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As obesity rates continue to rise, plus-size fashion has become a market segment with emerging opportunities. While size-inclusive movements influence retailers to incorporate plus sizes in their retail strategy, it remains unclear whether plus-size consumers are satisfied with these offerings. Inclusion efforts often prioritise stocking larger sizes (Naidu et al., 2026), but this alone does not ensure consumers feel respected, comfortable, or welcome in fashion spaces. My research aims to explore how retail atmospherics shape plus-size consumers' fashion retail experiences and contribute to (or undermine) inclusive environments. Guided by the DAST (Roggeveen et al., 2020) framework, the study will explore how the design, ambient, social, and trialability elements act across physical and digital retail contexts.

I will perform a two-staged ethnographic study to understand how plus-size consumers make sense of store atmospherics in fashion retail environments (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). This will include shop audits, shop-along and post-shop-along interviews, along with netnography, a study of digital spaces associated with plus-size fashion. The data collection is expected to take place over a six-month period, gathering insights into actual behaviours and experiences of larger-sized consumers through observation, and supporting an understanding of how consumers make sense of the retail atmospherics they encounter.

This study will identify atmospheric elements that matter most for creating inclusive plus-size fashion environments. The findings will offer retailers guidance for designing inclusive physical and digital spaces, support more equitable shopping journeys for larger-bodied consumers, and challenge fat-phobic norms embedded in contemporary fashion retail. In my presentation, I will outline the conceptual framework guiding the study and present the ethnographic, shop-along, and netnographic design developed to capture plus-size consumers' experiences of inclusion and exclusion across physical and digital fashion retail environments.

Keywords

Plus-size consumer, Fashion retail, Retail atmospherics, DAST framework, Ethnography

References

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