



Oversized Models – Omitted Commercial Opportunities

Effects of Model's Body Size on Consumers' Purchase Intention

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1 | Slimness is the Aesthetic Standard

Katrina, a 17-year-old girl was asked by one of the online shopping websites to model for their clothes on July 9th, 2018. Katrina is 170cm tall and weighs only 55 kilograms, which is envied by lots of girls at her same age. However, to everyone's surprise, Katrina can only fit into half of the small-sized clothes that the shop assigned to her, while the other half is too small for her to fit in, though she is already really slim. And if Katrina puts on normal-sized clothes, then all of them are just too big for her to present.

As this anecdote may sound abnormal, it is not a single case in China. If you search for women's clothes on an online shopping website in China, you will find various types of these clothes for sure; however, it is often overlooked that they have one thing in common: they are all displayed on models with skinny, slender, and sometimes frail body shape. Both Chinese merchandisers and customers take it for granted that models have to be slender.



Katrina modeling for online shopping websites
Photo provided by Ge Gao

2 | The Investigation

Nevertheless, there is no solid evidence or reports on types of models that consumers truly prefer, in which their attitudes toward average to oversized models are not clear.

Regarding this problem, reporters conduct an online survey through Wen Juanxing from July 1st to 11th, a platform that provides various forms of surveys and polls to investigate this problem. There are in all 102 people participated in this investigation, in which over 70% of them are young women aged from 15 to 30. In the survey, participants are being inquired of their online shopping experience; then, reporters showed them photos of different body sized

models presenting the same casual dress, and ask them to choose of which those clothes will they be more likely to favor, purchase, and share via social media.



Picture used in the online survey
Photo from asos.com

Through the investigation, 12% people are often exposed to models that share similar body sizes with them, and 70% of respondents identify themselves as having medium body-shaped people but rarely find a model of similar body size to them. Even worse, for those who perceive themselves as extreme obesity can never match their body shapes with those of the models shown on the website. In addition, over half of participants express that they actually prefer oversized models over slim models, and they own good impression towards clothes are presented

by over-sized models as they look much more realistic and referable compare to those only presented by slim models. “If clothes are well-presented by oversized models, then I should also look find in normal sized clothes, while pictures of slim models are usually presented after being “Photoshoped”, so I will not know how would the dress look on myself”, said by Yiting Chai, a 27-year-old young woman who spend more than thousands of RMB purchasing clothes from Taobao every month.

In fact, together with the improvement of living quality over the past two decades, the average weight of Chinese people has been increased gradually, which should have created market for over-sized populations. In the investigation, the very last question asks participants whether or not they want to make a change to the current aesthetic standard that “being slim is the beauty”, and what would they do if they want to. The majority of participants own positive attitudes towards this question that their answers include keywords and phrases like “healthy”, “confidence”, “happiness is over slimness”, and “less discrimination”. Similarly, people on Twitter post messages like “I really wish that when I click on a size for a dress, I could actually see a model who is that size, wearing the dress. I want to be able to see what the dress will look like on someone who looks like me. Do better,

plus size stores.”, and some other people state that “I really would love to be a plus size model that advocate for the plus size community positively, helping young girls to love themselves no matter what.”

3 | The Omitted Commercial Opportunity

The survey and interview with consumers suggest a more effective way in promoting products in online shopping—to design clothes for people who are a little bit fat obese may become a popular business.

Online merchandisers assume that skinny model would attract more attention and generate more benefits; however, survey results reveal something different—as explained above, people have better impressions towards oversized models. Indeed, various international brands has realized this potential commercial opportunity, such as ASOS. ASOS is a brand originated from the United Kingdom. It is one of the first stores to display clothes on models of different shapes. It was surprised to find that the consumers did not show disgust for they were generally used to models of skinny shape. Instead, their feedbacks have been overwhelmingly positive, such as: "This helps massively, as I often wonder how clothes would look on me, when I'm clearly 5 sizes bigger than the model. Great move forward." from MysticMoon on Tweet.



Models from Zhenxing Guo's online shop

Chinese online merchandisers almost never attempted to use oversize models, except only a few stores targeting fatty girls, leaving them with few choices. The customers rarely voice out for the disconnection between body shapes of theirs and models' or consider the effects simplification of aesthetics might have on them. Therefore, these omitted commercial opportunities do have great room to develop in the future, which benefits both companies and consumers.

4 | The Responsibility of Media

Through the investigation on consumers' opinions on model's body size raises an astonishing issue that "facts" presented to people may not be "facts", and certain values and standards that people believe may not be true.

To be honest, our standards of aesthetic and beauty-appreciation are shaped and regulated by the society, but not born with—not everyone born to believe that being skinny is beautiful. To a great extent, the way that we think and live is the product of social norms and some “popular styles” created and promoted by certain powers (most likely are companies that gain benefits from this).

As media certainly play essential roles to influence these norms and popular standards, the expectation of media under this situation is “to regard themselves as powers to amend the current aesthetic standards and remind people what is actually realistic and reasonable”. However, current media are taking the side of the opposite, in consideration of their own interests and potential risks that they will have if standing out to point out the truth.

Media, as unneglectable powers, can rescue people from doubting themselves and become too worried about their body shapes; can prevent people from using extreme approaches to lose weight that are eventually harmful to their bodies; can “liberate” people from the kidnap of preposterous beauty-appreciation standards.

5 | Appendix

Link of survey: <https://www.wjx.cn/m/25716487.aspx>

Sample size: 102

Respondents: an online survey through Wen Juanxing from July 1st to 11th, a platform that provides various forms of surveys and polls to investigate this problem.

Methods of collecting data: an online survey through Wen Juanxing from July 1st to 11th, a platform that provides various forms of surveys and polls to investigate this problem.