

Advanced Feature – CW1

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1503 Words

My feature is based on how diet companies use their marketing in the new year, to gain the attention of self-conscious consumers. If I was writing this feature for a professional publication, I would most likely consider it for Glamour or Metro. They both have a lifestyle dedicated section, which I believe this topic would suitably fit into. Their target market is younger women, who more commonly struggle with the topic in discussion. Therefore, my article would reach its target demographic through either of these publications.

New Year, New Me. Is it a money-making scheme for diet companies?

Do you feel pressured to lose weight in the New Year? Body confidence influencer Estelle and gym manager Nat, discuss how to navigate the pressure presented to us by diet companies in January.

As we move anxiously into 2022, many people are wondering what this year will have in store for us after the devastation that has been caused by Covid-19.

But one campaign that hits many of us at the start of every year is led by the common saying, “New Year, New Me”.

The new year inspires resolutions in most of us. In 2019, YouGov conducted a survey where 48 per cent of people admitted that their resolution was to lose weight. 59 per cent said that they wanted to exercise more, while 54 per cent said that they wanted to eat healthier.

Can you see the recurring theme here? Most resolutions made in the New Year are targeted at our sense of failure in not living up to the idealised version of what we think we should be.

Diet companies and fitness companies pounce on this opportunity to get our attention. Our social media feeds are full of their advertising to lose a few pounds or sign up for their New Year detox scheme.

Estelle Curiel, 25, is a body confidence influencer online. Her content focuses on empowering women to feel confident within themselves.

“Weight loss campaigns used to make me feel anxious but now they just make me angry,” Estelle explains.

“They prey on vulnerable people and promise them impossible and unsustainable results.”

Psychology Today reported how 95 per cent of people who lose weight by dieting will regain it in the following 1 to 5 years.

They also explore the fact that these diets can be harmful. Many of the diets that these companies are promoting to you on social media in the new year, lack essential nutrients.

The act of dieting, alongside weighing yourself, can also get very dangerous. You are 8 times more likely to develop an eating disorder if you have a history of dieting than if you don't.

When asked what she would like to say to the diet companies, Estelle said this: "Just stop. Money isn't worth destroying people's mental health and leading to possible deaths. You know diets don't work; you know it's not sustainable. So please, leave us alone. And stop all the adverts everywhere."

As much as these companies promote the promise of wellbeing and a happier, healthier life to us online, it's important to remember what their focus is.

They are a company. Their focus is on that very word, 'company'. They exist to make money.

If there is an opportunity for one of these diet or detox companies to make more money, they will take it. Unfortunately, that is often to the detriment of the physical and mental health of many.

There are so many other New Year's resolutions that you can follow to benefit your wellbeing both safely and effectively.

Here are some that Estelle recommends: "There are so many resolutions that people can follow for their well-being. Implement daily self-care, meditation, journaling, joining a club or a class, mindful movement for joy. You can start therapy if you have access/the means, budgeting in a monthly massage, drinking enough water, cooking a couple of times a week, trying out a new hobby, spending x number of minutes outdoor every day...honestly the list goes on. People think weight is the end all and be all of health but there are so many more important aspects that we too often forget, especially our mental health."

So, what about the other side of this discussion?

Nat Baker, 24, is the assistant manager of a gym in Devon. When asked about New Year's intake she said: "January is typically our busiest month for new starters. It differs but I reckon our membership base increases by at least 10% in the new year."

A study by Vitabiotics, a vitamin company, found that those who turn to the gym to improve their mood keep going for seven weeks and six days on average. While those that join up for weight loss or to maintain their slim build, only last on average five weeks and four days before they start to miss sessions.

“Many people view the New Year as a new slate. Most people don’t make it past May due to not creating sustainable habits. I think after a heavy December of indulging people feel like they should go to the gym rather than wanting to,” Nat explains.

“I 100% think that there is pressure especially in the younger generation. If you scroll through any social media at this time of year you will see lean gorgeous girls plastered all over your screen. These people have probably been training for years and some posts are often edited. Losing weight is one of the highest New Year's resolutions and this causes a lot of pressure.”

Even James Bond’s personal trainer has little time for the idealistic expectations followed by gym subscriptions in the new year!

Simon Waterson, trainer to Daniel Craig and other stars said: “Oh, I hate it! I think you should never make fitness resolutions. It is setting yourself up for failure. If you’ve been a bit overindulgent over the holiday period then it’s a natural thing to go, well I’m just going to be more conscious of my wellbeing and my nutrition and fitness programme.”

Many of today’s youth feel the pressures of social media. Seeing filtered and photoshopped images places realistic expectations on what they should look like and act like.

The mass advertising that the New Year brings only amplifies this feeling of self-consciousness.

“Isn't it a bit much to ask yourself to be a new person every single January? Why can't we practice self-growth in March or July? Or in any month for that matter. ‘New Year, New Me’ highlights all the things that are ‘wrong’ with yourself rather than celebrating the amazing things that you have achieved throughout the previous year,” Nat says.

There are many ways that you can join the gym and still look after your mental health and wellbeing. It’s important to make sure that you are going to the gym to improve on yourself, as a whole.

Are you going to the gym because you’re focused on how other people see you and think of you?

Or are you going to the gym to better yourself and to improve your physical and mental health?

These are important questions to ask yourself when signing up for a gym or making any decision that involves changing something about yourself.

Nat curated her best pieces of advice for newcomers that want to start the gym, while still looking after themselves: “My number one piece of advice would be to seek the help of a fitness professional, not Instagram fitness gurus. Don’t be too strict with yourself and enjoy the process. Fitness and health should complement your lifestyle, not take it away. I would also encourage working on other aspects of your life. Reading self-growth books and eating nutritious foods. Don’t have the all or nothing approach and remember that you are so much more than just a clothes size or a number on the scales.”

So, when you see that 75 per cent off offer on weight loss lollipops or a treatment plan for calorie counting on your social media feeds, stop and think.

These companies just want your money. What do you want?

Multiple statistics, articles and personal experiences express that these diets, exercise regimes and superficial products often don't work.

They certainly don't work long term and are not sustainable.

Both Estelle and Nat have communicated that showing kindness to yourself is key.

They come from different backgrounds, but they are both women who feel the pressures of social media expectations.

And of course, this doesn't only affect women.

Men are pressured to bulk up with protein powders, tablets and gym memberships.

So, loving ourselves in all our individuality seems to be the most important factor here.

Try your best to see the reality behind the marketing of these diet companies and spot the fiction behind the so called 'facts'.

Estelle is known online for her encouraging words about self-confidence.

This is what she would like to say to those feeling pressured by diet companies and the focus on weight loss in the New Year: "You are more than enough as you are. Your weight does not in any way affect your worth. Your worth is constant. You are this incredibly complex human being, and your weight is the least interesting thing about you. You do not need to lose weight to be loved and respected. Of course, if you want to lose some weight no one is going to stop you, but truly think about why you're doing it. Is it internalised fatphobia? Fear of being rejected? The research suggests that our bodies have a range of weight/body fat percentage that they are happiest at. You won't get to it by dieting. It really is about finding balance. Your body knows best, trust it."

