by others (Leary and Baumeister, 2000; MacDonald, Saltzman and Leary, 2003).

The American Psychological Association (n.d.-a) defines self-acceptance as "a relatively objective sense or recognition of one's abilities and achievements, together with acknowledgement and acceptance of one's limitations." Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) found a high positive correlation between self-acceptance and self-esteem. In another study, Macinnes (2006) indicated that an increase in self-esteem and self-acceptance positively affect psychological well-being.

1.2. The influence of advertising on self-esteem and self-acceptance

Previous research findings, supported by numerous studies, confirm the influence of advertising on viewers' self-esteem and self-acceptance, resulting from perception of themselves and their achievements. Much of the research focuses on the impact of advertising on gender image. Advertisements and media images strongly impact shaping gender images due to stereotypes and generalisations that "continue to objectify women and place stress solely on their appearance, thus devaluing their innate worth" (Rajagopal and Gales, 2002, 3333).

Several studies confirm that women often compare themselves to the image of women in advertisements. Matlin (1987) found that women in contact with idealised characters in advertising tend to be less satisfied with their attractiveness (Kulkarni and Banerjee, 2021). Banerjee and Kakadee (2020) highlight that fixing beauty standards through advertisements leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes.

The media influence individual's attitudes toward their body and appearance through social comparisons with media ideals. Yu, Damhorst and Russell (2011) showed that body images presented in advertisements influence viewers' attitudes toward brands. This is due to perceptions of attractiveness and similarity to ide-

alized and non-idealized advertising images. Their research results suggest the use of realistic model images reflecting a greater number of individuals' body images in advertising. Furthermore, several studies on the effects of very attractive models in advertising failed to unequivocally support their use. Bower and Landreth (2001) demonstrated that the perception of the model's expertise about the product is more important than the model's appearance in terms of advertising effects. This may suggest that confronting idealised advertising characters may not positively affect consumer self-esteem or the image of the brands presented.

Most of the previous research on the influence of advertising on self-acceptance and self-esteem has focused on the negative effects on body perceptions. However, there is also emerging research on the impact of advertising on self-perception in the context of self-worth and evaluation of self-capabilities in a social context. The stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising leads to a downplaying of their role, capabilities, and achievements. This causes women to set less ambitious goals and lose self-confidence. The findings of Jennings-Walstedt, Geis and Brown (1980) suggest that repeated exposure to non-stereotypic commercials might help produce positive and lasting behavioural changes. Women exposed to such advertisements show more independence of judgment and display greater self-confidence.

Advertising can thus influence consumers' positive self-perceptions by stimulating positive attitudes about themselves. Campaigns that use consumers' feelings of self-esteem have been around for a long time. The frequent motive of their impact on the audience was in the past to evoke positive feelings towards the brands. Therefore, Durgee (1986, 21) defined self-esteem advertising as "a type of advertising which attempts to alter consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards products by stimulating positive feelings towards themselves." His research results supported the hypothesis that ads positively influencing consumers' attitudes towards themselves have also positively affected their attitudes towards brands. The key reason for this influence is that the marketing approach is based on identifying, stimulating, and satisfying consumer needs. Self-esteem is one of the strongest psychogenic needs (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger, 2011).

In a broad sense, self-esteem advertising can be defined as a type of advertising that stimulates consumers' positive feelings towards themselves, supporting their self-acceptance and self-esteem. Nowadays, advertising more often responds to social changes and growing expectations for brands related to social responsibility. Emphasising consumers' strengths and boosting their self-esteem and self-acceptance stems from the pursuit of marketing and social goals. Therefore, there is a need for research that takes into account the social and marketing value of self-esteem advertising.

1.3. Self-acceptance and self-esteem problems and trends in the pandemic context

The pandemic period is associated with the intensification of problems related to self-acceptance and self-esteem, which is confirmed by the results of various studies. The stress and anxiety caused by the coronavirus became a serious threat to psychological well-being in populations worldwide (Galea, Merchant and Lurie, 2020; Swami, Horne and Furnham, 2021). The additional anxiety associated with the pandemic may also have weakened the mechanisms we often use to help cope with negative thoughts.

According to the survey conducted by American Addiction Centers,[1] 1 in 5 (20%) Americans suffered from low self-esteem during the pandemic. A large percentage of those who experience low self-esteem (42%) stated these negative feelings have been worse than in previous years since the start of the pandemic. It is especially worrying that 16% of the respondents admitted they have drunk alcohol to try and ease negative feelings about their self-confidence (AdCare, 2021).

The findings of Swami et al. (2021) suggested that pandemic-related stress might shape body image outcomes under physical and social distancing conditions. Increased exposure to thin/athletic ideals via media messaging and simultaneous decrease in physical activity heightened concerns about weight and shape changes. The study's results confirmed that Covid-related stress and anxiety were associated with more negative body image.

The report *The Power of Women: What Are Contemporary Polish Women Like?* (Mobile Institute, 2020) showed that 48% of surveyed Polish women declared they did not like their bodies. During the pandemic, we could observe a noticeable strengthening of social trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem. This concerns especially young women and girls. Mature women over 40 accept their bodies much more often. The research showed that self-acceptance increased with age.

Although there is a lack of statistical data on the increase in self-esteem problems, it can be seen in other studies on the psychiatric condition of society. According to estimates by the European Commission, before the pandemic, about 10–20% children suffered from mental illness problems. The current level is estimated at 20–25%. This may indicate the magnitude of the increase related to mental problems associated with the pandemic period. In reference to young people, even the term "the Covid generation" is used (Deeker, 20.01.2022).

During the pandemic, we could also observe the strengthening of specific trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem. Identifying social trends influencing consumer behaviour can help determine the areas for the social impact of commercial brands. These are:

— self-acceptance and self-care (love yourself and mind yourself),
— body acceptance (body positivity, fat-shaming),

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[1] The survey was conducted in March 2021 on a sample of 3,000 respondents.

— naturalness (natural beauty, true beauty, no filter, no make-up),
— authenticity (being yourself, be yourself),
— diversity, equality, and inclusion,
— women's empowerment and girls' empowerment.

These areas are often interconnected, which impacts the blurring of boundaries between the categories. The identification of the trends can be the basis for developing advertising campaigns responding to social changes and growing expectations related to social responsibility. The sensuosity to specific topics can also protect brands from being subjected to social criticism associated with the lowering of self-esteem of various groups and individuals. Identified trends can be expressed in the content and influence the features of advertisements that support self-esteem and self-acceptance.

2. Research methodology

The research was carried out using qualitative and quantitative methods. The research procedure involved three stages. The first was based on research from the pandemic period regarding self-acceptance and self-esteem issues. The results of these studies allowed us to determine the scale and character of the problems. At this stage, we also aimed to identify social trends influencing consumer behaviour and determine areas of social influence of commercial brands. In the second stage, a collective case study was conducted involving the campaigns of three brands supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance. The third stage involved a diagnostic survey using an online questionnaire on the consumer perception of the advertisements and their value resulting from expectations, motives, and impact assessments.

Identification of trends, issues, and campaigns related to self-acceptance and self-esteem was based on Google search results based on combinations of keywords such as: self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-love, self-confidence, trends, trend, report, campaign, campaigns, ad, ads, advertising, advertisement, Covid, pandemic, coronavirus.

The selection of the brands and their campaigns was based on a review of campaigns related to the analysed social aspects. We chose brands whose campaigns are closely related to supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance and clearly express this in their key messages. These were: Dove, Pantene, and L'Oréal. The content and the presentation of these messages were analysed. The synthesis of information led to conclusions about the key messages and campaign features.

A diagnostic survey on the perception of advertising campaigns that support self-esteem and self-acceptance was conducted using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms. It consisted of 12 questions, including single and multiple-choice cafeteria questions, linear numeric scale, and Likert scale questions. Respondents were informed about the topic of the study before the survey, as well

as about the complete anonymity of their responses. The survey was conducted in April/May 2022.

The sample consisted of 172 respondents. There is a significant disproportion in the gender representatives in the sample structure. Among the respondents were 134 females, 35 males and 3 non-binary persons, constituting respectively 77.9%, 20.3%, and 1.8% of the sample. The largest group of respondents (40.1%) were aged 18–26. Respondents between the ages of 46 and 55 accounted for 22.7% of the group, 15.7% were 36–45 years old, and 12.8% were 27–35 years old. Other groups were less well represented and accounted for a total of 8.8% of the sample.

To characterise the respondents, we asked them to rate their self-esteem using a 5-point rating scale from (1) "very low" to (5) "very high." The average self-esteem score was 3.66 for the entire sample. The respondents were also asked to rate how, in their opinion, their worth was perceived by other people. The average score in this case was slightly higher, at 3.76.

Due to convenience sampling, the analysis of the survey results concerns only the surveyed respondents.

3. Key messages and features of self-esteem campaigns

The content analysis was the basis for identifying key messages and features of self-esteem campaigns from the pandemic era and determined whether they are linked with established trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem issues. The study considered three brands for which the topics of self-acceptance and self-esteem are crucial in marketing communications. These were: Dove, Pantene, and L'Oréal.

The first of the brands is Dove, whose campaigns have referenced self-esteem and self-acceptance themes for years. The key message of the recent Dove campaign expressed in the campaign name and the main slogan refers to "real beauty." The brand's advertisements address authenticity, natural beauty and diversity issues. The campaign messages are based on content designed to boost self-confidence and acceptance of one's appearance. By opposing the idealised, unreal image of women presented every day in the media and advertising, Dove wants to free women from the pressure to be perfect and flawless. Dove's campaigns also respond to the negative trend of body shaming, wanting to help end body judgment and spread more "body love." The key message conveyed in Dove's campaigns is that, in reality, we are all beautiful and that what we see and appreciate in ourselves depends only on our perception. So, we define beauty ourselves (Dove, n.d.-a).

During the pandemic, Dove declared that it would not digitally alter the shape of the human body: its size, proportion, or skin colour. Hence, its ads began to feature a logo with the slogan "no digital distortion." Dove launched the "Reverse

selfie" campaign (Ogilvy, 2021), which is part of the #NoDigitalDistortion move-ment to help build confidence and positive body image on social media (Dove, 2021). Dove encouraged women to accept ageing and not hide it, as it expresses experience and our journey through life. Dove supports showing ourselves as we are in real life, using the hashtags: #Dove, #ShowUs, #RealBeauty, and #Real-Women. In the campaigns Dove tries to break unrealistic beauty standards and help women as well as non-binary individuals "redefine beauty, on their own terms" (Dove, n.d.-b).

An analysis of the visual content of Dove ads shows that they most often de-pict a group of women with different images. Dove's ads portray the realistic look of women of different shapes, sizes, skin colours, ages, etc. In large part of the self-esteem ads, the Dove products are not presented directly, which indicates the social nature of the Dove campaign. In many ads, only the brand name and logo appear. In ads in which the products are presented directly, Dove encourages women to discover their real beauty by offering products that provide excellent body care. Thus, the products are presented not as increasing self-value but as al-lowing one to enhance self-acceptance by discovering one's own beauty.

The other brand that consistently supports self-esteem and self-acceptance is Pantene. The brand continues redefining what "beautiful" really means. In recent years, brand campaigns have focused on the areas of diversity, equality and inclu-siveness, belonging to the "Be Yourself" trend. Advertising messages are based on two main keywords "beauty," "beautiful," and "power." The campaign "I'm BeautifuLGBTQ+" featured a range of people within the LGBTQ+ community and their own unique stories of transformation (Pantene, 2021a). Continuing its ef-forts, Pantene launched a new "Power to Transform" campaign in 2021 that recog-nises, celebrates and gives visibility to those who are transforming their lives. The crucial slogans of the Pantene campaign thus became "Family is beautifuLGBTQ" and "the power of visibility." Pantene supports LGBTQ kids and their families in taking pride in their identity, loving them unconditionally, and seeing them for who they truly are (Family Equality, 2021; Pantene, 2021b).

Most of Pantene's ads are related to their core competency, hair. The content of Pantene's self-esteem advertisements doesn't focus on products but hair, which is the source and tool of self-expression, pride and power. In the #HairHasNoGen-der campaign, the brand highlights the true power of hair in expressing identity. In the Polish ad, Michał Szpak argues that "one must have the strength to be dif-ferent." Pantene's #PowerOfHair campaign highlights that hair also has the power to transform (Pantene, n.d.-a). In the campaigns "Power of Grey" and "My Hair won't be silenced," Pantene challenges "hair shaming" related to ageing or eth-nicity, and discrimination against natural hair, which negatively affect self-esteem (Pantene, n.d.-b; Watts and Lynch, 2021). Analysing the key messages allows us to describe Pantene's campaigns as empowerment advertising.

The last brand analysed, L'Oréal, has used the same key slogan "Because you're worth it" in its campaigns for 50 years. Recently it has been expanded to include the phrase "Believe in yourself," which expresses the key message. This is a call for women to believe in their self-worth and recognise their innate value both as women and as individuals. According to the brand's messages, L'Oréal Paris products are designed to help women feel confident, beautiful and powerful. For the brand's advertising, the choice of content presenters was key. These include strong, intelligent, and inspiring women who represent brand values and create change. They are ambassadors to encourage other women to recognise their value, which comes from living your truth and feeling that "you are enough" (L'Oréal Paris, 2021).

The latest campaign launched during the pandemic was called "Lessons of worth." It took the form of inspiring testimonials from spokespeople including Kate Winslet, Camila Cabello, Helen Mirren, Jane Fonda, and Andie MacDowell, who talk about how the tagline's words "Because you're worth it" have empowered them. Powerful women like Kate Winslet argue that self-esteem comes from an inner conviction that "I'm worth it." Advertisements with an explicit social character are meant to express a message about "feeling brave enough to believe you're worth it." The brand ambassadors support authenticity, demonstrating that all differences, scars, and imperfections make us who we are. L'Oréal encourages us to believe and tell ourselves that we are "worth it," convincing us that what we have to offer is beyond our race, gender, body and age (L'Oréal Groupe, 2021).

The analysed campaigns from the pandemic period represent different approaches, but we can also find common features. Therefore, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding contemporary self-esteem campaigns. They are united by values and a way of understanding self-worth which involves an inner sense of beauty and authenticity. Key features of the campaigns analysed include empowerment messages, encouraging the audience to feel confident, beautiful, and worthy. The campaigns combine the promotion of self-esteem and self-acceptance with respect for diversity and freedom to express oneself. They are linked to specific trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem issues, the amplification of which was observed during the pandemic period.

4. The social and marketing value of self-esteem campaigns from the consumers' perspective

The diagnostic survey using an online questionnaire was conducted to assess the perceived value of advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance. The study was conducted after a long period associated with pandemic conditions. The survey covered three aspects of value judgments: expectations, motives, and impact assessments.

The scope of the study addressed the following issues:
— subjective evaluation of the impact of advertising on the perception of others and self,
— subjective assessment of the saturation of ads supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance,
— subjective evaluation on giving appropriate attention to supporting self-acceptance of different groups,
— expectations related to supporting specific areas of self-acceptance and self-esteem,
— assessment of commercial brands' motives for running self-esteem campaigns,
— perceived social impact of self-esteem advertising,
— perceived impact of self-esteem advertising on brand image.

Table 1. Subjective evaluation of the impact of advertising on the perception of others and self

The way persons are portrayed in advertising affects:	% of responses					Mean	SD
	Definitely not (1)	Rather not (2)	Hard to say (3)	Rather yes (4)	Definitely yes (5)		
perception of other people	7.6	18.6	12.8	45.3	15.7	3.34	1.18
self-esteem	9.9	23.3	13.4	36.0	17.4	3.27	1.27

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

First, respondents expressed their opinions on the impact of advertising and how people are portrayed on perceptions of others and themselves. The majority of respondents (61%) strongly agreed with or leaned toward the opinion that the way persons are portrayed in advertising affects the perception of other people. More than half (53.4%) of respondents admitted that how people are portrayed in ads affects their self-esteem. It should be noted that a significant proportion of respondents did not express strong opinions on this issue. The mean of the responses on a 5-point Likert scale was 3.34 for perceiving other people and 3.27 for self-esteem. This suggests that respondents recognise a slightly more significant impact of advertising on perceptions of others than self-perception.

The study attempted to assess the demand for self-esteem advertising, determining whether respondents feel an excess or insufficiency due to the saturation of this type of advertising (Figure 1). The vast majority of respondents (75%) described the number of ads supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance as insufficient ("too little").
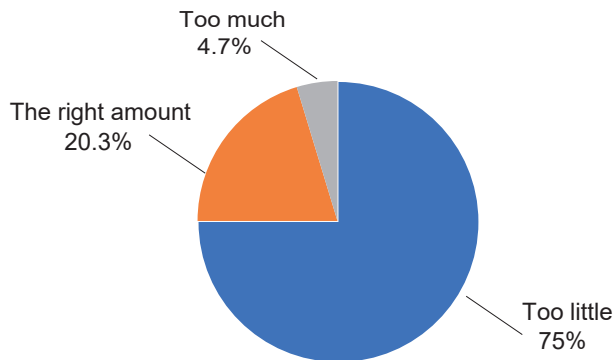
Figure 1. Subjective assessment of the saturation of ads supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Table 2. Evaluation of giving appropriate attention to supporting self-acceptance of different groups

Advertising pays adequate attention to supporting the self-acceptance of:	% of responses					Mean	SD
	Definitely not (1)	Rather not (2)	Hard to say (3)	Rather yes (4)	Definitely yes (5)		
women	4.6	18.0	19.8	13.4	44.2	3.44	1.08
men	9.9	28.5	31.4	24.4	5.8	2.88	1.07
LGBT+ people	21.5	36.6	20.3	16.9	4.7	2.46	1.14
seniors	14.0	37.2	22.7	20.3	5.8	2.67	1.12
young people	6.4	19.8	28.5	32.0	13.4	3.26	1.11

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Respondents were also asked to assess whether advertising pays adequate attention to supporting the self-acceptance of people from various groups (Table 2). In assessing the attention to various groups, women received the highest average score calculated from responses on a 5-point Likert scale. Well over half of those surveyed (57.6%) considered the attention paid to women's self-acceptance in advertising appropriate (44.2%) expressed strong opinions in this regard). The survey results confirmed that consumers are aware of the focus of advertising supporting self-acceptance being mainly on women. Attention given to men received a lower rate — the mean for this group was 2.88. Notably, the most considerable portion of neutral responses concerned men (31.4%). A large percentage of respondents were aware of the insufficient attention given to the self-acceptance of LGBT+ people (58.1%) and seniors (51.2%). The mean scores concerning opinions on providing appropriate attention to self-acceptance of these groups were respectively 2.46 and 2.67.

Table 3. Consumers' expectations of the areas of self-acceptance and self-esteem that should be supported in advertising

Advertising should support:	% of responses					Mean	SD
	Definitely not (1)	Rather not (2)	Hard to say (3)	Rather yes (4)	Definitely yes (5)		
physical appearance	6.4	8.1	11.0	39.0	35.5	3.89	1.17
sexual orientation	5.2	14.0	27.9	28.5	24.4	3.53	1.16
ethnic diversity	2.9	4.1	13.4	32.6	47.1	4.17	1.00
opportunities for success	2.3	6.4	13.4	41.3	36.6	4.03	0.98
personal development	1.7	4.1	11.6	39.0	43.6	4.19	0.92

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Regarding the issue of consumer expectations related to advertising's support for specific areas of self-esteem and self-acceptance, the majority of surveyed consumers see the need to support a wide range of areas (Table 3). They include physical appearance, sexual orientation, ethnic diversity, opportunities for success and personal development, representing potentially attractive self-esteem advertising topics. However, the most definite opinions are for supporting "ethnic diversity" and "personal development" — respectively 47.1% and 43.6% expressed strong expectations for these areas. The mean calculated based on respondents' opinions expressed on a 5-point Likert scale was 4.19 for "personal development" and 4.17 for "ethnic diversity."

Table 4. Opinions on motives of commercial brands to support consumers' self-acceptance and self-esteem

Motives for supporting consumers' self-acceptance and self-esteem	% of responses
trends and fashion involving such activities	62.8
aiming to increase interest in the brand	39.5
the desire to increase the number of customers	35.5
social responsibility and conducting social programs	30.2
consumer pressure for this type of activity	14.5
other responses	1.2

Note: Respondents could indicate 1–2 answers

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

From the point of view of the perceived value of advertising conducted in a social context, it is essential how consumers interpret the motives for conducting such activities. Respondents were therefore asked to express their opinion on the motives of brands in supporting consumers' self-acceptance and self-esteem (Ta-

ble 4). Most (62.8%) pointed to trends and fashion involving such activities. The following two most frequently indicated motives were related to the realisation of marketing goals, which are the increased interest in the brand interest in brand (39.5% of responses) and the larger number of customers (35.5% of responses). Nearly one-third of respondents indicated a motive of social responsibility and conducting social programs.

Table 5. Perceived social impact of advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance

Advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance:	% of responses					Mean	SD
	Definitely not (1)	Rather not (2)	Hard to say (3)	Rather yes (4)	Definitely yes (5)		
increases social acceptance of diversity	2.9	8.7	14.0	43.3	30.8	3.91	1.03
helps people with self-acceptance problems	4.1	7.6	28.5	37.2	22.7	3.67	1.04

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

The crucial part of the survey focused on perceptions of the social impact of advertisements supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance (Table 5). The assessment referenced two aspects affecting self-evaluation derived from intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives. Most respondents (74.1%) recognised the impact of advertising on the increase in social acceptance of diversity. A slightly smaller but significant portion of respondents (59.9%) believe that advertising supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance helps people with self-acceptance problems. For the second area, there were twice as many neutral responses. The averages calculated from the answers given on a 5-point Likert scale were 3.91 and 3.61 for these two areas. Thus, it can be concluded that respondents perceive a positive social impact of this type of advertising, which is somewhat more noticeable from an intrapersonal perspective.

Table 6. The perceived social impact of ads supporting body self-acceptance

The ads' perceived impact	% of responses
they increase acceptance of diversity	66.9
they give strength to those treated as "others" to fight prejudice and "hate"	61.0
they convince us that our value does not depend on our appearance	53.5
they simplify the understanding of self-confidence by limiting it to appearance and beauty	22.1
they reduce some people's motivation to work on themselves and their appearance	13.4
other responses	1.7

Note: Respondents could choose multiple options.

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Due to the increased problems regarding body acceptance identified in the pandemic period research, respondents were asked to express in-depth opinions on the social impact of advertising in this area (Table 6). The majority of respondents believe that the ads increase acceptance of diversity (66.9%) and add strength to those treated as "others" to fight prejudice and "hate" (61%). More than half of the respondents (53.5%) stated that such ads convince us that our value does not depend on our appearance. Given the multiple-choice option given to respondents, it seems interesting that more than one-fifth of respondents (22.1%) considered such ads as simplifying the understanding of self-confidence by limiting it to appearance and beauty. It is worth mentioning that 13.4 % of the survey participants state supporting body self-acceptance may reduce motivation to work on themselves and their appearance.
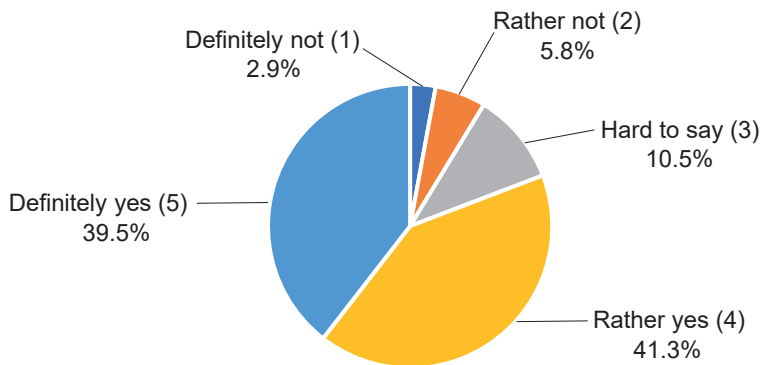

Figure 2. Opinions on the positive impact of self-esteem advertising on brand image

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

The analysis of the survey results is finalised by identifying the perceived impact of self-esteem advertising on brand image. Most surveyed consumers (80.8%) recognise the positive impact of advertising on brand image, and almost 40% are convinced of it. The mean for responses reported on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) "definitely not" to (5) "definitely yes" was 4.09 with a standard deviation of 0.99. Considering the perceived low saturation of this type of advertising found in the first part of the survey, it can be concluded that their use is linked to marketing potential.

Conclusions

Self-esteem campaigns try to change the attitudes and behaviours of consumers by stimulating positive feelings towards themselves. In the past, a common motive

for self-esteem advertising was to evoke positive feelings toward brands in the audiences. The approach to self-esteem advertising has been changing, and we can observe a noticeable shift of emphasis.

The analysis of the campaigns from the pandemic period shows that brands are focusing less on products and more on consumers and values. Branded products are shown less often as a way to increase self-worth, rather as support for expressing consumers' real beauty and power. Ads increasingly present brands in the broader context associated with consumer self-esteem and self-acceptance. Self-esteem advertising seems to increasingly respond to social expectations and meet socially responsible goals.

The campaigns have some common characteristics, making it possible to draw conclusions regarding contemporary self-esteem advertising. They share similar values and understanding of self-worth that involve an inner sense of beauty and authenticity. Key features of the campaigns include empowerment messages, encouraging the audience to feel confident, beautiful, and worthy. The campaigns tie supporting self-esteem and self-acceptance to respect for diversity and freedom to express oneself. They do this by showing the possible areas of discovering one's value; enhancing the value of diversity; showing influential people who have based their success on their belief in their worth; demonstrating the worth and beauty of non-idealized characters; focusing on positive self-esteem, which is independent of the opinions of other people. It should be highlighted that the content and features of the analysed campaigns are linked to specific trends related to self-acceptance and self-esteem issues, the amplification of which was observed during the pandemic period.

The value of self-esteem campaigns was judged based on consumers' assessments of expectations, motives, and perceived impact. Our study shows that consumers recognise marketing and the social value of self-esteem advertising. The marketing value of self-esteem advertising is related to its positive impact on the image of brands, perceived low saturation, and identified expectations associated with this type of advertising. Assessment of the value of such campaigns is also influenced by the interpretation of motives for conducting such activities. According to respondents, they are primarily driven by trends and fashion. Consumers also note marketing motives and those related to social responsibility.

Consumers appreciate the positive social impact of this type of advertising, which is somewhat more noticeable from an intrapersonal perspective. There are also clear expectations of greater advertising involvement in supporting recipients' self-acceptance and self-esteem. These particularly relate to areas such as ethnic diversity and personal development. The research also showed consumer awareness of insufficient attention given to the self-acceptance of LGBT+ people and seniors.

The study concerned the subjective evaluation of advertising as a phenomenon, which may be considered as a research limitation. The value of specific

campaigns is, of course, related to their strategic assumptions, the way they are implemented, and the context resulting from particular conditions. The research also involved other limitations due to its scope and the way it was conducted (on-line survey method, convenience sampling).

The study was carried out after a period associated with pandemic conditions, which may have affected the results. COVID-19 has influenced the scale and awareness of social problems related to self-esteem and self-acceptance. However, the identified trends, the key messages and features of the self-esteem campaigns and associated assessment dimensions may remain relevant in the future, regardless of pandemic conditions. This suggests the need for further studies in the post-pandemic period and comparing the results.

Future research may also focus on measuring value in the context of specific brands and campaigns. It would be interesting to determine the impact of advertisements on self-acceptance in relation to previous brand perceptions and various levels of consumers' self-esteem. The evaluation of marketing and social value of the self-esteem advertising may demand demonstrating the long-term effects, the explicit identification of which seems to be difficult.

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