Shift in Preferred Model Size Among the Fashion Industry

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Introduction: Of the $1.2 trillion worldwide footwear and apparel sales, $62.4 billion products had been returned for improper fit in 2015 (Frankel 2017). Latest technological advances have been working to solve this problem by introducing true-to-size avatars, allowing the industry to come closer to give customers an accurate fitting experience at home and in retail stores (Frankel 2017). These avatars use sizing to help reduce the return rate of online fashion sales. For example, Body Labs has created technology that allows customers to submit a photo as well as their height and weight to produce a 3D avatar that accurately represents customer's body shape. The younger generation, who is highly adaptable, embraces this new technology. These technologies, like the 3D avatar, are expected to have critical perspectives on the fit of mass-produced clothing as well as the idealized body silhouette presented by the fashion models. A study on the fitting experiences as well as the desired body shape of the Millennial generation, who is the future principle consumers of fashion goods, would provide interesting implications for the direction of future fashion. The purpose of this research is to investigate the Millennial generation's perception on the current sizing system and the future of ideal body shapes. These findings incentivize companies to construct new technology where customers can have customized tailored fitting, providing maximum customer satisfaction.

Methods: A questionnaire was developed to survey demographics, shopping experiences for size fitting, fitness performances to achieve preferred body shape, and the perception on the current and future model size and silhouette. This survey was reviewed and approved by the University IRB (Institutional Review Board). The face-to-face surveys were conducted for two weeks to collect the data from U.S. residents of the Massachusetts and Connecticut regions. A Likert-type scale was used to ask questions allowing participants to choose value as unimportant, less important, neutral, more important, or most important.

Results and Discussions: A total of 111 participants of young adults aged between 19 and 24 completed the survey: 71 of them were males, 40 were females. The first part of the survey was focused on shopping experiences of the participants. Forty-two percent of the participants responded garment fitting as the most significant consideration in their shopping. To the questions asking about their shopping experiences regarding garment fitting, 63% of participants selected that they experienced sizing problems where shirts felt tight on their arms and back, but failed to fit correctly around their waist. Also, 57% of respondents indicated that they had sizing problems with pants that fit the leg area correctly, but not the waist. A significant majority (74%) responded that they were willing to pay extra for clothing with a tailored fit to their body.

Next, the participants' fitness performances were surveyed asking what body shape they were trying to achieve, which was expected to provide better understanding of the idealized body shape of young adults. Responding questions asked the significance of each body part being worked on in the gym. Participants gave the most significant consideration to the abdominal (37%), the arm (36%) and the Gluteus Maximus (28%) areas. These results suggest that the majority of the responders were looking to achieve toner arms, flatter stomach, and a larger gluteus, which directly corresponds with the responses regarding what parts of the garment they experienced the sizing problems.

In order to investigate the ideal body shape of young adults further, their perceptions on the current and future model size and silhouette were surveyed. Eighty-eight percent of participants responded that the model silhouette currently used to display fashion is not an accurate representation of the average woman's body and 72% of them responded that they would support a brand that only used naturally curvy woman to display their clothing. The majority of participants (63%) preferred a model with an athletic body shape and 71% of them anticipated that a curvier silhouette is what most females would idolize by 2020. According to the results, the ideal body type is changing from the widely known tall, slender model silhouette to a fit, hourglass model silhouette.

Conclusion: The survey results show that the young American adults aged between 19 and 24 are experiencing difficulties with current sizing systems as well as the model silhouette that the garment brands employee. They are expecting a change of ideal body shape to an hourglass body silhouette in the near future. The change of perception on the ideal body silhouette is expected to bring about a significant change in their shopping patterns. This research brings attention to the need for introducing body-scanning technology that will enable access to the body shape change, providing perfect fit clothing.

References

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