**Perceptions toward female fashion model size diversity in luxury brand runways**

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**Introduction** Runway models, both women and men, have been traditionally underweighted, while particularly female models are even severely underweighted when body mass index (BMI) was investigated (Jestratijevic, 2020). In the fashion modeling industry, producers who hire fashion models tend to employ skinny models because of the unpredictability and the uncertainty of the market (Mears, 2010). The models who are to be chosen in the industry have no choice but to maintain the skinny bodies which sell well. Fashion modeling industry has been experiencing changes recently, including hiring plus-size models for luxury brand runways (Cichowski, 2019). The emergence of plus-size models in luxury brand runways has its meaning in two aspects. First, it could reduce unpredictability of the market of employing diverse sized models which could let the producers in the industry to consider hiring diverse sized models in the future. Second, the frequent exposure to the diverse body size in media would reduce people’s obsession over the ideal skinny bodies (McCraken, 2019).

Plus-size models on runways range primarily from a women’s clothing size 10-20, but those in the top modeling agencies are sizes from 10-14 and over five feet and eight inches tall (Czerniawski, 2012). Considering the models on runways are playing a central role in representing and reproducing body ideals in the consumer society (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006), changes in sizes of models on luxury brand runways would impact how the audience perceives the conventional body ideal and may have a positive impact on societal change. Because this trend is relatively new, and there has not been much academic research related to investigating public perceptions toward the change. Therefore, the present study examined the comments from YouTube videos showing luxury brand runways. We particularly examined the following research questions: How do people respond to the sizes of models on luxury brand runways? How do people react when they watch luxury brand runways with plus-size models?

**Methods** Using YouTube as a social media platform, the present qualitative study was conducted to understand the female models' size differences in two runways from the same luxury brand, i.e., Versace, in two consecutive years. Versace was selected because the brand (1) has had uploaded its runway videos on YouTube over five years, (2) had over 200,000 followers (as of 2020.12.15), and (3) had plus size models in the recent runways. YouTube videos from 19 minutes-long Versace Women’s Spring-Summer 2020 Fashion Show (Versace, 2019) and 14 minutes-long Versace Spring Summer 2021 Fashion Show (Versace, 2020), were analyzed. Models on the runways were identified from Vogue Runway website (Madsen, 2020; Phelps, 2019). Sizes of female models on both runways were collected from each model's modeling agencies. Body measurements of the models were collected, and sizes of the models were identified based on Curvy body type from Standard Tables of Body Measurements for Adult Female Misses Figure Type, Size Range 00–20 (ASTM D5585-21, 2021).

Public comments under the two videos were copied and pasted to an Excel file and coded. Comments were excluded when coding if they were (1) not written in English, (2) not mentioning a size-related word, or (3) not an initial reply to the videos. Forty-seven comments from Versace Women’s Spring-Summer 2020 and 45 comments from Versace Spring Summer 2021 fashion shows were coded by magnitude coding, in vivo coding, and pattern coding. Throughout magnitude coding, comments were coded with three symbols based on the tone of the comments. The codes were compared and discussed until they meet the agreement. The researchers conducted the second cycle coding, pattern coding, together to organize related codes into several themes. The researchers, then, reviewed and defined the themes.

Results and Discussion: Fifty-nine models from Versace’s Spring-Summer 2020 fashion show and 45 models from Spring Summer 2021 fashion show were considered in the study. The fashion show in 2021 had three plus-size models who were size 12 or over on the runway, whereas the fashion show in the previous year had no plus-size models. Besides two models who were size four, the rest 57 models out of 59 models from Versace Women’s Spring-Summer 2020 were size 2 or below. Most of the comments related to the sizes of the models included negative responses over the skinny models from the 2020 fashion show. For example, one viewer commented as follows: “Poor girls…Way too skinny.”

The responses over the plus size models or the diversity seen from the show were found to be 69% positive and 9% negative. One positive response was as follows: “All different shapes and colors of models and clothes I love it”. Adjectives and nouns addressing the sizes of the models (e.g., skinny, fuller, plus size) were frequently found in both videos’ comments. In the 2020 fashion show, about two percent of the total comments mentioned the size-specific words as follows: “skinny”, “thin”, “slim”. In the 2021 show the size-specific word frequencies were over five percent and examples were as follows: “fuller size”, “+ size”. However, hypernyms related to the sizes of the models (e.g., diversity, inclusivity) was found in one-third of the comments made for the 2021 fashion show, whereas only one comment was made for the 2020 fashion show, which is as follows: “I wish there was more diversity in his models.”

Based on the tone of the comments we identified three different groups to better understand viewers’ reactions. The first group of the comments reflected no engagement of personal emotion or assertion: “…they are tall and skinny…” The second group of the comments expressed clear feelings about the size diversity: “So happy to see plus size models!...”. The third group strongly supported or criticized female fashion model size diversity in the luxury brand runway: “First time incorporating plus size, and THEY DID IT RIGHT!!!!...”. Whereas the second group of the comments consisted 26% of the 2020 fashion show comments, it consisted 74% of the 2021 fashion show comments.

**Conclusion** Our findings indicates that people tended to respond positively and frequently toward sizes of models in luxury brand runways when the size diversity was clearly visible on runways. Although words describing sizes of models were frequently used in both videos’ comments, hypernyms were rarely used to describe sizes of models under the runway video with homogenous skinny models. The degree of emotional engagement in comments was different in the two videos. These findings support the value of visibility of size diversity in runways to shift perception toward size diversity as a social norm. However, the findings cannot be generalized because the study conducted the research over only one luxury brand. We reviewed spring-summer season runways happened in two different years so the time gap may have impacted people’s perceptions. The future research could expand the research into diverse luxury brands employing plus size models for their runways. In-depth follow-up interviews with people who wrote the comments under the YouTube videos would be useful to understand the process of perception toward female fashion model size diversity.

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