

Plus Size Fashion Ads in Brazilian Retail - How Overweight Consumers Rate¹?

Anúncios de Moda *Plus Size* no Varejo Brasileiro - Como os Consumidores Acima do Peso Avaliam?

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Abstract

The number of overweight people has increased over the years and the popularization of virtual social networks has created and enhanced movements of acceptance of the fat body. This caused the fashion retail companies to start investing more to serve this segment, but little is known about the way these individuals evaluate the strategies of this market. This article aims to verify how fat consumers evaluate the advertisements developed by the Plus Size fashion retailer. To this end, an online survey was conducted with 152 respondents from 22 Brazilian states. The results, obtained by means test and frequency analysis, point out that the ads that follow the ideal patterns of the fashion market generate greater approach and purchase intention behavior, while the clothing store ads are the ones that provide greater behavior away from this audience.

Keywords: Plus Size fashion. Brazilian retail. Advertising.

Resumo

A quantidade de pessoas acima do peso tem aumentado no decorrer dos anos e a popularização das redes sociais virtuais criou e potencializou movimentos de aceitação dessas pessoas. Isso fez com que as empresas de varejo de moda começassem a investir mais para atender a este segmento, mas pouco se sabe sobre a maneira como estes indivíduos avaliam as estratégias desse mercado. Este artigo objetiva verificar como os consumidores acima do peso avaliam os anúncios publicitários desenvolvidos pelo varejo de moda Plus Size. Para tanto, realizou-se uma survey online com 152 respondentes de 22 estados brasileiros. Os resultados, obtidos por teste de médias e análise de frequências, apontam que os anúncios que seguem os padrões ideais do mercado de moda geram maior comportamento de aproximação e intenção de compra, enquanto os anúncios de lojas de confecção são os que proporcionam maior comportamento de afastamento neste público.

Palavras-chave: Moda Plus Size. Varejo brasileiro. Anúncios publicitários.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, despite social pressures for ideals of beauty that worship sculpted and thin bodies, strongly evidenced by the media, it seems that some fat individuals have accepted their bodies more. Not just for the sake of acceptance, but for the need to dress; the fashion market has sought to invest more in this segment. This demand has aroused the interest of both market professionals and academics, since market actions and research on the fashion market for fat people are still incipient.

Regardless of weight, as well as color, race or creed, human beings exhibit specific behaviors due to their nature and desires. For example, perceiving yourself as similar to something or someone in social groups and even to images related to products, is one of the human characteristics considered to be natural. Thus, people began to seek, through consumer activities, possibilities to insert themselves in social groups and, at the same time, represent their individuality in the way in which they perceive and express their self-perceptions. This meant that, in the search for greater identity representation, some groups were being formed and new market segments emerged from how these groups perceived themselves similar to the image that the products offered, something that is no different for fat consumers.

Sirgy (1982) formulated the theory of self-congruence, also called perceived similarity. In this idea, for a purchase to be made it is necessary that the consumer perceives similarity between his self-image and the image of the product. In fashion, these aspects are quite common. That is, people tend to feel similar to products and generally identify themselves with the style before making the purchase. However, in fashion for overweight people it seems that this is not something common.

Breward (2003) states that fashion can be understood as a malleable extension of the **Self** to express one's identity or manipulate it to be what you want to demonstrate. Thus, when a type of consumer is unable to access fashion, he is unable to extend his self in order to demonstrate his personality and identity to others.

When in a situation in which the fat consumer cannot find clothes that fit him satisfactorily, it is encouraged, albeit indirectly, to continue the social judgment that this body is not 'ideal', thus emphasizing the stigmas, pressures and discrimination for these consumers to seek to fit between lean or muscular bodies (Breward, 2003; Melo, Farias, Kovacs, & Damascena, 2014; Peters, 2014; Melo, Farias, & Kovacs, 2017; Sousa & Melo, 2018).

Despite social pressure for the ideal body model, data from 2015 from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in the period between 2002 and 2013, report that there was a continuous decline in the weight deficit among the adult population (considering 20 years or older), while the behavior of the prevalence of overweight and obesity showed a continuous increase for both men and women.

According to the Institute of Health Metrics and Assessments (IHME), as of disclosure on the HealthData portal (2014), Brazil appears in fifth place in the world ranking of overweight people, considering the entire total predicted by the Body Mass Index (BMI), from overweight to morbid obesity. According to IBGE data (2015), more than half of the adult population in Brazil (56.6%) is overweight. This means that about 82 million Brazilians had a BMI equal to or greater than 25.

Faced with this reality, in the last few years, a movement started to valorize the fat body, called **fat pride**, giving greater visibility to overweight people and treating their bodies in a more mild and positive way, with speeches of empowerment and pride, requiring new market views for this segment (Colls, 2006; Peters, 2014; Sousa, 2020). Showing that we are far from making any apology to the fat body, but that we only want to discuss something that seems neglected.

Understanding that communication and advertising carried out by companies are actions that precede the choice and purchase action and, in addition, fashion retailers still need to know the Plus Size fashion market better, especially in this aspect, this article aims to verify how fat consumers evaluate advertisements developed by Brazilian Plus Size fashion retailers.

2 Bibliographic References

2.1 Self-image, perceived similarity and advertisements

Self-image is a subjective reflection and does not necessarily need the person's observation of how they see themselves (Ponchio & Strehlau, 2011). According to Belk (1988), this self-perception of his image is built from present, past and future perceptions of the individual, and can be faithful to the way others see him or not.

From the way the individual sees himself, he begins to use mechanisms to show others, the image as he perceives himself, that is why consumption is so used that people feel included in some of the different groups existing social (Zafaneli, Troccoli, & Scatolino, 2016). For Gonçalves (2009), marketing agents know that there is this relationship between the consumer and the product and, therefore, strive to increasingly add meanings to the goods to awaken interests and meet the expectations of consumers' identification.

This identification relationship is explained by Morandin, Bagozzi and Bergami (2013) as being based on spontaneous and instantaneous connections that individuals experience in the initial contacts of interaction and that activate, in themselves, perceptions of pre-existing similarities.

Nunes, Baptista, Maffezzolli and Vieira (2013, p. 3) emphasize that, for any purchase to take place, the consumer will initially be based on the degree of similarity perceived with the product offered. Therefore, the authors affirm that the commercials are prepared based on consumer guidelines, and these ads may have greater rational or emotional content.

So it is with regard to advertisements. According to Rocha (2001), the advertisement synthesizes a broader phenomenon of consumption of which it is a part. Also according to the author, the idea that one has of oneself is reinforced and is made explicit in advertisements, for both men and women, for this reason the ads aim to awaken the will, the desire, the will and the consumer choice. As for the choice, consumers can exhibit behaviors of approaching or withdrawing when stimulated by retail promotional elements, as described in the next topic.

2.2 Consumer approach and withdrawal behavior

The environmental stimuli that surround the individual in the consumption scenario are able to influence the behavior of this individual at an emotional and sensory level, in such a way that these stimuli are able to generate influence in attitudes of approach and withdrawal from the consumer towards the product (Marcelino, Geleilate, Gomes, Maciel, & Leocadio, 2011).

Mehrabian and Russel (1974) proposed an emotional measurement model, known as the PAD model, in which stimuli exist in three emotional situations: Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance. In a similar perspective, Farias (2007) describes that these three emotional states, which act as mediators of this approach and withdrawal behavior, imply in all environments, whether traditional or virtual.

Despite understanding that the main sensory channels capable of influencing purchase intent, be they sight, hearing, smell and touch (Farias, 2007), a substantial number of studies

that emphasized the category were not found in the academic literature. Visual and that deal with promotional elements, such as advertisements, with the few works hitherto linked to the question of store layout and colors, for example. In addition, most studies that analyze the stimuli for approach and withdrawal behavior seem to understand only the auditory aspect, dealing with the influence of music on the environment as an influencing factor in behavior and purchase intention. With this, this study deals with the vision in the Plus Size fashion retail environment.

2.3 Plus Size Consumption

Although, until the early 2000s, people with excess weight and obesity showed less sensitivity and involvement in the consumption of fashion products, it was clear that consumers' thinking was changing and these people already valued the consumption of health products. Fashion in the same way as consumers in other segments (Meng, 2007).

In the last few years, the fashion market and the textile industry have started to wake up to this new consumer demand and have created a segmentation which they called Plus Size, in English. Despite the claim that this term came up to give an idea of sophistication and modernity replacing other terms that were used to sell products of these sizes, such as “large sizes” and “special sizes” (Betti, 2014). Kulick e Meleney (2005) claim that the word 'fat' is associated with something bad and, therefore, all the euphemisms and terms prevalent in the women's fashion department have been replaced by a more pleasant term, ‘Plus Size’.

Thus, the Plus Size market has managed to expand among several brands and several countries and, increasingly, clothing companies have been adhering to larger sizes in their pieces. All this expansion has already made Plus Size considered the fastest growing segment of the women's clothing industry in the early 2000s. (Matis, 2006; Meng, 2007).

There's no delimitation regarding the numbering considered Plus Size, for this reason, for delimitation purposes, this study will consider Plus Size from the numbering 44. The studies by Medeiros and Cardoso (2010), and Winter and Moraes (2013) conclude that the overweight and obese women are unhappy with Brazilian fashion geared towards this biotype because they cannot find affordable modern clothing, but this problem is not restricted to Brazil. The Portuguese Costa and Cardoso (2007) point out that, for fat women, it is extremely difficult to find clothes that match their needs.

Medeiros and Cardoso (2010) report that some fat consumers stated that the act of buying clothes, often considered pleasurable for women, was seen as something frustrating for these consumers, as they did not find beautiful, varied and often the cuts were straight and left them looking without curves and without femininity. In addition, these consumers did not feel comfortable looking and trying on clothes in stores that were not specialized.

Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005, p. 337) affirm that it is practically impossible for fat women to find clothes that are in line with fashion trends, thus, “it is impossible to dress a large body in a modern way, with modern feminine styles”.

Winter and Moraes (2013) state that the difficulty in finding clothes that follow fashion trends is high, and that fat consumers do not feel attractive because of their bodies, a feeling that leads to decreased self-esteem. The authors conclude that the Plus Size segment has yet to transform itself in Brazil and difficulties such as lack of standard size, shortage of larger sizes and lack of clothing with a greater variety of design and models, need to be addressed. Only then will this category of consumers be able to see themselves represented in the fashion market.

3 Methodological Procedures

This study is quantitative and descriptive. The field research was carried out using structured online forms, shared by virtual social network and electronic mail. The sampling technique adopted was non-probabilistic for convenience, since it was not intended to make inferences for a population of interest. The pre-test was developed with 36 consumers to detect deficiencies in the statements of the questions and difficulties in filling out the answers, which were then analyzed and adjusted.

The link to the form was sent to several people and, at the end of the established 30-day period, 373 valid questionnaires were obtained. After treatment to identify the respondents' body profile, 221 of them did not correspond to the body profile of fat people, leaving a final sample of 152 consumers with the appropriate profile for this analysis.

To measure the evaluation of advertisements by respondents, three different types of advertisements were presented (the one considered ideal - which fits the fashion market standards; the one usually used by urban clothing stores; and the ads produced by clothing stores). The differentiations between the ads were not described to prevent responses from being biased and these images were validated by specialists in the area of Marketing and Communication. The scale of Andrade and Mazzon (2008) was used with its seven items in full. For the analysis, the means test and the frequency analysis were used.

3.1 Sample characterization

The sample was represented by 22 Brazilian states and the Federal District, with 67.1% coming from the Northeast, 22.4% from the Southeast; 6.6% belonging to the South region; 2.6% of the Midwest; and 1.3% from the North.

Of the total respondents, 54 are male (35.5%) and 98 female (64.5%). Regarding the level of education, the sample was composed of 48.7% of university students, 17.8% of specialists, 11.8% of graduates, 7.8% of masters, 7.2% of doctors, and 6.6% with completed high school. The average age of 35 years, whose standard deviation was 9.8 years, with respondents having a minimum age of 18 years and a maximum of 68 years.

The average individual income is R \$ 3,472.55, with fashion being R\$ 2,000.00, and a minimum monthly income of R\$ 0.00 and a maximum of R\$ 19,000.00. The average height presented was 1.69 meters, with a minimum height of 1.48 meters and a maximum of 1.94 meters. Regarding weight, the average among respondents was 89.4 kg, with a minimum of 54 kg and a maximum of 148kg.

4 Evaluation of Announcements and Discussion of Results

As proposed by Andrade and Mazzon (2008) in the ad rating scale, the objective was to identify which ads generate the feeling of closer proximity to the consumer and can, consequently, awaken their buying interests.

The items evaluated in each ad, have antonyms at the ends of the seven-point scales. In this way, the highest averages leaning towards 7 corresponded to the positive averages and represented adjectives such as: fun, true, very original, well produced, trustworthy, modern and very controversial. According to Andrade and Mazzon (2008), the higher the positive average, the greater the consumer approach behavior.

On the other hand, the averages that lean towards 1 correspond to the negative averages and represent adjectives such as: boring, liar, without originality, badly produced, deceptive, outdated and not at all controversial, which, the authors affirm that they generate greater removal behavior due to consumer part.

The description of each of the three types of ads used and the results obtained are further detailed below.

Study 1: Advertisement 1 (Ideal Type)

The first Plus Size advertising advertisement presented to the respondents was called the ideal advertisement, as it presents greater alignment with the standard used by the fashion market today, due to its colors, edition and images. Both ads are real, from two chain stores operating in the Brazilian market, which use larger size models to advertise the new clothing collections in this segment, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 - Fashion advertisements corresponding to the market standard
 Source: Store website (2018).

From the evaluation of these ads that follow a pattern considered here as ideal and is already used by the clothing market, it is possible to see, in Table 1, that fat consumers have high averages.

The highest average was related to fun, which means that most fat consumers considered the ad fun, and the lowest average was for the controversial item, which suggests that for these consumers, this is not a type of ad controversial.

When the responses were analyzed from the perspective of the frequency analysis, it can be identified that, in general, there was a higher frequency for positive evaluations. This means that fat consumers are attracted to this type of advertisement.

Table 1
Averages - Ad 1

Body profile	Fun	Truth	Originality	Production	Trust	Modernity	Controversial
Mean	5,17	5,01	5,06	4,67	4,95	5,07	4,05
N	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
Std. Deviation	1,702	1,751	1,916	1,585	1,385	1,599	1,976

Source: Research data (2018).

Frequency variations show that 67.2% rate this ad as modern, 63.9% think it is confident, 62.5% original, 61.8% amusing and only 43% rate it as controversial.

Study 2: Advertisement 2 (Urban retail)

The second type of advertising refers to those used by medium-sized urban stores with Plus Size numbers. Figure 2, used by this research to compose this type of advertisement, was presented to respondents right after Figure 1, characterized as ideal. Like Figure 1, the ads that make up this second figure are also real, use larger size models to advertise their clothing collections and have their brand names excluded.



Figure 2 - Plus Size urban store advertisements

Source: Store website (2018).

The evaluation of consumers for this second type of ad identified high averages, but not higher than those presented in the first type of ad. The highest average was for the truth item and the lowest average was for the controversial item, that is, the respondents considered this type of ad to be true, but not controversial, as found in the first type of advertisement.

Table 2
Averages - Ad 2

Body profile		Fun	Truth	Originality	Production	Trust	Modernity	Controversial
Fat	Mean	4,57	5,49	4,53	4,60	5,11	4,62	3,97
	N	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
	Std. Deviation	1,694	1,548	1,856	1,692	1,377	1,734	1,950

Source: Research data (2018).

The results of the frequency analysis of this second ad pointed out that fat consumers show an approaching behavior, that is, they are attracted to this type of ad.

For 70.3% of respondents, this is a real announcement. They also rated the ad as: confident (64.5%), well-produced (63.2%) and original (58.6%). The lowest frequency was for controversy (42.8%).

Study 3: Advertisement 3 (Clothing stores)

The third and last type of advertising used in this research referred to the ads produced and used by Plus Size fashion clothing stores. Thus, this type of advertisement was presented to respondents by Figure 3, right after the presentation of the second type. As previously specified, the images are real, use Plus Size models to advertise their garments and the names of stores and clothing brands have been excluded in order to avoid identification by respondents.



Figure 3 - Clothing store advertisement
 Source: Store website (2018).

This type of ad presented the lowest averages among fat consumers. Despite this, the item truth presented an expressive average, which means that respondents attribute this to a type of true advertisement. In contrast, the lowest average was for the production item, that is, they assess that this type of ad is poorly produced.

Table 3
Averages - Ad 3

Body profile	Fun	Truth	Originality	Production	Trust	Modernity	Controversial
Mean	4,01	5,20	4,04	3,75	4,86	4,27	4,03
Fat N	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
Std. Deviation	2,021	1,624	2,042	1,895	1,461	2,023	2,042

Source: Research data (2018).

When the frequencies were analyzed, it was found that, for this third type of ad, fat consumers presented positive frequencies, which means an approaching behavior towards this type of ad.

For fat consumers, positive frequencies were lower in the controversial item (35.5%) and higher in the true item (60.6%). There was relevance between the items: confident (55.2%), modern (46.7%) and original (46%).

4.2 Considerations for the three types of advertisements

Based on the results of the averages tests and the frequencies, it was possible to verify that the closer to the market ideal the advertisement is, the greater the positive evaluation of consumers.

Type 1 ads were considered fun, original, well-produced and modern. All these positive results expressed by the highest averages and highest frequencies, imply that this is the type of advertising that generates greater approach and purchase intention by fat consumers.

Respondents rated Type 2 ads, those used in urban stores, as the most truthful and most trusted. In addition, this second type of advertisement showed favorable averages and frequencies, which means that it also generates approximation behavior in fat consumers. Type 3 ads, on the other hand, used by clothing stores, were the ones that showed the greatest withdrawal behavior among respondents, having received the worst evaluations, and being judged as the most poorly produced.

5 Final Considerations

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the more aligned with the fashion market standards the advertisements are, the greater the approximation behavior and, consequently, the greater the purchase intention of fat consumers. This fact can be confirmed when analyzing that fat individuals have higher positive averages for ads that follow the ideal standard and higher negative averages for ads that do not follow these same standards.

The results of this study can offer important contributions to the marketing of clothing retail companies with Plus Size sizes that adopt or intend to adopt the use of advertisements as a way of promoting their products. By improving and adapting your ads to the ideal market standards, there will be greater approach behavior and purchase intention by fat consumers, which can generate increased profitability.

The main limitations of this study are related to the generalization of the discoveries provided by it, since the sample was not probabilistic, but this does not imply its commitment and contribution. The development of the same study is suggested by applying it to a sample of individuals with numbers starting at 50.

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