



Brief research report

Got yoga?: A longitudinal analysis of thematic content and models' appearance-related attributes in advertisements spanning four decades of *Yoga Journal*[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Yoga has become an increasingly common health practice among U.S. adults over the past decade. With this growth in popularity, yoga-related print media have been criticized for shifting away from yoga's traditional philosophies and promoting a thin, lean ideal physique representing the "yoga body." The purpose of this study was to (a) analyze the presence and content of advertisements over the 40-year publication history of *Yoga Journal* magazine and (b) explore female advertisement models' socio-demographic and appearance-related attributes over time. Results suggested that *Yoga Journal* now contains significantly more advertisements for food, nutritional supplements, and apparel and fewer advertisements for meditation and nutritional practices than in its early years of publication. Models were more frequently rated as White and in their 20s and 30s in recent years of publication. Trends in model body size matched shifts in culturally dominant body ideals over time. Implications and future research directions are considered.

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1. Introduction

The number of yoga practitioners in the United States has nearly doubled since 2012; an estimated 36.7 million Americans currently practice yoga (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016). In addition to its growing popularity as a fitness trend, yoga has been increasingly and successfully used as a clinical treatment for a variety of mental and physical health conditions and as a health self-management technique among many groups (Field, 2016). However, with this burgeoning appeal, scholars and activists have been critical of yoga's increasing commercialization and its media representations, which predominantly include images of young, thin, White women wearing expensive fitness apparel (Boccio, 2012). These unvaried depictions of contemporary "yoginis" pervade media, including television, print, and electronic outlets.

Even in the digital age, print media continue to be a relevant source of information for US consumers, with more than two thirds of Americans preferring to read print magazines to online sources (Nicholas & Mateus, 2016). Many women's magazines, such as *Ladies Home Journal* and *Vogue*, have been in circulation since the early 1900s and remain widely read today (Fangman, Paff Ogle, Bickle, & Rouner, 2004). Despite their popularity, women's magazines have been criticized for promoting unrealistic standards of beauty since the beginning of the 20th century (Fangman et al., 2004). Based on their longitudinal analyses of women's magazines between 1901 and 1980, Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986) concluded that the decline in female model body size between 1950 and 1980 may have influenced the decline in size of the ideal female body over this time period, potentially playing a role in the outbreak of eating disorders among women in the late 1980s. Although this explanation is speculative, it is consistent with current sociocultural theory linking exposure to objectifying thin-ideal media images with decreased body satisfaction, increased prevalence of eating disturbances, and increased risk for a variety of other health concerns among women and girls (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999).

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Current research suggests that the women featured in advertisements and editorial content of contemporary women's health and fitness magazines are increasingly thin and toned, embodying an athletic ideal (Benton & Karazsia, 2015). They tend to be young, less diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, and frequently outfitted in revealing clothing (Bazzini, Pepper, Swofford, & Cochran, 2015). These magazines tend to emphasize appearance (i.e., body-as-object) over performance (i.e., body-as-process; Franzoi, 1995) and include advertisements for many types of products focused on altering one's appearance (Milillo, 2008; Wasylkiw, Emms, Meuse, & Poirer, 2009). Similar trends in the physical representation of cover models and consumerist content have been observed in a comparative cover content analysis of three Westernized yoga magazines (Webb et al., in press).

Advertisements featured within mainstream yoga lifestyle magazines have not been systematically examined for comparable content nor have potential longitudinal effects been considered. Given yoga's expanding and effective use as a therapy specifically for eating disorders and body image concerns (Klein & Cook-Cottone, 2013; Neumark-Sztainer, 2014) and the growing popularity of the practice among US women (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016), it is important to consider how the images and content presented in yoga media may counter or enhance these efforts. Thus, in this study, we aimed to: (a) analyze the presence of advertisements and their thematic content and (b) explore female advertisement models' socio-demographic and appearance-related attributes over *Yoga Journal's* 40-year publication history.

2. Method

2.1. Sample selection

Study data were extracted from a sample of *Yoga Journal* magazines. We chose *Yoga Journal* because it is internationally recognized as the premier yoga lifestyle magazine currently circulated across 28 Western and Non-Western countries ("*Yoga Journal International Editions*," 2014), reporting a 2016 readership of approximately 2 million (*Yoga Journal*, 2016). *Yoga Journal* has a 40-year publication history, facilitating analyses of trends over time. Finally, archives of this magazine, first published in 1975, were available digitally. We chose to focus on magazine advertisements as they have been found to significantly influence internalization of body ideals (Harrison & Cantor, 1997) and consumer preferences (Williamson, 2002).

Issues published between 1975 and 2008 were accessed electronically through Google Books archives; issues published between 2009 and 2015 were accessed in print through our lab archive. We constructed a sample of 41 issues by purposely selecting one issue from each year, cycling through the year to account for seasonality. We attempted to systematically sequence through the months within each 3-month season; however, this was not possible for every year. In one instance, we chose an issue from the spring season (March) rather than from the winter season (which included December, January, and February). Consistent with previous research, we only included advertisements that were one full page or larger (Farquhar & Wasylkiw, 2007).

2.2. Coding procedures

All advertisements in the final study sample ($N=1028$) were rated for thematic content. The research team collaboratively developed the coding guide through an iterative consensus-making process. An initial set of advertisement coding themes was adapted from prior studies (Milillo, 2008; Wasylkiw et al., 2009). Researchers also finalized themes for products based on a sample of

30 advertisements that were used solely for training. These advertisements were sourced from issues not included in the final sample across each decade of *Yoga Journal's* publication history to ensure the comprehensiveness of categories.

Coders rated *presence of overall product advertisements* by indicating whether or not the advertisement featured any type of product (as opposed to an advertisement for a conference or retreat, for example). Product-related content was further assessed by coding the presence or absence of five themes within the advertisement text and imagery, including *nutritional supplements* (e.g., herbs, vitamins, etc.), *food products* (e.g., cereal, nutritional or energy bar, etc. for human consumption), *apparel* (e.g., yoga-specific sports bras, pants, gear such as yoga mats, etc.), *nutritional practices* (e.g., Ayurvedic approaches, vegetarianism, mindful eating, etc.), and *meditation* (e.g., explicit reference to meditative practices).

Model attributes were only coded in advertisements that featured one female model (which was the majority) and that allowed for a definitive rating (e.g., images were clear enough to rate skin color, etc.; $N=371$). Consistent with previous approaches (Milillo, 2008; Wasylkiw et al., 2009), coders rated their perceptions of the advertisement models' *body size*, *race/ethnicity*, and *age*. Perceptions of body size was coded using the Pulvers Figure Rating Scale (Pulvers et al., 2004), a 9-point scale which corresponds to BMI values between 16 and 40 (BMI increases by three points with each 1-point increase in scale value). To code perceptions of race/ethnicity, coders initially rated whether the model appeared to be "Black/African American," "White/European American," "Hispanic/Latina," "American Indian/Alaska Native," "Asian/South Asian," "Arab/Middle Eastern," or "Multi-Ethnic." These categories were collapsed into dichotomous "White" or "non-White" ratings for this analysis. To code perceptions of age, coders chose the most representative rating from four categories including "younger than 20 years," "20–30 years," "40–50 years," and "60 years or older." Appearance-related attribute codes were mutually exclusive.

Two female research assistants were trained to code advertisements using the systematic coding guide. Each coder rated 20 training advertisements over two sessions then independently rated 10 novel training advertisements to ensure consistent application of the codebook and sufficient inter-rater reliability (IRR). Each coder then independently rated each advertisement in the study sample. IRR was assessed through percent agreement for thematic content and by calculating Cohen's kappa and intra-class correlation (ICC) for categorical and continuous variables, respectively. Percent agreement ranged from 90% to 98%, Cohen's kappa values ranged from .72 to .75, and the ICC value was .87. The first author resolved discrepancies between ratings.

3. Data analysis

Chi-square tests of association or Fisher's exact tests were conducted to assess changes in thematic content and advertisement model attributes (race/ethnicity and age) over time. Two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to assess changes in presence of the average number of overall product advertisements over time and models' mean body size over time.

4. Results

4.1. Thematic content

Advertisements per issue increased significantly over time (see Table 1). Over 70% of advertisements across all decades were for products, and these increased significantly over time. Significantly

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