She looks like me!
How body type similarity influences online clothes shopping

Iina Ikonen
Jiska Eelen

RCC Lab seminar 13/01/2021
Anna King @Kingi8713 · May 20
Actually just browsing a clothing shop. Seeing the physical look of an item in your size before purchase. Many online stores use a 10/12 model and that's not my shape.

Fella Girly @danzoz83 · Feb 9
If you are a company that sells plus size clothing, especially if you only offer plus size online, POST MODELS OF ALL SIZES IN YOUR CLOTHING!!!! AND DON'T CALL YOURSELF SIZE INCLUSIVE IF YOU DON'T OFFER BIGGER THAN A 20 OR 22 #plussize #fat #clothes

Morgan Bulliard @MBulliard · Apr 20
It's really hard to buy clothes online when all the clothing models are size 0-2. I need to see what my chunky, funky size 10 legs are going to look like in those shorts before I commit to buying them.

Holly @xhollytillingx · May 30
What if online clothing shops used models of every size, and categorised by size instead of the clothing, and the size would show a model of that size wearing the clothes and there wouldn’t be different clothes for each size, just the same clothes but different sized models 💫
Research questions

1. Is it beneficial for a fashion (e-)retailer to adopt a more inclusive practice in model recruitment (in the short term*)?

2. How does the inclusion of larger models influence consumers’ shopping behaviour, and why?

3. How should a company go about creating more inclusive product imagery (cross- or within-product strategy)?
• Thin models as aspirational examples (e.g., Nichols & Schumann 2012)
• Attractive models are more effective (e.g., Halliwell & Dittmar 2004)

• Higher user-image congruence (Lou, Tse & Lwin 2019)
• More authentic (Schoenberger, Kim & Johnson 2020)
LACK OF PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE ONLINE INCREASES RISK

e.g., Liu, Batra & Wang 2017; Shim & Lee 2011; Huang, Schrank & Dubinsky 2004
Assessing fit and appearance online crucial

30-40% of fashion items bought online are returned

“Clothing and footwear is the most returned sector, which is unsurprising due to the importance of fit – especially for online pureplays as customers do not have a chance to try items on or judge the quality of products.”

- Emily Salter, Retail Analyst for GlobalData

Cost of online returns expected to reach £5.6 billion by 2023 in the UK alone

https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/10/growing-online-sales-means-more-returns-and-trash-for-landfills.html
https://fashionunited.uk/news/retail/online-returns-to-reach-5-6-billion-pounds-by-2023/2018121740591
How does using differently sized models influence online shopping behavior?

- Perceived Similarity
- Lower Perceived Risk
- Increased Purchase Intention
Study 1

Perceived similarity
Study 1: Initial correlational evidence

N = 146 female students

Key measures:
Purchase intention
(“How likely would you be to buy these jeans in your size W32/L32?”, 7-point scale)

Body similarity
(“Please indicate to what extent you agree to the following statement about the model wearing the jeans:
This model’s body looks similar to mine.”, 7-point scale)

Clothing size
Perceived similarity & purchase intent

Purchase intent by perceived body similarity

Actual clothing size does not explain changes in purchase intention (p = .960)
Study 2 Similar vs. different body size
Study 2: Within-subjects experiment

151 females from Prolific Academic
Dissimilar (thin) vs. similar model
Within-subjects design

Purchase intention
Perceived similarity
Perceived risk (in terms of fit and appearance) measured with a 6-item scale, adapted from Shimp & Bearden 1982

Brand image *
You just ripped your favorite pair of jeans that fitted you the best and you really liked on yourself. This pair of jeans was a dark blue with a slim fit and you are now seeking to replace it by ordering a new one online, which is also dark blue with a slim fit. - - This is the only picture that is provided by the website, the model is wearing a size UK 2.

You decided to postpone the purchase decision, and when you go back to the website a week later it has been rebuilt. Now you can view the same jeans on a model wearing the jeans in your indicated usual clothing size UK 28.
Similarity increases purchase intent, mitigates risk

Purchase intent

- Low similarity: 3.13
- High similarity: 4.29

Perceived risk

- Low similarity: 4.84
- High similarity: 3.60

\[ t(150) = -6.96, p < .001 \]

\[ t(150) = 9.01, p < .001 \]
Mediation (MEMORE model 1)

\[ b = -1.24, \ p < .001 \quad b = -0.982, \ p < .001 \]

Indirect effect: \[ b = 1.22, \ 95\% \ CI \ [0.917, 1.545] \]

Total effect similarity \( \rightarrow \) purchase intent: \[ b = 1.159, \ p < .001 \]

Direct effect: \[ b = -0.061, \ p = .614 \]
Study 3 Upwards vs. downwards comparison
Downward vs. upward comparison vs. similar

301 females from Prolific Academic
Dissimilar (smaller) vs. dissimilar (larger) vs. similar model
Similarity manipulation

Perceived similarity

F(2, 301) = 7.131, \( p = .001 \), \( \eta_p^2 = .046 \)
Risk & purchase intent

Purchase intent

- Similar: 4.03
- Smaller: 4.05
- Larger: 3.07

Perceived risk

- Similar: 4.23
- Smaller: 4.30
- Larger: 4.56
**Mediation model**

* Effects hold when controlling for frequency of using jeans, body satisfaction or actual clothing size
Conclusion

Reflecting a wider variety of body sizes can be effective in increasing purchase intention

Perceived similarity between the model and the consumer decreases perceptions of risk

Possible negative consequences if model is not perceived similar

Limited correlation between actual size and perceived similarity
Next steps

What drives similarity perceptions? Role of body image accuracy

Influence on choice or browsing behaviour

Relevance of fit (e.g., product type, role of gender)

Returns – is the evaluation also objectively more accurate?
Thank you