

Exploring Body Image Perception Among Indian Women – An Affective, Perceptual, Cognitive and Behavioural Study

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[Abstract] The purpose of this article is to recognize if the body image perception among plus size consumers have an impact on fit related issues faced by them when they purchase clothes. The fashion industry has come to a point of “size acceptance” where designing clothes for plus size is taking up the market to the next level. Future trend shows a huge rise in the consumption of plus size women clothing when compared to the consumption of men and children apparels. A sample of 102 respondents has participated in this study which is descriptive in nature. A non-probability sampling method, convenience sampling method was used to select the sample respondents. Consumers who are plus size women and who purchase plus size readymade apparels are the inclusion criteria for the samples collected. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to explore the constructs of this study. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation modelling was used to confirm the factors and develop a model for Body Image Perception. Cronbach’s Alpha value derived was 0.872 and indicates that the overall reliability of the study is 87.2%. SPSS v21 and SPSS AMOS v21 are the packages used to analyze the data and draw the SEM model. The results of the study have brought out the relationship between functional fit, aesthetic fit and social comfort of plus size apparels showing the influence of Body Image Perception on all the three. It is observed that Social Comfort is the strong predictor of Body Image Perception followed by Functional Fit.

[Keywords] body image perception, inclusive sizing apparels, full figure silhouette (shape), functional and aesthetic fit, social comfort, plus size women, fashion in the clothing industry

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Introduction

The world of plus size is growing at a faster pace. Over the year’s women have undergone change in lifestyle, sleep patterns and work environment has contributed to an increase in the waistline of everyone and women are not an exception to it (Volonté, 2019). Plus-size models are gaining dominance and recognition in the fashion world in recent times as it’s the need of the hour, but the industry lacks in practically manufacturing clothes for them. Catering to the needs of a plus-size woman in the apparel industry is still a challenge. Shopping preferences change according to a woman’s height, weight comfort etc. Industry-standard shows that women who wear size 40 centimeters and above constitute to the plus-size category. The research paper aims at inclusive sizing of women and the perception they carry about their bodies while making an apparel purchase. Image dissatisfaction leads to a negative mood which in turn affects the overall wellbeing of an individual. Women tend to compare their body types with unrealistic body images depicted in the media world and has direct physiological appearance-related comparisons. There are copious problems that plus-size women face while shopping for clothing.

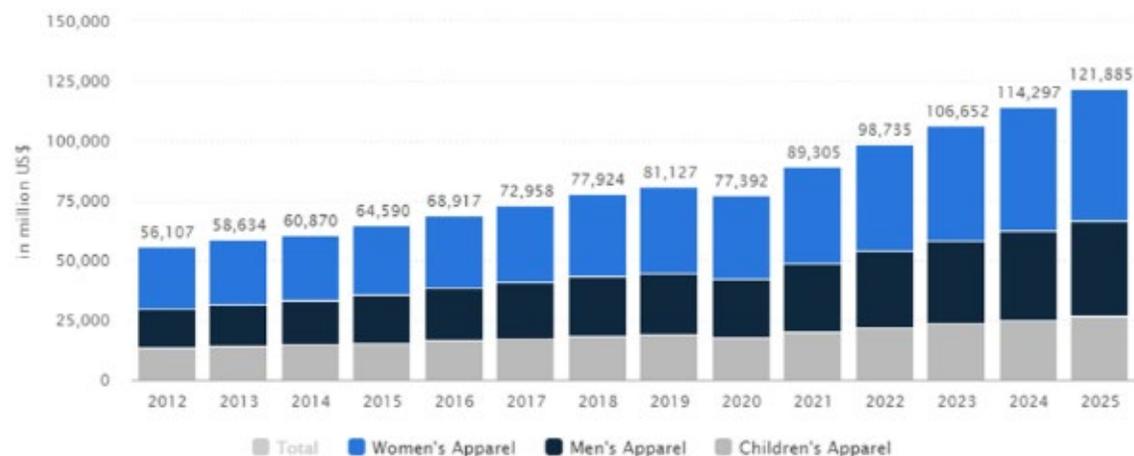
Women play numerous roles in their lives having no time to take care of themselves having gained weight yet, there is huge demand for curvy or plus-size models to walk the ramp as beauty pageants. The number of working women have drastically increased over the few decades which has resulted in want for

extra-large readymade clothing and today's society demands more of plus size apparels. During the last few decades, the choices for plus-size apparels were limited with only a few brands selling with very restricted collections available. Large size clothes and size retailing is gaining superiority in the last decade, the fashion industry took advantage of this and started introducing clothes for plus size. Plus-size clothing in the fashion industry has come a long way yet changing fashion trends within the society that had failed to accommodate plus-size consumers.

Demand for full-figure apparels increased at large due to rise in obese and overweight individuals across the world, this has also increased the market size of plus-size apparels. The study deals with various challenges that plus-size women face while purchasing apparels. Size is a major concern, where body imaging plays a notable role. The mental picture about his or her own body is called body image or body image perception (Fallon, 1990) a subjective picture of one's physical appearance established both by self-observation and by noting the reactions of other. There is a massive market that sells clothes and accessories for women, plus-size apparels are a new add-on to the existing market, some brands offer plus-size apparels. Past studies have lacked in bridging the gap between apparels for plus-size women and the challenges they face while selecting clothes they prefer using the limited availability. Traditional, western and into western apparels available for plus-size consumers with specific plus-size chart (Hooda, *et.al.*, 2018). There are many barriers that plus-size women need to undergo while selecting from a range of plus-size clothing. Inequality in clothing stores and negligence of the plus-size has brought embarrassment among customers. Yet this marketplace has gained momentum in recent years with growth in the want for plus-size clothing.

Figure 1

Future Trend of Plus-Size Women's Apparels in Comparison with Men's Apparels and Children's Apparels



Source: Statista (Forecast adjusted for expected impact of COVID-19), July 2020

Literature Review

Preferences and attitudes of plus-size consumers and perception towards fashion aesthetics differ with age groups and occupations. Growing fondness in aesthetics of fashion has impacted the plus-size apparel industry (Venkatesh, *et.al.*, 2010). Clothing is not about fitting alone but it relates to other elements such as body posture and the complexity in body proportions. Identifying emotional well-being and self-esteem of inclusive sizing among women is interlinked with personal satisfaction and individuality (Büttner, A.J *et.al.*, 2019). The future trend (Figure 1) shows a huge rise in the consumption of plus size women clothing consumption compared with men and children apparel consumption

The fashion industry must give importance to the quality of apparels and a wide variety of clothing to select from. There are various challenges that apparel manufacturers face while solving the in offering wide

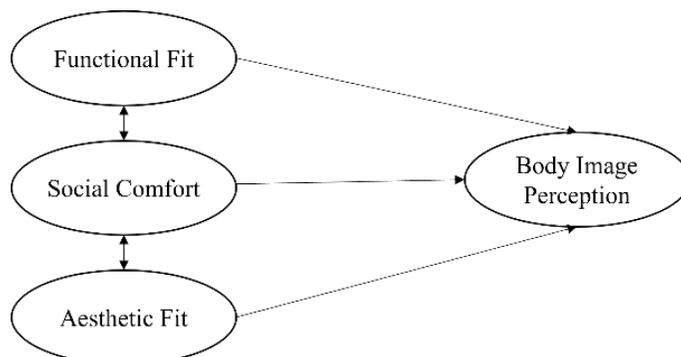
clothing option for plus size consumers with respect to fit (Kim & Damhorst, 2010). Problem-solving approaches such as creating ideal fit, retailing and prototype for plus-size women can be adopted. This can increase confidence among the users since these approaches can bridge the gap. A recent hike in the retail industry concerning the women inclusive sizing market brings in want to ensure a holistic understanding of plus-size apparel needs. Plus-size consumers need to know how to deal with negative perceptions that society has on them. Marketers need to give a wider range of clothing to their plus-size customers. The apparel industry meets its demand only on the body proportions for the ideal body which makes it difficult for plus-size consumers to visualize them trying on the garment if it would be an effective fit on their problem areas. Self-discrepancy comes into the picture when the process of imagining one in the garments brings emotional discomfort.

The various ways in which the enterprises can increase the collections for plus-size consumers in the E-commerce industry is by understanding the buying behavior such as knowing patterns, brands, and price of plus-size consumers. Plus size women have also started to use the online medium to purchase their clothing yet they also prefer to shop in brick-and-mortar stores. Some limited brands and websites sell plus-size apparels. Bodily dissatisfaction among social media users is crucial in recent times having internet taking prominence. Social media platforms play a pivotal role in determining the body image. Ideal body image is developed by an individual throughout one's lifetime.

Pictures are posted with manipulated effects on the Instagram account and other social media account to portray positive body image. Self-body image is socially compared as manipulated pictures were positively rated and original pictures were negatively rated. Size is a major concern, where body imaging plays a vital role. Societal views and social comparison influence how a woman perceives the way she looks, (Bissell, & Rask, 2010). Aesthetics revolves around the 5C's; the context of usability, care, comfort, convenience, and communication (P. K. P, 2018). Body imaging starts at adolescence, the study focuses majorly on the women youth population. Body image deals with a person's satisfaction and dissatisfaction about their body-based looks (Kostanski, et al., 2004),

Brand loyalty revolves around affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects (Bagozzi, et al., 2017). In the long run either clothes or the brand gets emotionally connected with the consumer. The buying process revolves around three stages such as the cognitive; the process of thinking, affective; emotional connection and perpetual; converting thoughts to actions (Lavidge, et al, 1961). The link between clothing choice and the various aspects of body image lies between self – objectification and choosing comfortable clothes. Women's contemporary body management and appearance are neglected (Tiggemann, et al., 2012). Marketers should provide plus size consumers a wider range of clothing to select from as the number of plus-size consumers is increasing along with a boom in purchasing power. Every individual has perceptions about their body and has their individuality in dressing which influences certain style, color, pattern, clothing fit, likes and dislikes, etc, the various factors that influence the buying behavior of plus size clothing are availability, promotion, and low price (Jadhav & Khanna, et al., 2016)

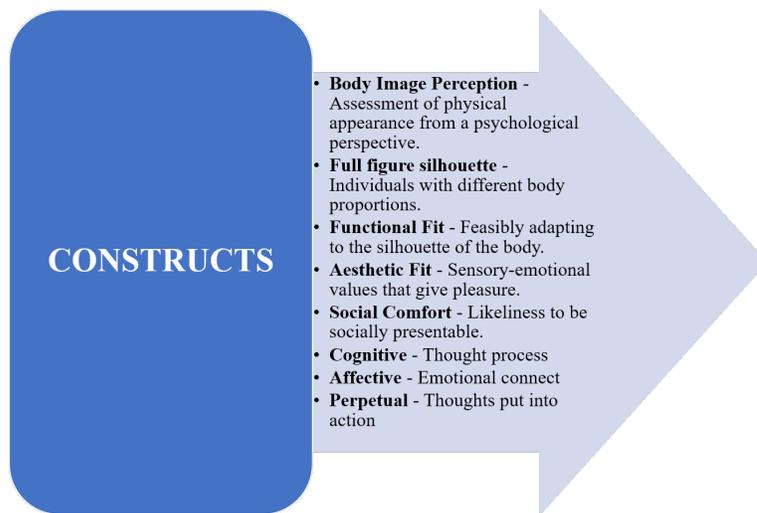
Figure 2
Conceptual Framework



Clothing fit is also called the functional fit. The human body finds comfort in the fit of the garments. Sizing charts are not well suited for individual consumers but find the place to accommodate the difference at various intervals. Technology in today's era has well-developed assessment techniques to cater to functional fit related issues (Dabolina, et al., 2018). The fundamental rule of the clothing system is comfort, and the customers make their choice of clothing based on it. Clothing attributes and the fabric play an important role in the comfort of a garment which leads to the purchase decision (Kamalha, et al., 2013). Physical appearance from a psychological perspective is body image. It encompasses perceptual, affective, cognitive, and behavioral attributes. Body image is influenced by biological, social, cultural, individual, and historical factors. Clothing plays an important role in the aesthetic appearance of individuals to gain identity in society (Reddy & Otieno, et al., 2019). Fashion perspectives on aesthetics differ from individual to individual.

Figure 3

List of Constructs



Methodology

This study concentrates on the body image perception among plus size consumers and to identify the impact of independent constructs like Functional fit, social comfort, and Aesthetic fit on body image perception. A sample of 102 respondents has participated in this study and is of descriptive type. A non-probability sampling method, Convenience sampling method was used to select the sample respondents. Consumers who are plus size women and who purchase plus size readymade apparels is the inclusion criteria for the samples. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. Questionnaire was categorized into five sections. First section consists of demographic profile of the respondents, whereas next four sections comprise of scales related to Functional fit, social comfort, Aesthetic fit, and Body Image perception. First section questions are of multiple choice and next four sections comprise of 5-point Likert scaling questions. Journals, newspaper, websites, and research articles were taken for framing the questionnaire and for the review of the literature. The respondents were selected irrespective of different age groups, educational qualification, income slabs, marital status etc. Exploratory factor analysis is used to explore the constructs. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation modelling is used to confirm the factors and develop a model for Body image perception. Cronbach's Alpha is used to assess the reliability of the constructs in the study. SPSS v21 and SPSS AMOS v21 are the packages used to analysis the data and drawing the SEM model.

Data Collection and Discussion

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha value. Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.7 is considered as good reliability. The normality of the constructs was studied using the Skewness and Kurtosis. The Skewness and Kurtosis lies between +/- 3 (Hair, *et al*, 2006) shows the data is normally distributed.

Table 1
Reliability Analysis and Test of Normality

S. No	Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	Functional fit	7	0.874	-0.616	0.251
2	Social comfort	5	0.881	-0.861	0.026
3	Aesthetic fit	4	0.877	-0.805	0.317
4	Body Image perception	6	0.878	-0.585	-0.478
	Overall reliability of the study	22	0.872		

It is noted from the Table -1, that the reliability values of the construct ranges from 0.874 to 0.881 and the overall reliability of the study is identified as 0.87, which in terms of percentage shows 87.2% of reliability. All the Cronbach's alpha value of the constructs as well as the overall study is all above the threshold limit of 0.7, the study is assessed with good reliability. There are several methods to prove the normality of the data, in this study the authors have adopted the method of assessing the Skewness and Kurtosis of the constructs to test the normality. Since the Skewness and Kurtosis are well within the threshold limit of +/- 3, the data collected for the study is normally distributed.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic variable	Category	Number of Respondents (N=102)	Percentage
Age	18 - 20	1	1
	21 - 35	72	70.6
	36 - 50	18	17.6
	Above 50	11	10.8
Educational Qualification	Schooling/ Diploma	3	2.9
	Undergraduate	23	22.5
	Postgraduate	49	48
	Professional	24	23.5
Body Category	Others	3	2.9
	Ideal Weight	28	27.5
	Overweight	39	38.2
Social Status	Obese	35	34.3
	Student	13	12.7

	Government Employee	5	4.9
	Private Employee	36	35.3
	Entrepreneur	19	18.6
	Home Maker	29	28.4
	Metropolitan City	85	83.3
City	Urban Centre	11	10.8
	Semi-urban Centre	5	4.9
	Rural Centre	1	1
	Pear	42	41.2
	Apple	31	30.4
Silhouette	Hourglass	19	18.6
	Triangles	6	5.9
	Inverted Triangle	4	3.9

The data for this study was collected through primary sources. Table - 2 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents who form a part of the primary data, which was collected by the authors. The respondents were categorized according to their age, educational qualification, body category, social status, an Indian city that they live in and body silhouette which was used for the analysis.

The study was conducted among plus size women who fall under four age categories they are: 18 – 20 (1 %), 21 – 35 (70.6 %), 36 – 50 (17.6 %) and above 50 (10.8 %). Respondents represent various educational qualifications; schooling/diploma (2.9 %), undergraduates (22.5 %), postgraduates (48 %) and professionals (23.5 %) and others (2.9 %) and hold different social status such as students (12.7 %), government employee (4.9 %), private employees (35.3 %) and entrepreneurs (4.9 %), homemakers (24.5 %), professional (13.7 %) and others (3.9 %). The marital statuses of respondents were married (58.8 %), unmarried (38.2 %) and others (2.90 %).

Responses were restricted to plus-size Indian women consumers. The maximum number of respondents hail from the metro cities in India and belong to various locations in India such as metropolitan cities (83.3%) Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru, urban center (10.8%) Coimbatore, Trichy, Erode, and Madurai, semi-urban center (4.9%) Pudukotai, Thiruvallur and Kancheepuram. Rural centre (1%) Perungudi. The difference between perception and reality were identified through weight category. The perception regarding the body weight is categorized as; ideal weight category (27.5%), overweight (38.2%) and obese weight category (34.3%). Awareness of body shape among plus size women in this study were categorized into five body types, they fall under the various body silhouette such as pear (41.2%), apple (30.4%), hourglass (18.6%), triangle (5.9%) and inverted triangle (3.9%).

Table 3
Factor Components and Its Loadings

Factor	Components	Factor loading
Factor 1	Preference to buy clothes which conceal physical silhouette.	.821
	Clothing in same sizes fit differently	.719
	Size varies from brand to brand unlike normal sizes	.674
	Finding the right size of clothing is a challenge	.638
	Styles offered is limited	.589
	Cost is high	.555

	Quality of the clothing is good	.516
	An attire strongly indicates personality.	.789
	Comfort	.722
Factor 2	Accessibility of clothing in plus size for all occasions, in preferred patterns and colors	.678
	Other's opinion on physical appearance is important	.602
	Suitability of Formal/ Office wear	.547
	Clothing creates positive impression in the viewers' perspective.	.732
Factor 3	Strong plus size fashion influence	.689
	Creating a statement of fashion by mix and match of clothing	.563
	Aesthetic clothes are not comfortable but stylish	.518
	Body image perception changes with maturity.	.777
	Body positivity is important	.713
Factor 4	Comfort in own skin	.689
	Pressurized to fit into a culturally ideal look	.631
	Dressing up changes the negative perception on others point of view	.544
	Appealing look	.509

An attempt was made to explore the factors that are related to the apparels for plus size women. Exploratory Factor analysis with principal components analysis with an option of Vari-max rotation is employed to assess the reduction of 22 variables into factors. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.844 confirms the sample size taken for this analysis is appropriate and depicts the Global standard value for KMO that should be between 0.6 to 1. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity's Chi-Square value of 796.469 ($p=.000$) is also found as significant. It is noted from the analysis that the 22 variables are reduced to four distinct factors. It is confirmed by the Eigen values: 6.137, 1.856, 1.501 and 1.316, which are all greater than unity. The percentage of variance explored by the four factors is 38.358, 11.603, 9.384 and 8.225 respectively. Total cumulative variance explored by the reduced four factors is observed as 67.569%. Table-3 portrays the components of the factors and their factor loadings.

From Table-3 it is inferred that factor 1 is a combination of seven variables such as "Preference to buy clothes which conceal physical silhouette", "Clothing in same sizes fit differently", "Size varies from brand to brand unlike normal sizes", "Finding the right size of clothing is a challenge", "Styles Offered is limited", "Cost is high" and "Quality of the clothing is good" which are named as "Functional Fit". Factor 2 is grouped with five variables such as "An attire strongly indicates personality", "Comfort", "Accessibility of clothing in plus size for all occasions, in preferred patterns and colors", "Other's opinion on physical appearance is important" and "Suitability of Formal/ Office wear" which are named as "Social Comfort".

Factor 3 consists of four variables such as "Clothing creates positive impression in the viewers perspective", "Strong plus size fashion influence", "Creating a statement of fashion by mix and match of clothing" and "Aesthetic clothes are not comfortable but stylish" which are named as "Aesthetic Fit". Factor 4 is grouped with six variables such as "Body image perception changes with maturity", "Body positivity is important", "Comfort in own skin", "Pressurized to fit into a culturally ideal look", "Dressing up changes the negative perception on others point of view" and "Appealing look" which is named as "Body Image

Perception.” It is noted that preference of clothes to their physical size, personality for what they wear, creates positive impression through their clothes they wear and keeps changing their perception as they become mature are the key aspects of the perception of Plus size apparels.

Table 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factors	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	ECVI	χ^2 dof
Functional fit	0.917	0.906	0.093	0.094	3.896
Social comfort	0.912	0.906	0.095	0.097	3.025
Aesthetic fit	0.911	0.905	0.091	0.091	3.632
Body Image perception	0.916	0.908	0.093	0.097	2.885

Confirmatory factor analysis is performed to confirm the factor structures of Functional Fit, Social Comfort, Aesthetic Fit and Body Image Perception. Table 4 depicts the readings related to the Confirmatory factor Analysis. Goodness of fit index (GFI) suggested ranges from 0 to 1 and closer to one to a perfect fit model (Joreskog & Sorbon, 1984). The Root-Mean square error approximation (RMSEA) ranges from 0 to 1, a smaller value indicates better model that Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI) measure always remains positive and closer to zero indicates better model fit. Chi-square is more sensitive for greater sample size, so it is better to use the ratio of Chi square to degree of freedom. Hypothetical model and sample data suggests that 2 to 1 or 3 to 1 value is indicative of acceptability. Chi square Ratio approximately 5 or less is reasonable. The GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, ECVI and Chi-square ratio values of Functional Fit, Social Comfort, Aesthetic Fit and Body Image Perception in Table 4 are satisfying the minimal acceptance limit. Figure 4 and Figure 5 shows the Confirmatory factor analysis of Functional Fit and Social Comfort.

Figure 4 CFA for Functional Fit

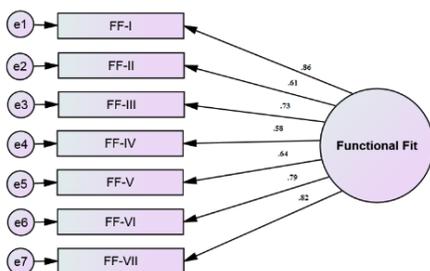


Figure 5 CFA for Social Comfort

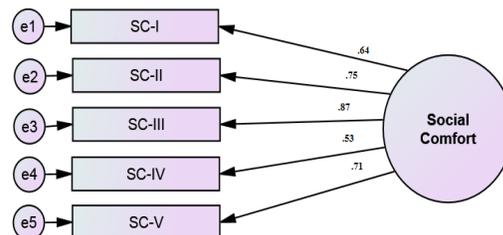


Figure 6 and Figure 7 shows the Confirmatory factor analysis of Aesthetic Fit and Body Image Perception. In this study Functional Fit, Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit are independent variables and the Body Image Perception is the dependent variable.

Figure 6 CFA for Aesthetic Fit

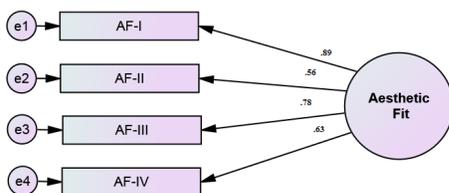
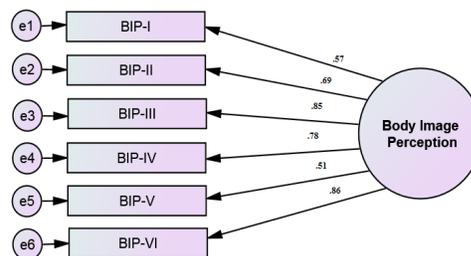
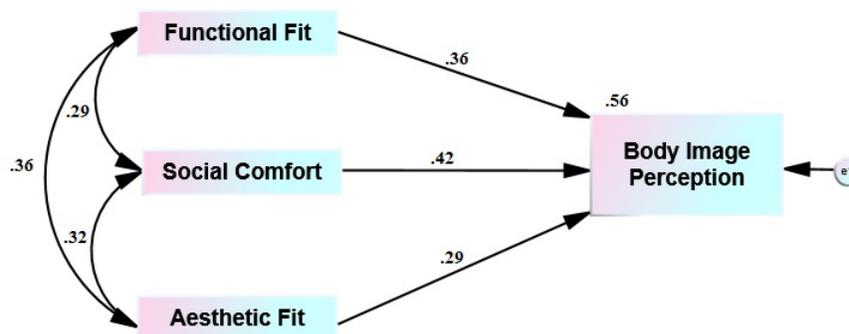


Figure 7 CFA for Body Image Perception



A model is developed for Perception of Body image among plus size women in India. In this model Functional Fit, Social Comfort, Aesthetic Fit and Body Image Perception are the observed variables. Functional Fit, Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit are independent variables, whereas dependent variable in the model is Body Image Perception. e_1 is the error term for the dependent variable. The model developed with the above aspects is displayed in the Figure 8.

Figure 8
Model for Perception of Body Image among Plus Size Women



The model in the Figure 8 depicts that the causal relationship between Functional fit and Social Comfort ($r=0.29$, $p=.008$), Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit ($r=0.32$, $p=.002$) and Functional Fit and Aesthetic Fit ($r=0.36$, $p=.001$) are observed as positive and significant. R-square value of the model 0.56 shows 56% of the variability of Functional Fit, Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit on Body Image Perception. It indicates the moderate relationship between the independent variables taken in the model. Further the regression coefficients of Functional Fit, Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit 0.36, 0.42 and 0.29 shows the positive and significant impact of all the three independent variables on the dependent variable Body Image Perception. This indicates that one unit increase in Functional Fit, Social Comfort and Aesthetic Fit enhances the Body Image Perception by 0.36, 0.42 and 0.29 units. It is also noted that Social Comfort is the strong predictor of Body Image Perception followed by Functional Fit.

Table 5
Model Fit Summary

χ^2	dof	χ^2/dof	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	ECVI
5.718	3	1.906	0.916	0.904	0.094	0.096

It is noted from the Table - 5, the model's Chi-square $\chi^2/\text{dof} = 1.906$ shows the model is valid. The model's goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.916 and its adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) is 0.904 shows the model fit is good. Further the model's Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.094 and Expected Cross Validation Index (ECVI) value of 0.096 are within the acceptable limit and confirms the model is of better fit.

Conclusion

This study explores the body image perception among plus size women and the challenges they face in finding clothing that is well fitted to their body silhouette. The results indicate positivity towards individuals body image. Internet has paved way in creating awareness among women in knowing their body silhouettes. Findings indicate moderate relationship between independent variables such as Functional Fit, Social Comfort, Aesthetic Fit, and the dependent variable termed as Body Image Perception. Producers should include more realistic sizing for their plus-size consumers. Marketers should take initiatives in advertising

their brands to the target groups for a better reach. The fit of the clothing and the quality matters to the consumer hence the brands can give importance to it and create brand loyalty. The satisfaction level of various plus size outfits available in the market are still on the unsatisfactory side, marketers should work on it to increase the satisfaction of their customers.

Producers must bridge the gap between consumers who choose tailor-made apparels over ready wear clothes, semi stitched apparels will be a good option to give the apparels a better fit. It is also noted that Social Comfort is the strong predictor of Body Image Perception. Plus size clothing has become a booming industry from the niche market but it has not reached its full potential because fashion houses earlier ignored the plus-size category. It is still a challenge for plus size people to find trendy clothes for them when compared to regular sizes. Accepting full figures and plus-size fashion cliché is still dominant in today's scenario. The "Body positivity movement" that was started in the early nineties as the first wave of feminism was a platform for "self-acceptance" and it has paved the way to make everyone feel positive about their bodies with respect to height, weight, and shape. The movement dealt with all types of body shamming stating that it is the right of every individual to dress as they wish without facing any societal pressure.

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