

Thin models do not sell better, according to new research

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Despite advertisers defending the use of ultra-thin models by saying that thinness sells, research conducted by Sussex's Dr Helga Dittmar and Dr Emma Halliwell from the University of the West Of England suggests that models do not have to be ultra-thin to be effective at selling products.

While previous research has established that ultra-thin models have a negative impact on body image for many girls and women , until now no study has investigated alternative images that could be used effectively in advertising.

In a project involving 800 women, Dr Dittmar and Dr Halliwell compared the impact of viewing adverts featuring ultra-thin models, typically dress size eight, with adverts featuring models with a dress size 14, which represents both a healthy body weight as well as the average UK dress size.

They found that women who already wanted to change their appearance were particularly susceptible to being affected by viewing ultra-thin models and reported increased negative emotions about their own bodies after exposure. In contrast, viewing average-size models did not have a negative effect on women's body image, compared with exposure to neutral, appearance-unrelated images.

Dr Dittmar, a reader in Psychology at Sussex says: "These findings suggest that average-size models may be used in advertising without

compromising the effectiveness of the advert and without increasing body image concerns amongst many women.

"Models with a healthy, normal body size could be used effectively in advertising

Contrary to claims that thinness sells, the perceived effectiveness of the adverts was not influenced by the body size of the models. Average-size and ultra-thin models were seen as equally effective. This was found to hold across advertisements for a range of different consumer goods, including body care, make-up and food products.

Source: University of Sussex

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