

A Comprehensive Study of Short Male Consumers: Garment Fit, Body Size and Clothing Choice

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Fit and comfort often consider as the two most significant attributes for clothing evaluation and consumption (Hugo & van Aardt, 2012). These two clothing attributes are interrelated in many aspects. For example, women with larger body size are more likely to choose looser fit bottoms for both physical and psychological comfort (Chattaraman & Rudd, 2006). A study of fit preferences of male consumers aged from 19 to 66 years (Chattaraman et al., 2013) also found that men with larger body size prefer looser fit for greater ease. According to a study conducted by Howarton and Lee (2010), many respondents expressed that they were frustrated and disappointed with the apparel industry due to their dissatisfaction of garment fit. Therefore, it is imperative for the fashion practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between body size and garment fit.

Although the garment fit and comfort are closely related to consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction, limited research has focused on male population. A large body of research has examined on women such as clothing fit preference (Pisut & Gonnell, 2007); and female sizing systems (Petrova & Ashdown, 2012). As Chattaraman et al. (2013, p. 291) assert, "Although both men and women experience fit dissatisfaction, scholarly research has almost exclusively focused on women, leaving a critical gap in the research on men's fit issues and preferences." Indeed, there have been relatively few research studies (Chattaraman et al., 2013) which have devoted to men's body type and fit preferences. Among our reviewed literature, only two studies (Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1991; Shim et al., 1990) specifically focused on big and tall male apparel shoppers. However, short male consumers have never been investigated. In light of the limitations in the prior research, the present study attempts to fill this void by studying the body size, shopping behaviour, and fit preferences of male consumers who are shorter than 5' 8".

It is evident that male consumers who are shorter than 5'8" have been ignored by most of the mainstream fashion brands (Shim et al., 1990). Even though many brands carry size "small" and "extra small" in their collection, many clothes are primarily catered to taller men with lean body type. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why the clothing proportion and fit often do not match with those consumers who are shorter than 5'8". Due to the absence of appropriate sizing system for short men, a sizable portion of the menswear market is currently underserved by the fashion industry.

In this study, we adopted Shim et al.'s classification (1990; p. 89) of men's height: (1) "short group" less than 5 ft., 8 in.; (2) "average height" 5 ft., 8 in. or greater; and (3) "tall group" 6 ft. or greater. In order to produce a comprehensive report, this research study consists of three phases. In phase 1, an online survey with several measuring instruments (based on some prior studies such as Judge & Cable, 2004) was used to investigate the public perception towards short men. In phase 2, the anthropometric data will be collected from 200 male subjects who are under 5'8", and a sizing chart with four body types (oversized, muscular, average, slender) will be produced and presented to the fashion practitioners who are targeting to or dealing with this specific consumer group. In phase 3, qualitative research method was employed to understand how short men perceive, evaluate and select clothing from three different perspectives – aesthetic, function and emotion. In terms of the research progress, phase 1 study has been completed, and phase 2 and 3 have been undertaken. We expect that the results of this study will be available for ITAA conference in November.

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