

Developing fashion products for plus size women

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Cite as:

Büttner Ana, Strehlau Suzane (2020), Developing fashion products for plus size women . *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (64076)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020 .



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Abstract:

The purpose of this research is to discuss how to develop fashion clothes to enhance well-being among plus-size women. The theories of well-being, fashion consumption, fashion consciousness gave support to the fieldwork. The research corpus was built upon 16 semi-structured interviews and pictures select by plus size women. The visual and content analysis reveals different relationships between fashion and well-being. The contribution is how to increase well-being from plus size women considering product development recommendations.

Keywords: fashion, plus size, product development

Track: Innovation Management & New Product Development

1. Introduction

Obesity is a growing problem. The World Health Organization states that it is a global epidemic known as “globesity”(Wang, 2007). The emergence of the Plus Size segment - those women who wear clothes numbered at or above 44 (Brazil) (Zanette; Lourenço; & Brito, 2013), 12 (UK) and 42 (EU) - does not aim to exalt obesity, imperfections caused by body fat, but to assist in the construction of women's well-being. It is a form of inclusion in the scope of consumption because there are prejudices of the fashion market with this body (Aires, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to discuss how to develop fashion clothes to enhance well-being among plus-size women. Customers are looking for a product that meets their personal needs, expressing their individuality and attitude (Lange, 2014; Crane, 2006). The market offers limits the consumption of this public, reinforcing their exclusion by the shape of their bodies, and also because they do not have offers on desired brands or products perceived as sophisticated (Zanette; Lourenço; & Brito, 2013; Winter; & Moraes, 2013). Recently, Dolce Gabbana launched some items to this public.

2. Theoretical framework

For clothing-related well-being to happen, a concern with ergonomics is required - a discipline that studies relationships between human beings and aims to improve well-being (Iida, 2005) - as it concerns the system-function between man-clothing. Clothes should adapt to the body movements and personal activities.

In planning each garment it is also essential to consider the anthropometric characteristics of each individual, “anthropometry is intended to help the fashion designer become aware of the importance of human dimensions in design and to establish a link between anthropometry and design of clothing” (Menezes & Spaine, 2010). This clothing must have an excellent fit, and for this to happen it is necessary to make adjustments in the modeling to optimise the results (Novaes, 2010).

Fashion consumption and fashion consciousness have some similarities, both are expression of culture and personal identity (Lam & Yee, 2014). Despite these resemblances, they are different concepts. Fashion consumption is influenced by a person's consciousness of fashion, which is called fashion consciousness. Fashion consumption can be defined by the purchase and use of clothes or artefacts carried on the body by consumers to help their identity. This concept can be operationalized by the number of items owned, the use of the clothes you

have, the taste for buying new clothes, the time allotted for the purchase, recognition of the self. Fashion awareness is a central aspect of the self, along with issues related to the amount of research time the user does to consume fashion (Rathnayake, 2011); refers to a person's degree of involvement with clothing styles or fashion (Nam *et al.*, 2007).

Fatshonists are fashion lovers who wear plus size clothing (Bickle, Bursned, & Edwards, 2015; Fischer & Scaraboto, 2013). The eagerness of these consumers is to wear clothes that follow trends, as the thin ones wear, and to find these pieces in their size, which reflects the traditional view of women's fashion consumption and its practices (Betti, 2014). These women believe that fashion designers do not understand their clothing needs (Bickle, Bursned & Edwards, 2015; Fischer; & Scaraboto, 2013).

Retailers often offer dark, simple-designed clothing considering that fat girls don't want to draw attention to their body, and therefore limiting them to use clothes that make them feel unattractive. To compensate for limited clothing choices, many women buy more shoes, bags and accessories (Bickle, Bursned & Edwards, 2015).

Promoting social inclusion through the recognition of plus size women as customers is an essential factor in attracting them and driving emotional well-being. The contemptuous look of salespeople gives them a negative feeling to the buying experience (Betti, 2014) affecting consumer satisfaction in a retail establishment. It is an emotional reaction of the individual associated with their overall joint assessment of experiences performed (Bickle, Bursned & Edwards, 2015) at that location.

Being able to consume fashion is related to the well-being of plus size women, but companies must understand better these consumers to provide them with the desired products.

3. Research Method

Following a qualitative design, interviews were conducted personally or by video and transcribed afterwards. The snowball sample was composed of plus-size women. Respondents were invited to participate and to show a photograph where they were feeling good with their clothing and another one revealing the opposite. Besides these, they were also asked to give a picture of a well-dressed (and badly-dressed) person. The duration of the interviews averaged 45 minutes. The response saturation criterion was used to establish the final data collection.

A floating reading of an interview was made to separate a list of words, called categories, based on the literature review, and then supplemented by words relevant to the topic (subcategories) that had not appeared in the readings. This categorization phase of the interview

was to understand how to ameliorate the denomination of the categories and subcategories and how they can be relaxed from a context (Bardin, 2016). Afterwards transcripts were analysed using software ATLAS TI version 7.5.

Fifty three images were presented by the interviewees in total, and they were analysed according to manifested content of the picture (Banks, 2007) looking for the latent content of fashion consciousness, ergonomic and anthropometric factors.

4. Analysis

Sixteen female respondents were between 23 and 72 years old. All were considered obese or overweight using the Body Mass Index (BMI) criteria. Although some studies state that body mass index (BMI) is unreliable, the Journal of the American College of Cardiology in 2018 says that higher BMI values showed effects similar to those of total fat and then performed the same function (Bell *et al.*, 2018). Some of the interviewees had lost some weight, but they were still considered plus-size and had their well-being affected.

A recurring pattern of responses to fashion consciousness allows us to group respondents in two groups. The first one called Fatshionists is composed by those with a high degree of fashion consciousness but no specific training in the field; and the second groups named “the outsiders” are the interviewees with little interest in the styles or fashion of the clothes.

The presence of fashion consciousness plays an important role in the ease of purchase, which promotes both a positive and a negative feeling. The positive one occurs when respondents search for the plus-size fashion market and are happy to know that there find fashion brands that are specialised in big sizes and are concerned about their body. The negative well-being arouses when having interest in fashion but there is a reduced amount of products with fashion trends in their size, leaving a frustration feeling. The Fatshionists discuss modelling, colours’ harmony and the coordination of clothes pieces. Price is less relevant as long they can find what they want. One important feature is to have comfort with fashion clothes that are following their body anthropometric proportion.

The outsiders suffer more to find clothes in physical stores and are more concerned about prices. Online retail is pointed as an easier place to find one bigger size, but they would rather find them in physical stores.

The difficulty of purchase caused by the anthropometric aspects diminishes consumers well-being. This means that the clothes offered for them do not provide comfort or fit; they

were developed for not having the best wearability and anthropometric compatibility, and are not in keeping with their identity.

The deformity promoted by fat is not the same in all bodies as it is located not always equally. The lack of size standardisation and that are not offered in all products they want to wear at their physical retail size diminish well-being. And to compensate they will look for accessories such as handbags and shoes.

When plus-size consumers lose some weight, tend to find the clothes they want and so, increasing their well-being. They can find their self and accept their body. Even inside this segment there is one continuum of adversities when looking for something to wear. The bigger the person is, the higher will be the frustration related to clothes.

The interviewees consider other people well dressed when the clothes look comfortable and are in conformity with body anthropometry, and the opposite is when they are badly dressed.

4. Final remarks

Fatshonists - fashion lovers who wear plus size clothing (Bickle, Bursned & Edwards 2015; Fischer & Scaraboto, 2013) - who have not lost weight value online commerce, as this is where there is a bigger offer of desired products. For most fashion brands that are in physical retail do not manufacture clothes in large sizes, because they are not within the thin aesthetic standard imposed by society (Brandão, 2015). Fatshonists who lost weight feel happier because they have changed their bodies to feel socially included in their fashion consumption.

Price seems to be something that is not sensitive to these interviewees. This must be because the interviewees feel the lack of products in their size in desired brands that are present in physical retail (Zanette; Lourenço; & Britto, 2013; Winter; & Moraes, 2013).

Regarding the Outsiders who lost weight and those who did not, it is noted that the positive feeling about fashion consumption is also more evident in the interviewees who lost weight. Price is somewhat more relevant in Outsiders' consumption than Fatshionists.

Outsiders report more on handbag and shoe consumption than Fatshionists, this is to compensate for limited clothing choices (Bickle, Bursner & Edwards, 2015). Regarding modelling, both Fatshionist and Outsider consumers value comfort over their body anthropometry. The same happens with the lack of standardisation of clothing sizes.

There are some recommendations related to product development of fashion brands. The results indicate that these consumers have a hard time finding the clothes they want to wear that

fit their body perfectly. There is a deprivation of the use of clothes considered the latest fashion trend, which generates a critique of the image of these obese women (Novaes, 2013).

The accumulation of localised fat is different on each body; consequently, fat bodies are not equal. So fashion brands should make an anthropometric study of plus-size bodies to develop their moulding. It can result in a different way of size their clothing, for example when the fat is mainly located on upper part it can be named as 12A if it is more situated in the middle of the body could be named 12B and in the lower part 12C. The product mix should offer all types of clothing, like dress, skirts, playsuit, pants on all sizes. Another action should be the study of fashion trends related to colours, fabrics, shapes to adequate this design to a fat body. The last one is related to develop clothing with cuttings that optimise the waste of fabric so that it can result in a competitive price of plus size clothing.

The difficulties of plus-size consumers in finding clothes reveals that product development in the fashion sector needs to refine the understanding of this market and plan offers that will fit these bodies perfectly. Inappropriate clothes reinforce prejudice against obese women as it helps to project an image of bad appearance.

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