

Frustrated FATshionistas: How do plus-sized consumers mobilize to demand better clothing options?

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Marginalized groups of consumers can mobilize as an online community to seek greater inclusion in and more choice from mainstream markets, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"In order to gain greater inclusion in the mainstream market, fatshionistas have tried to persuade established companies to serve them better, publicized the offerings of companies that have tried meeting their needs, and looked for opportunities to interact with influential designers and retailers in order to influence them to do more to serve their needs," write authors Daiane Scaraboto (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) and Eileen Fischer (York University).

We assume that [consumers](#) will seldom experience a prolonged scarcity of goods they are willing and able to pay for. Yet some groups of consumers—especially those who have historically been socially stigmatized—often find that companies fail to meet their needs. For example, African American consumers living in or near [poor neighborhoods](#) have often had limited access to a variety of goods and services they both wanted and could afford.

Consumers of plus-sized fashion are another marginalized group inadequately served by the mainstream consumer marketplace. The authors studied thousands of online posts by self-styled "fatshionistas" (fashion lovers who wear plus-sized clothing) to find out why and how

marginalized consumers can effectively mobilize to seek greater inclusion in mainstream markets.

"Mobilization was triggered by three factors: the emergence of a collective consumer identity as plus-sized consumers embraced and identified with the Fatshionista identity; identification of "institutional entrepreneurs" (people who appear to be able to change the system) such as the singer Beth Ditto who is both plus-sized and a fashion icon from whom they draw inspiration; and appropriation of the logic of human rights as Fatshionistas borrowed from the Fat Acceptance Movement to legitimate their desire for greater market inclusion," the authors conclude.

More information: Daiane Scaraboto and Eileen Fischer. "Frustrated Fatshionistas: An Institutional Theory Perspective on Consumer Quests for Greater Choice in Mainstream Markets." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2013.

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