



Exclusivity Isn't Cool Anymore: Plus-Size Model Representation in Retail Fashion Advertisements

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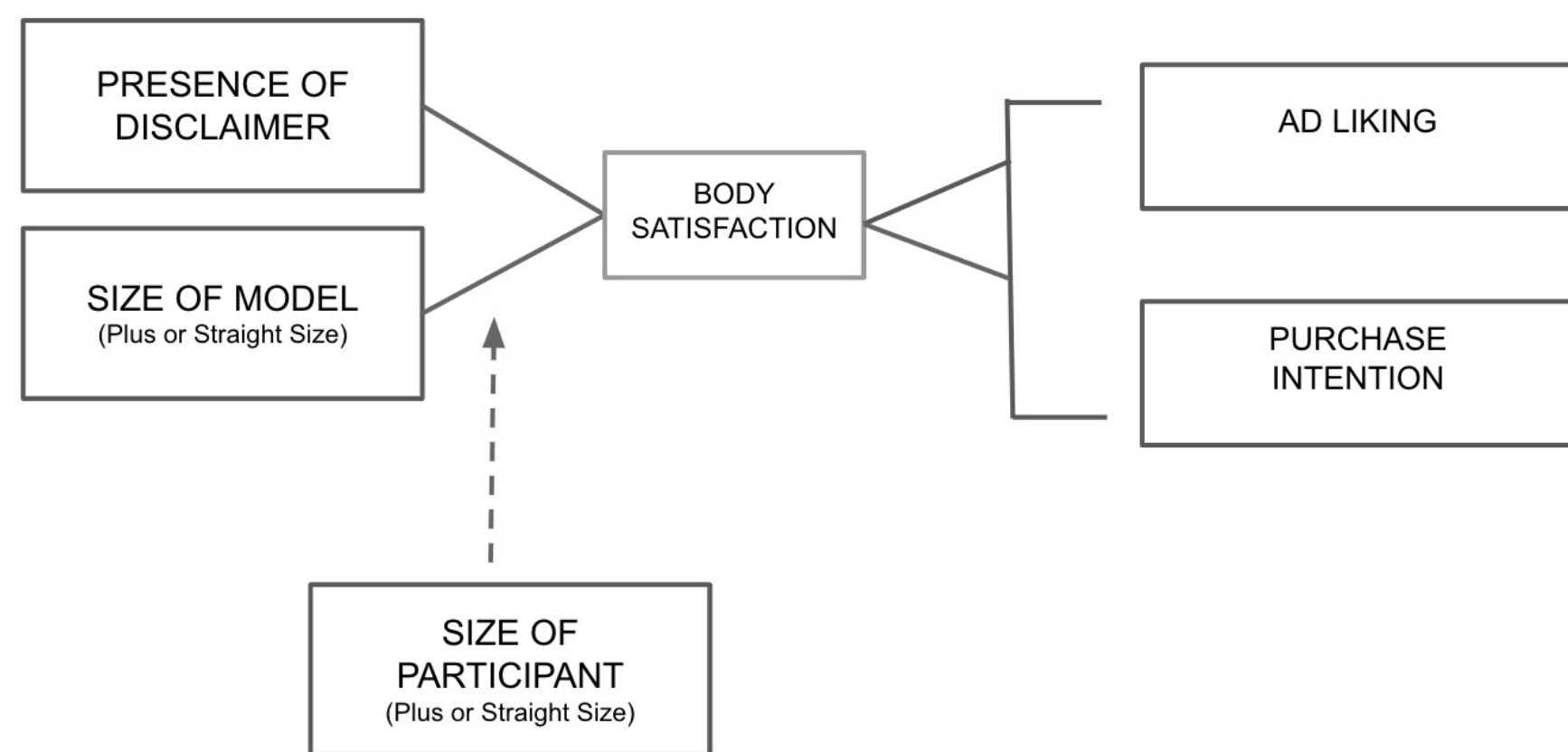
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ABSTRACT

Size inclusivity is essential in advertising as self-image is partly constructed through consumerism. For years prior to the Body Positivity Movement, thin women were primarily depicted in advertisements. The present study draws on Social Comparison Theory and Social Discrepancy Theory to support that creating size-inclusive advertisements is not detrimental to persuasiveness; plus-size models can be just as persuasive as their straight-size counterparts. In this experiment, body satisfaction, ad liking, and purchase intention of plus and straight size populations were measured when shown size diverse models. Secondly, some participants were exposed to advertisements that contained a disclaimer that the model they viewed has been digitally altered. This study uses a 2 (presence or no presence of a disclaimer) x 2 (plus or straight-size model) factorial design.



BACKGROUND

- Mass media perpetuates body standards that are not feasible for most people. In 2012 these notions began to shift with the rise of the Body Positivity Movement (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).
- The need for size representation is not going away. From 1999–2000 through 2017–2018, the prevalence of obesity in the US increased from 30.5% to 42.4% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).
- Plus-size representation is a recent conversation because it has long been believed by advertisers that “thinness” sells and “fatness” does not (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Research from the 1970s through the early 2000s supports a correlation between attractiveness and weight.
- According to Social Comparison Theory (SCT), humans are driven to evaluate their opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954).
- Comparing upwards is when the target is perceived as having more desirable attributes. In contrast, downward comparisons occur when individuals perceive themselves as smaller in size than the model, making their subjective evaluation positive (Hendrickse et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Stimuli Collection

- Instagram photo advertisements were retrieved from 35 major US retailers.
- Python and Selenium were used to create a pipeline to gather the URL information from each retailer's Instagram photos
- Over 70,000 individual photos were web scraped by simulating scrolling behavior on Instagram's JavaScript-enabled code.

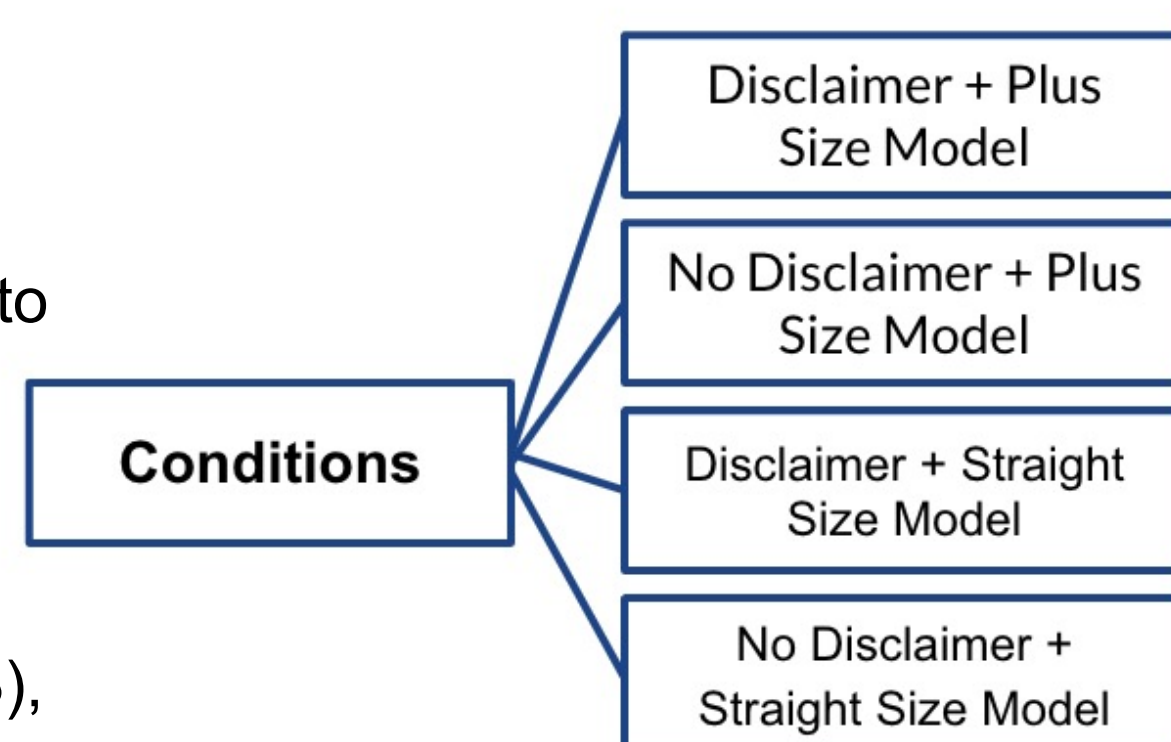
Pre-Test

- 18 female college students completed the pre-test survey. Each person viewed 14 advertisements.
- Participants answered questions to assess the models' attractiveness and weight.
- 4 plus size and 4 straight size advertisements were retained for the final experiment (*illustrated above*).

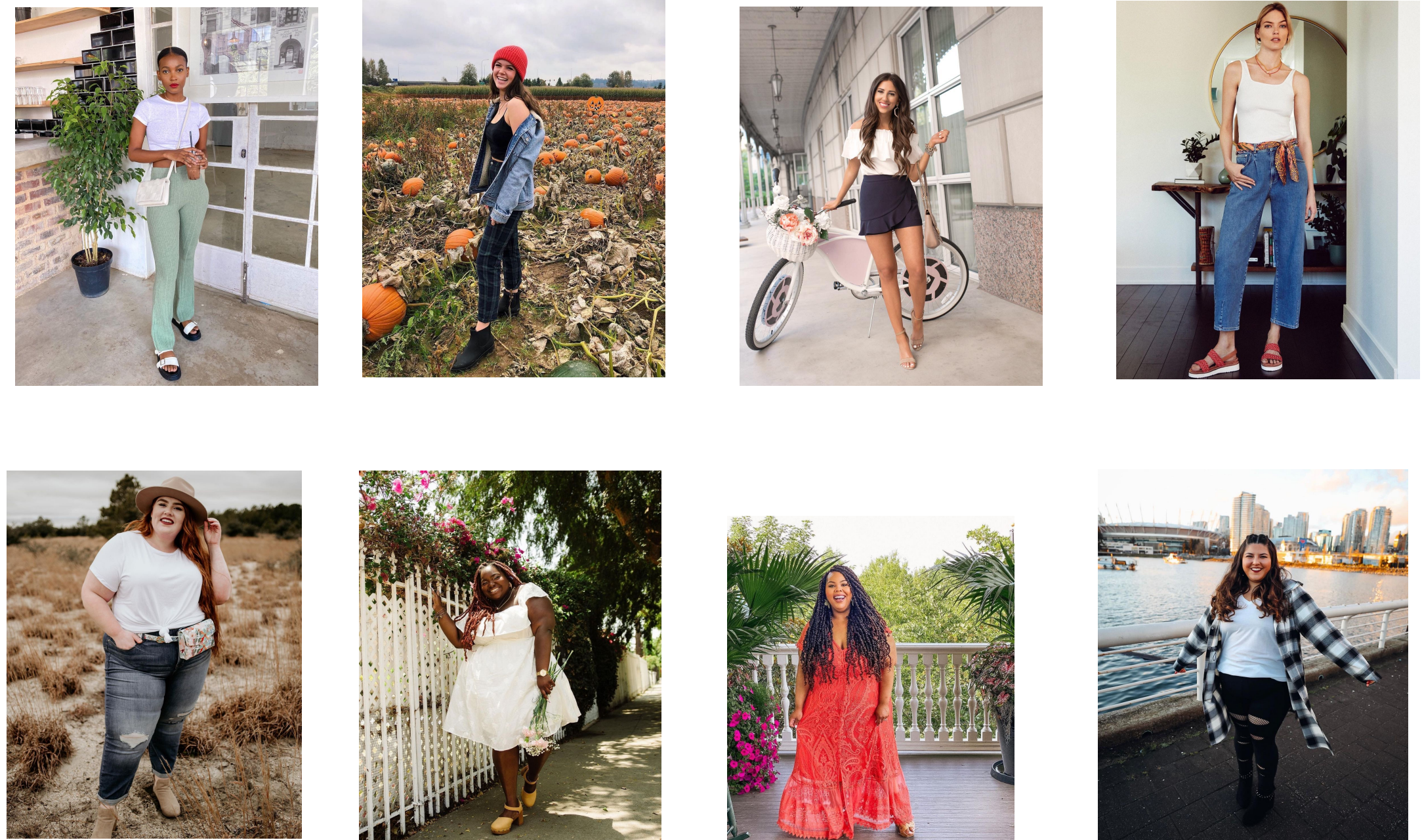
Experiment

- 292 female college students participated in an online experiment and were exposed to 1 of 4 conditions.

- Measurements:**
 - Body Image States Scale
 - Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS-3),
 - Ad Liking Scale
 - Purchase Intention Scale



Experiment Stimuli Photos



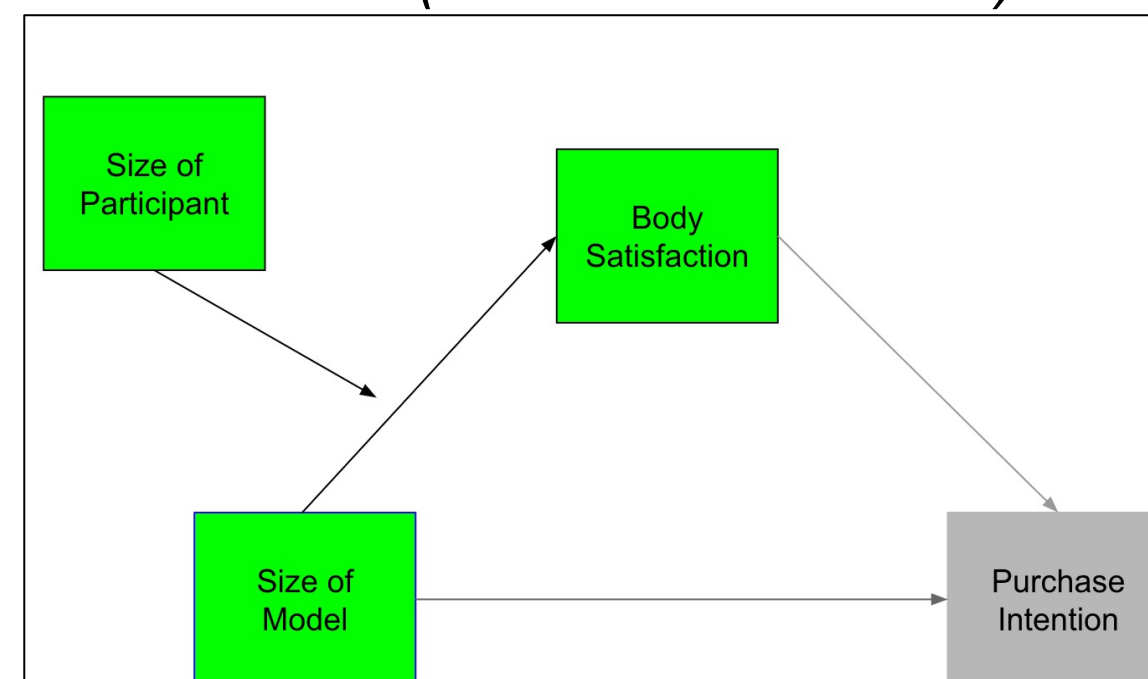
- **H1:** Body size of participant and model size will interact such that...
 - **H1a:** Plus-size participants will rate their body satisfaction higher when exposed to plus-size models compared to straight-size models.
 - **H1b:** Straight-size participants will rate their body satisfaction similarly when exposed to plus-size or straight-size models.

- **H2:** Both plus-size and straight-size participants will have higher body satisfaction ratings after seeing a disclaimer regardless of model size compared to the absence of a disclaimer.

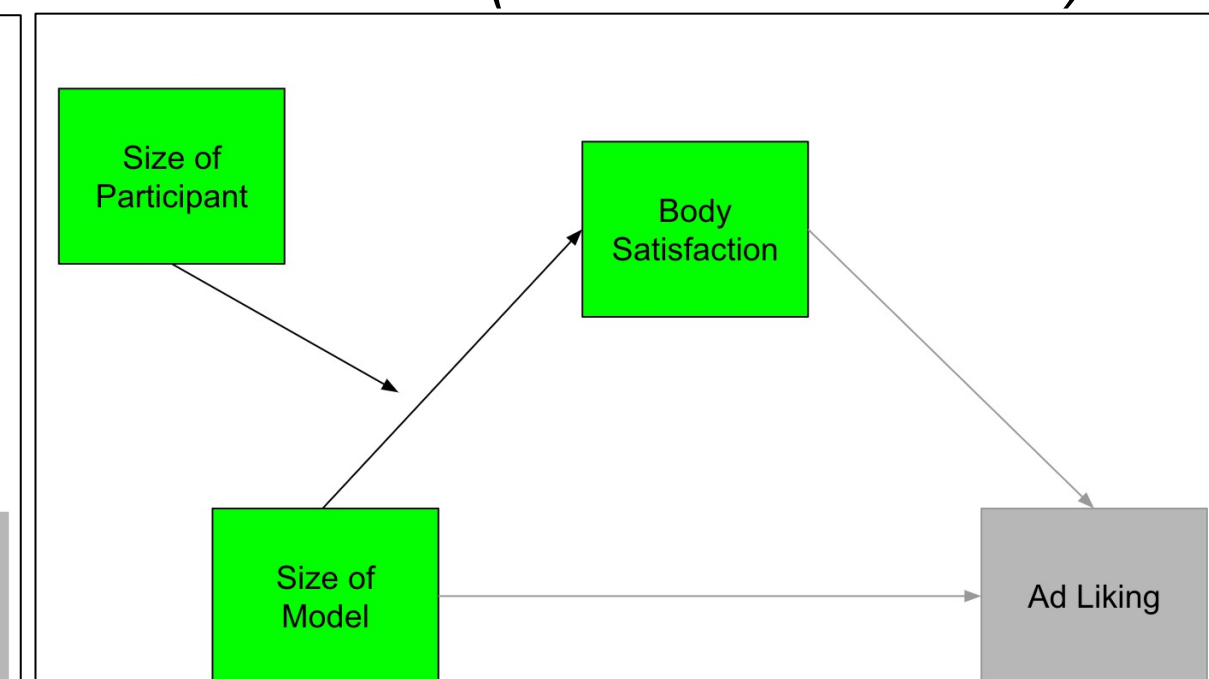
- **H3:** Participants with high body satisfaction ratings are more likely to have higher...
 - **H3a:** purchase intention scores compared to those who have lower body satisfaction ratings.
 - **H3b:** ad liking scores compared to those who have lower body satisfaction ratings.

RESULTS

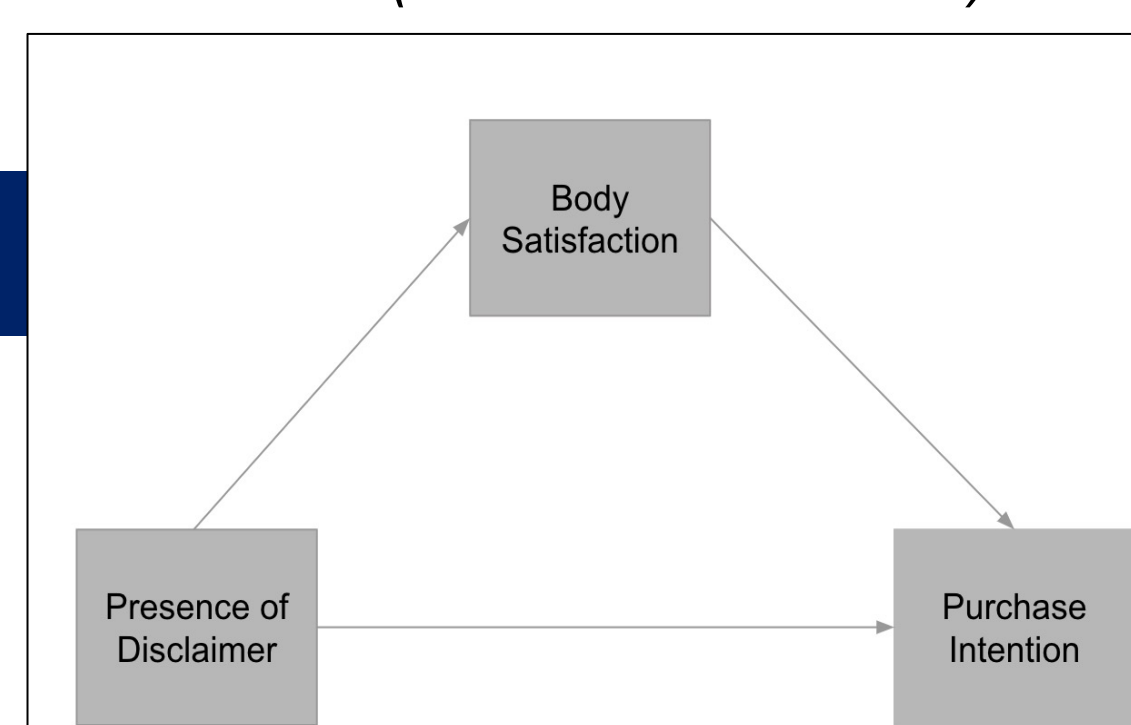
TEST 1 (PROCESS Model 7)



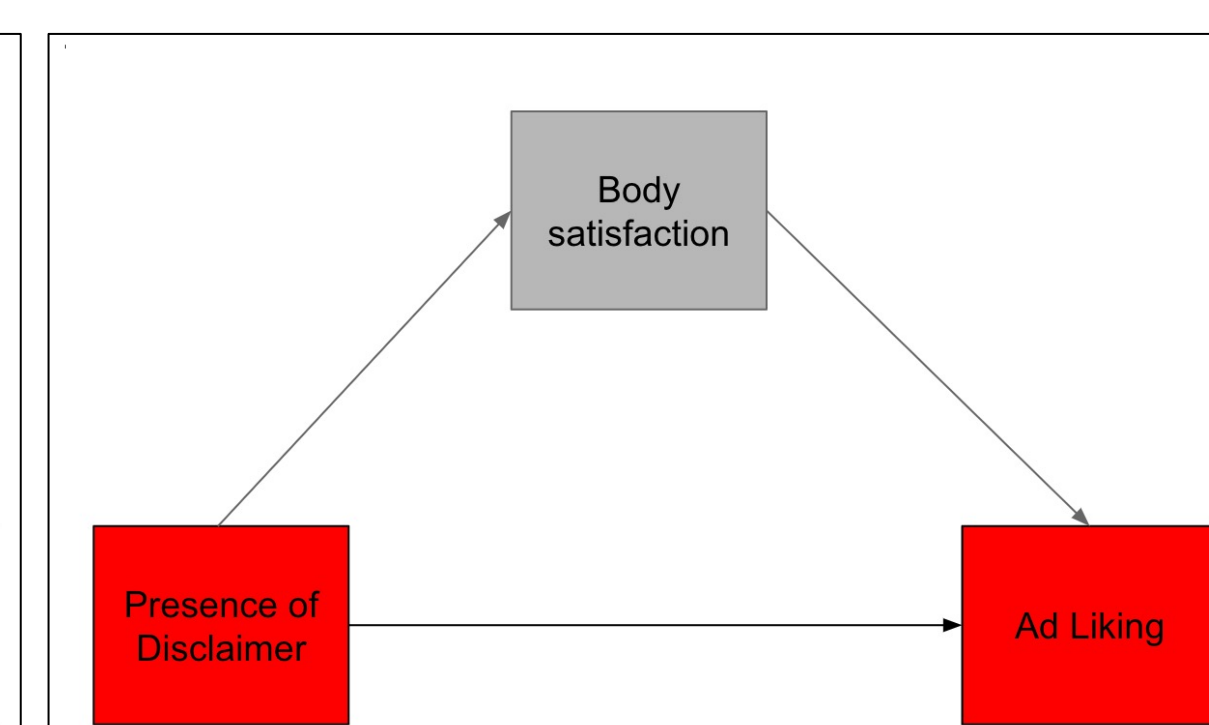
TEST 2 (PROCESS Model 7)



TEST 3 (PROCESS Model 4)



Test 4 (PROCESS Model 4)



- There is a direct relationship between size of model and body satisfaction. For plus size participants, this relationship is even stronger (Simple Moderation, PROCESS Model 1 Analysis).
- Data supports a negative relationship between the presence of a disclaimer and ad liking (Bivariate Regression Analysis).
- There is no significant relationship between purchase intention and the independent variables (model size and presence/absence of disclaimer).

DISCUSSION

- Size inclusivity matters, especially for plus-size people who reported higher body satisfaction when shown plus-size advertisements. Representation is important because body dissatisfaction is a significant contributor to body-related anxiety and eating disorders (Hendrickse et al., 2020).
- Model size does not significantly affect purchase intention; retailers should include size diverse models in their advertising.
- Including a disclaimer that the model has been digitally altered decreases ad liking. Emphasizing alterations potentially decreases the perception of advertisement authenticity.