A Review on Concerns for Apparel Shopping: A Study of Plus- Size Customers

Jasleen Rana,

Research Scholar, Faculty of Management Studies, ManayRachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad

Deepti Dabas Hazarika,

Professor & Director, Faculty of Management Studies, ManavRachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad

Abstract

India is a booming market with respect to apparel industry, which gives a huge scope to another niche segment that is the, plus-size readymade apparels. The change in attitudes with respect to body shapes and sizes has led many renowned retailers to throw light on this niche yet promising segment but even after a lot of research and shift in focus there are concerns related to plus-size apparel shopping faced by larger than usual sized customers while exploring and buying ready-made apparel under this category. This paper, aims to review previous studies done with regard to exploring and observing various problems, issues or concerns related to fit, size availability, inclusivity (vanity and general sizing), size adjustability and price, faced by plus-size customers while buying, searching and shopping for apparels including branded retailers as well as small homegrown brands popularly advertised on social media handles and promoted by influencers. The researcher aims to understand the beliefs and attitudes of plus size or widely called 'curvy' consumers towards such shopping mechanisms both online as well as offline. Previously written research papers, articles and studies published with respect to plus-size customers, their concerns, pricing and buying behavior are analyzed by understanding various factors affecting plus-size buying.

Keywords: plus-size apparel, ready-made apparel, shopping, buying concerns, plus-size customers

Introduction

Plus-size clothing or curvy apparels are a general term given to a specific segment of clothes, which are designed and made in larger sizes, which are bigger than the usual common sizes. It is done for individuals who have a larger/broad built or are overweight than the common sized people. Terms like "curvy" have been used for plus-size women's clothing ranges and terms like "big and tall" are used for male's plus-sized clothing.

Globally heavyset and plump women enabled changed physical conventionalised attributes to establish aptitude is not, restricted by form and proportion. From Adele to Mellisa McCarthy, from Gabourey Sidibe to Tess Holliday and from Ashley Nell Tipton to Gabi Gregg (Gabifresh) Over size and overtly portly women have excelled in

multiple streams of new wave craze and celebrity linked industry. (Azeez A. , 2016)

Plus-size market in India

"The Indian 'plus size' market is estimated to have a good market share of 12 percent of the overall fashion market and is expected to grow at 25 percent per annum for the next five years," says Amar Nagaram, head of Myntra stated during the launch of their plus-size brand Sztori in 2018. He also suggested that this is a nascent unexploited potential for amply proportioned sizes that need to be addressed with online medium having definitive leverage for deep inroads into these largely uncharted markets." (SHEKHAR, 2019)

Brands across the board are thriving for 'body size' inclusivity and making it a part of the usual offerings given to customers, catering to curvier women and men. While some brands are including attire for plus-size consumers, other retailers are going all out and announcing new brands that only cater to this segment of the population.(Lamba, 2020)

Hetal Kotak, CEO of aLL, a popular store that is among the leaders of 'plus size' retail in India, approves that internet has contributed essentially in creation of awareness and a significantly large customer base. "Online accounted for 10 percent of our annual revenue of about ₹280 crore last year. We are seeing a year-on-year growth of about 20 percent," he says. Currently, aLL has about 80 exclusive outlets, and nearly 40 as part of Central malls across India. (SHEKHAR, 2019)

The need for addressing women's aspirations influenced by western attire by predominantly Indian brands is known for years. The exclusivity also set in over a decade ago with Revolution brand making in-roads. The imminent progression of the offerings has been a corollary of the proliferation of brands entering successfully with prompt apt positioning. (Textile Excellence, 2016)

The private labels engage with retailers with basket of benefits like:-

- 1. Value proposition with competitive pricing, enabled by tight market development costs
- 2. Perceptive positioning with hitherto unseen options and segmentation with underlying premise of creating allegiance to brands
- 3. All pervasive improvement in managing key functions in the process value chain and excelling for overall impact from design to distribution
- 4. Realising better purchasing effectiveness overall

Objectives

- **1.** To study the problems faced by plus-size consumers while apparel shopping
- **2.** To understand the major concerns with respect to various shopping patterns amongst plus-size consumers.

3. To explore and discuss the current plus size market scenario with respect to Indian retail.

Research Methodology

This paper focuses on data and information collected through secondary resources. The review is conducted to understand the major concerns related to plus-size apparel buying behavior. Information is obtained from various previously published sources like research papers, articles, etc.

Exploratory methods have been used to study various literature focused on researching plus-size or larger than usual sized apparel, its prices, sizing, fitting, availability and psychological aspects of buying patterns such as consumer attitudes and beliefs about the above-mentioned niche segment.

Studies and articles relating to plus-size retail brands and their offerings, size and fit based studies along with major issues related to inclusivity and understanding plus-size customers were reviewed. Latest trends in this niche segment are also explored along with price related issues faced by both males and females in this category.

Review of Literature

As per the objectives for the study, previously published literature from the past few years has been reviewed in the areas of plus-size readymade apparels, its prices, sizing, fitting, availability and psychological aspects of buying patterns such as consumer attitudes and beliefs about the abovementioned niche segment. Researcher aims to explore and understand the major concerns that are faced by a plus-size apparel seeking individual.

I. Buying behavior for readymade apparel

It has very evidently been discovered that the apparel market has been growing rapidly in Bangalore with a very intensively rising growth rate. It has now become important to understand how and why consumers give immense importance and significance to ready-made garments. Also understanding the psyche behind such behaviour, this study examined the influence of consumer's demographics and their buying processes, which

influence the apparel buying patterns. (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2014)

Consumers are said to be much more conscious these days about brand image and uniqueness of brands in terms of ready-made apparel which was concluded by a study done in selected cities of Karnataka state in 2018. It was also found that consumers are way more loyal towards the international brands in comparison to local or national brands with respect to readymade apparels altogether. (Lakshminarayana & D, 2018)

Private label brands have gained more popularity, the status of market has skewed towards mid to premium price segments, and there is limited price point value leading to price gaps in the market. Major brands such as Pantaloons, FBB, Max and Westside have gained popularity by offering

II. Factors affecting purchase of readymade apparel

A study done in a few selected cities in Karnataka found that store attributes have somewhat a significant impact on apparel purchase and motivation to explore the stores in the physical retail setup. Store attributes found to be impactful were the display of clothes, hanging ranges, service speed and assistance. (Lakshminarayana & D, 2018)

Consumer buying patterns are influenced by major internal as well as external factors which include consumer attributes, product attributes, past buying patterns, in-store attributes. To cater to these factors retailers mainly consider and implement various direct and indirect strategies like free Wi-Fi facilities in the store, freebies and free takeaways with the products, store apparel placement and arrangement etc. (Krishnakumar, 2018)

The Self-Esteem Effect

It's all in the mind and the perspective of the consumer. What is appealing is the look and feel of the product as it fits and not the label indicating the size. That mental imagery of the apparent fit, at the initiation stage, sets the self esteem level of acceptance and is not put off by the size on the

products in the value fashion segment in the country.

The private brans offer many benefits to apparel and clothing retailers like :-

- Understanding the capabilities and internal strengths to give better price options & ultimate value to their customers and drive higher margins owing to low advertising & promotional costs
- Offering latest merchandise and creation of differentiation in the market and also seek and also ensure customer loyalty
- Better controlling techniques to be implemented with regard to processes and important functions such as designing, price fixing, merchandising, stocking management and distribution and intermediaries
- Better bargaining power amongst suppliers (Wazir Advisors, 2020)

label, which otherwise reflects lowering of the product acceptability index.

Even within a size, one size fits all is not seen anymore and liberal designed contours are added in terms of inches into the clothing.

So, if our dress shopping consumer keeps finding that only larger sizes from Verum fit her, it's likely that her perception of that brand will decline. Is it any wonder that so many brands are building a few extra inches into their clothing? (Dooley, 2013)

Purchase ideas exploration and final buying decision of a modern Indian consumer are generally dependent on sturdiness, colour, uniqueness of the apparel or garment, comfort of the clothing, Price and also level of awareness and promotional activities incorporated by the retailers and brand owners other secondary factors like festivals, seasonal occasions, offers, discounts, stock clearances and shopping experiences (N.R.Vembu, M.Dharani, S.Dhivya, & R.Chandralakshmi, 2018)

III. Demographic factors and plus size clothing

Most of the brands selling plus-sized apparels and ready-made garments focused primarily on women apparels and do not put in much effort to pitch the male plus-size segment, Men also explore and demand plus size apparels and it gives a good growth segment for these brands. The inclination towards women's plus size apparels has also been to more of adults and elderly, which gives another opportunity for brands functioning in this niche setup (Ghose, 2012)

Generally, men have a fashion sense which is based on options being constrained compared to women's attire and possibilities. This more original and structured optionality for men's fashion, models their marked allegiance and preference self respect through branded garments available in select showrooms regardless of their age and education. (Ahamed.S & Ravi, 2016)

In a study including 287 Respondents around 82% participants were, found to indulge in readymade apparel shopping or buying using the Internet. In a contradiction to perceived idea, men and women purchased apparel online. Majority of them spent 1-2 hours per month and overwhelming over 3/4 of them were demographically apt consumers in the younger age bracket (15-35) as early age professionals or post graduate students. (Goswami & Khan, 2015)

Core sight Research estimated in their 2019 report on Plus size consumer attitudes reflect in clothing sales of approximately \$ 30.7 Bn in the US. Women who demand plus sizes tend to spend less per capita on apparel and live in lower income households relative to the overall female population in the country. (Coresight Research, 2019)

Unappealing merchandise is available for women by brands offering readymade plus-size apparel, which leads to dissatisfaction among the consumers. (Delisia Mathew, 2018)

IV. Consumer Attitude formation

Plus-size apparel market has been gaining momentum over the past 5 years but still it lacks inclusivity among the normal sized or the usual sized apparels and their brands. The thing that is actually holding or pulling this industry back is the visual aspect of plus-size apparels and the fat bodies related image attached to it. This makes the plus-size brands reluctant to promote the brand intensively in the required sense of fashion as the

perception to fashion needs to be rectified by body positivity amongst the society. Before plus-size fashion can become mainstream, it needs to be fully accepted and promoted in a positive way in order to make it normal and usual like other sizes. (Azeez A., 2017)

Chowdhary conducted a study in 1988 on 71 plussize/curvy size women who had sizes above 16, which is supposed to be under the extended or plussize category. He researched and finalized that the satisfaction and issues were linked to specific apparels and opinions and satisfaction levels differed with respect to age and size. Fitting and size were the two main highlighted issues. A study done by Kant (2018) in Panjab University, Chandigarh determined that the plus-size clothing options available in the city had a lot of sizing and styling issues, which led to inappropriate fit and size especially around the bust area and crotch area, which sadly made these women actually, reject the merchandise. (Chowdhary, 1988)

Non-inclusivity

The reason why luxury-clothing ranges have not been included in the standard sizing yet, could be two-folds: limited understanding of the levels of body positivity and Cost concerns amongst customers

Phalgunan explains, that the production of largersize garments generally costs more than usually sized garments due to "production aspects like, use of extra fabric for some items without charging more, grading patterns as sizes go up and down the scale, finding the right sewing

staff that understand the silhouettes, and finding the right silhouettes themselves". Plus, she says, "There is this long-standing industry belief that 'plus size' women won't spend money on expensive clothes because they think they will lose weight." (SHEKHAR, 2019)

The major reason for the dissatisfaction was the problem of finding and availability of well-fitting clothes to suit their body sizes and the unavailability of latest fashion complying with the current trends. Actually, they preferred more fashionable, easy, well-fitting, and good quality fabrics. The main problem was the unavailability of proper sizing uniformity and lack of up-to-date

information on the female body was, identified as the main issues in the Sri Lankan plus size women's wear market. Therefore, designers emphasized the requirement for a standardized/Uniform size chart with larger dimensions of clothing on Sri Lankan anthropometric data. (Seram & Kumarasiri, 2020)

Inclusivity is the new spirit of the 21st century, covering varied ethnicities, sexuality and sizing, body positivity etc. Technology being a catalyst, diverse consumers around the world are seeking different kinds of products once unavailable and, at the same time, consumer's overall shopping behaviour towards plus-size clothing has changed with the advancement in internet connectivity globally. (Coresight Research, 2019)

V. Importance of brands for plus-size customers

Plus-size buying has been a lucrative niche now for many renowned and upcoming retailers but the main issue that is seen is that plus-size apparels and its buying in marginalized to a great extent and even after gaining popularity and speed in terms of growth, plus-size fashion still fails to satisfy the larger than normal sized customers. One of the main aspects found was the photography and promotion of such apparels through normal sized models, mannequins etc. that is Size 8 to Size 14. Whereas the majority of plus-size customers fall under the category of sizes above 16. (CONLEY, 2014)

A decent range of plus-size clothing and apparels is now seen in many large scale and small scale shops, designer boutiques as well as in basic departmental stores that, earlier ignored and did not wish to sell such clothes or apparels. A significant growth in plus-size clothing lines and trends that focused only on the customer in need of larger than usual sizes particularly in the plus size lingerie sector. Revolution a renowned plus-size brand launched its lingerie collection in May 2007. Customers specific to the plu-sizde category are now demanding Indian/ethnic wear in larger and extended sizes. Therefore, its high time retailers start offering and selling trendy plus size items and capture this doable market segment. (Patil & Jadhav, 2012)

Inclusivity is also a symbol of the prevailing millennial culture, which is why newer designers such as Siriano want to explore and cater to to various body shapes. The addition of larger sizes has even reached into niche markets, such as lingerie and active wear. Popular sports brands such as Nike and Fabletics are now successfully selling plus-size athleisure range. (Pennsylvania, 2019)

VI. Brand preferences amongst plussize customers

A 2017 case study by Sharma on BIBA demonstrated that even after several problems faced by plus-size buyers, BIBA, women's ethnic wear Indian brand managed to enhance its sales as well as increase and retain customer loyalty, which eventually became a sizing benchmark in the industry. BIBA's sales were also increased during festival seasons because cultural background of India influences women to buy new ethnic wear for such auspicious occasions; this led to a change in the ready-to-wear ethnic clothes buying patterns among Indian women (Seema Sharma, 2017).

Chandra quoted that, since Nicobar is actually a small company as of now, the issues related to feasibility and costs need to been taken into account at every step. "We have forayed into extended sizing with tried-and-tested basics that work on every body type, and clothes that people will buy time and again. The restriction comes from the business end of the brand. It's just easier for a business to start with the more commonly-picked sizes," she says. (SHEKHAR, 2019)

With this niche retail industry starting to understand, focus and explore this particular segment with seriousness, even the upcoming businesses have now come out to explore and monetize from this market because of the untapped and full of scope consumer base it is creating. A good number of ethnic women clothing like readymade kurtas, salvar kamiz, suits etc as well as western wear above extra large (XL) size and they sure desire to dress fashionably and stay with the trend instead of choosing and wearing ill-fitted shapeless kurtas or men's clothes. Some of these budding and upcoming brands, which are catering exclusively to this particular sect, include brands like Last Inch, Amydus, Femella, The Pink

Moon, A Curve Story, Uptownie and Lurap among many others. (Krishna, 2020)

Homegrown brands

An article on homegrown brands stated that the untapped plus-size market or more appropriately put as an unsatisfied niche market can be pitched through homegrown labels with both ready-made and customizable outfits for the unusual or larger

than usual sizes. Brands especially focused on women's clothing ranging from western to ethnic offerings through small startups are called homegrown brands. Common brands selling through Instagram portal are Plus-Size Clothing Jaipur, Amydus, Bunnai, Tat TwamAsi etc. (Vohra, 2017)

Summary of studies covered:-

S.No.	Author(s)	Year	Outcomes	Major Outcomes mapped
1 <u>Yar</u>	(Lakshminarayana & ahd 2918) hatthada et.al	2018	Basic psyche around apparel buying behaviour	4320
2	(Satyanarayan, 2018)	2018	Consciousness regarding amongst readymade apparel shoppers	
3	(Wazir Advisors, 2020) Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Report	2020	Understanding of major private lable brands in India	Buying behavior for readymade apparel
4	(Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2014)	2014	undestanding the significance of readymade apparel shopping in the eyes of an Indian consumer	
5	(N.R.Vembu, M.Dharani, S.Dhivya, & R.Chandralakshmi, 2018)	2018	Indian consumer are generally dependent on sturdiness, colour, uniqueness of the apparel or garment, comfort of the clothing, Price and also level of awareness and promotional activities	
6	(Lakshminarayana & D, 2018)	2018	Impact and exploration of external factors which include consumer attributes, past buying patterns, in-store attributes	Factors affecting purchase of readymade apparel
7	(Krishnakumar, 2018)	2018	Shopping Motivation amongst apparel buyers understood with regard to readymade apparels	
8	(Dooley, 2013)	2013	Self esteem effect	
9	(Goswami & Khan, 2015)	2015	Study executed to understand the difference in online buying patterns amongst post graduate students and employed professional with respect to plus size apparels which included 287 respondents	
10	(Ahamed.S & Ravi, 2016)	2016	Behaviour of plus-size men and their demands and desires in terms of readymade apparel purchase	Demographic factors and plus size clothing
11	(Delisia Mathew, 2018)	2018	Unappealing merchandise is available for women by brands offering readymade plus-size apparel, which leads to dissatisfaction among the consumers.	
12	(Coresight Research, 2019)	2019	women plus-size apparel market in the States is approximately \$30.7 billion	

13	(Ghose, 2012) (Chowdhary, 1988)	2012 1988	Focus of brands is more on women as compared to men, undertanding of the gender based subsegmentation Major study conducted in India, about two decades ago which helped people throw light on interests of plus-size consumers in apparel selection, levels of satisfaction and understanding of sizes and	
15	(Kant, 2018)	2018	fit. Understanding of plus-size behaviour in Panjab University amongst student population and their attitudes towards readymade and "off the rack" plus size apparel	
16	(Ganguly, 2015).	2015	Understanding the applicability and effect of "vanity sizing" as a major psychological concept used to ensure inclusivity in sizes and motivation to purchase larger sizes with smaller labels	Consumer Attitude formation
17	(Coresight Research, 2019)	2019	Inclusivity is the new trend of 21st century, promoting body positivity and inclusion in normal and usual apparel brands	
18	(Seram & Kumarasiri, 2020)	2020	The major reason for the dissatisfaction was the problem of finding and availability of well-fitting clothes to suit their body sizes and the unavailability of latest fashion complying with the current trends.	
19	(Azeez A., 2017)	2017	Lack of inclusivity, which demotivated the plus-szie consumer as it makes them feel left out from the usual clothing ranges	

21	(Pennsylvania, 2019) (Patil & Jadhav, 2012) (Lamba, 2020)	2019 2012 2020	active wear by famous brands like Nike and fabletics The plus size customers have now been demanding Indian/Ethnic wear in larger sizes and people have started offering designer outfits in boutiques and niche retail segments Brands offering separate attire for plus-size customers as a special range and collection for larger than usual sizes along with normal ones in the Indian market One of the main aspects found was the photography and promotion of such	Importance of brands for plussize customers
23	(CONLEY, 2014)	2014	apparels through normal sized models, mannequins etc. that is Size 8 to Size 14. Whereas the majority of plus-size customers fall under the category of sizes above 16	
24	(Seema Sharma, 2017)	2017	A 2017 case study on BIBA demonstrated that even after several problems faced by plus-size buyers. BIBA is a well renowned ethnic India brand which is popular for salwar suits amongst indian women especially in terms of festival wear	Brand preferences amongst
25	(SHEKHAR, 2019)	2019	Study showed that a small segment brand Nicobar said that selling usual sizes is easy for small business to showcase and pack.	plus-size customers
26	(Krishna, 2020)	2020	Few of these start-ups which catering exclusively to this segment include brands like Last Inch, Amydus, Famella, The Pink Moon, A Curve Story,	

		Uptownie and Lurap among many others	
(Vohra, 2017)	2017	Understanding the boom of homegrown brands especially in Indian/ethnic wear for women which not only offer larger sizes but also offer customisation which helps customers get better fitting and comfort.	

Conclusions and discussions

Homegrown brands are gaining momentum and are very well supporting plus-size customers get ready-made as well as customized designer outfits which consequently leads to better confidence boost and enhancement among the plus-size customers. These homegrown brands are both offering ethnic as well as western outfits mainly selling via personal websites and Instagram pages.

Store environment is a major issue among the plus-size customers as they feel reluctant to purchase from the plus-size sections, which ultimately calls for inclusivity of larger sizes amongst the normal clothing ranges.

Curvy or plus-size customers have also been facing an issue with the price of apparels, prices of plus-sized clothes are generally higher than usual for larger sizes. The retail brands like Amydus, All and Pluss state that the reason behind elevated prices is the use of excess fabric for larger sizes.

Vanity sizing became popular in 2015 when people started under mentioning the sizes on the apparels. The size labels did not match the dimensions of the apparels, therefore creating a psychologically positive effect in the mind of the plus-size customers who were exploring and buying such apparels. In India Diza, Sassy-soda and Gia, which are exclusive plus size brands offered by Westside have been successfully following vanity sizing over a significant period.

Retailers today aim at targeting niche segments and specializing in that space. It becomes essential for plus-size apparel offering retailers, designers and other sellers to understand what the main concern of such consumers is. Plus-size seeking individuals basically aim at finding the right size with a decent trendy design and feel accepted when included by general brands.

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