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Introduction. On September 14, 2015, the plus-size clothing retailer, Lane Bryant, launched their #PlusIsEqual *social marketing* campaign. A follow-up to the “I’m No Angel” campaign, #PlusIsEqual aimed to raise awareness to the lack of representation of plus-size women in media and fashion. Though most of the reactions to the campaign have been positive, some expressed various oppositions to this campaign. This research investigated the prominence and themes of the negative comments about #PlusIsEqual voiced on social media.

Literature Review. Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing to programs designed to promote the acceptability of a social idea and change the voluntary behavior of target audiences (Andreasen, 2003). Social marketing differs from related concepts such as *corporate socially responsible* or *cause-related marketing*, in the element of behavioral change incorporated (Andreasen, 2003). Social marketing within the fashion industry is nearly non-existent as most cause-affiliated marketing is either corporate socially responsible or cause-related marketing. Dove launched one of the most successful cause-related marketing campaigns “The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty.” One of the goals of their campaign was to raise awareness of the unrealistic beauty standards (Dye, 2009). The #PlusIsEqual campaign is asking consumers to generate and spread body positivity, an abstract behavioral change, by encouraging consumers to become involved, voice their opinions, share the campaign message, and appear on mock billboards. Additionally, the campaign is asking media outlets to be more inclusive of diverse body types, which is also a concrete behavioral change. Such changes extend the campaign beyond familiar cause-related marketing seen previously within the fashion industry.

Currently, over two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese (Peters, 2014). Despite this majority consumer-base, plus-size models are nearly absent in high fashion magazines, and plus-size female consumers lack the same access to fashionable clothing that average-sized female consumers have (Peters, 2014). The thin ideal pervades the fashion industry, even affecting plus-size models who engage in thin centric appearance management behaviors including wearing body shaping garments and dieting (Czerniawski, 2011).

Theoretical Framework. Erving Goffman (1963) defined stigma as a discrediting attribute which reduces a whole, typical person to a tainted, discounted one. Obesity stigma, or negative attitudes towards obese people, is a pervasive and socially acceptable form of bias in North America (Puhl & Heuer, 2010). This bias leads to a number of weight-based stereotypes, including overweight or obese persons being lazy, weak-willed, and responsible for their weight. Obesity bias can be observed in several areas of the fashion industry; for example, consumers have reported more favorable brand perceptions when exposed to thin models, instead of overweight or obese models (Aagerup, 2011).

Methods. Twitter was chosen to follow as the campaign encouraged Twitter usage with the hashtag symbol. To investigate the themes in negative Twitter responses, #PlusIsEqual was followed for the first month of the campaign and each tweet was collected. The tweets that expressed disapproval of the campaign, models, or company were separated and analyzed.

Themes were developed throughout the coding process using a codebook. Two researchers independently coded 25% of the tweets to ensure validity. Cohen's Kappa reliabilities ranged from 0.422 to 0.748, indicating fair to substantial agreement (Viera & Garrett, 2005).

Results. Of the 5337 tweets made in the first 30 days, 227 (4.25%) were considered negative in tone. The disapproval expressed fell into five main categories: criticism (153), reservation (39), contempt (21), sarcasm (10) and externalizing (4). The tweet "So apparently #PlusIsEqual unless @lanebryant refuse to stock your size of course..." displays the most common criticism involving the type, quality, size, or price of Lane Bryant's clothes. Following this criticism, being critical of the lack of diversity in the campaign models in terms of size, shape, gender, and age was the second most prominent. These criticisms were often body centered, such as "#plusisequal as long as you have an hour-glass shape and don't wear bigger than a size 22 (US 18) huh?..." Criticisms of the health or aesthetics of plus-size models and women, the message, and promotional events were also observed. The most common reservation was suspicion of Lane Bryant's financial motives, such as "#PlusIsEqual because LB is concerned about the bottom line:\$." Suspicion of Lane Bryant's marketing motives or commitment to their own message, in addition to having reservations about the campaign success were also observed. The main contempt was the sentiment that overweight people are unhealthy. Contempt also included that overweight people are lazy, weak-willed, or gluttonous; overweight people have relationship issues; and body positive feminism is bad. The tweet posters also used derogatory names for overweight and obese persons and Lane Bryant models. Sarcastic techniques used included play on words to claim that the campaign is not mathematically correct. Externalizing took place when tweet posters used the glorification of plus-sized models to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

Conclusion. Though negative tweets were less than five percent of the observed tweets, these themes show this segment of the public being cautious or unable to accept this campaign for a variety of reasons such as comprising health, aesthetics, or perceived company shortcomings. The findings highlight the presence of obesity stigma in the plus-size fashion industry.

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