

Original Article

## Consumption of plus-size clothing: a systematic review

Consumo de roupas *plus-size*: uma revisão sistemática

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The consumption of plus-size clothing is part of a growing market, but it is always surrounded by cloudy issues, such as the lack of a precise direction when it comes to producing and selling these garments and the prejudice surrounding the various areas of the fat body. Employing a systematic review, this paper aims to understand the consumption of plus-size clothing through an in-depth analysis of studies published in various areas on the subject.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A systematic review was conducted in the WEB OF SCIENCE and SCOPUS databases, and 35 pertinent articles published up to the year 2020 were identified, read and analyzed in detail in this paper.

**Findings:** The articles originated three thematic categories: Plus-size Consumption, which deals with consumer experience with the industry; Plus-size in the Media, which addresses aspects of advertising and plus-size models; Plus-size Identity, which covers identity formation and social influences.

**Research Limitations/Implications:** Fourteen theoretical gaps were pointed out to be worked on by future studies, comprising online retailing, identity, demographic, contextual, methodological, cultural, and social issues.

**Originality/value:** The present study represents pioneering work in the field of research on plus-size clothing, and, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first of its kind to conduct a comprehensive and systematic analysis of studies published in various areas related to this topic. While the plus-size apparel and retail market remain shrouded in nebulous issues, this research stands out as a valuable contribution by providing profound insights into consumption in this segment. Moreover, by identifying theoretical gaps and offering suggestions for future research, the study promotes advancements in knowledge and understanding of this emerging area. Its academic significance and potential impact on the industry make it crucial to developing more informed and inclusive strategies for the plus-size fashion sector.

**Keywords:** Plus-size; Obesity; Consumption; Fashion

## RESUMO

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**Objetivo:** O consumo de roupas *plus-size* faz parte de um mercado em crescimento, mas que sempre está rodeado de assuntos nebulosos, como a falta de um direcionamento preciso se tratando da produção e venda dessas peças de vestuário e o preconceito que rodeia as diversas áreas do corpo gordo. O objetivo é compreender o consumo de roupas *plus-size* a partir de uma análise profunda de estudos publicados em áreas diversas sobre o tema, se utilizando de uma revisão sistemática.

**Design/Metodologia/Abordagem:** Uma revisão sistemática foi realizada nas bases de dados WEB OF SCIENCE e SCOPUS, e foram identificados 35 artigos pertinentes, publicados até o ano de 2020, que foram lidos e analisados em seus pormenores neste trabalho.

**Resultados:** Os artigos originaram 3 categorias temáticas: Consumo *Plus-size*, que trata da experiência do consumidor com o setor; *Plus-size* na Mídia, que aborda aspectos da publicidade e de modelos *plus-size* e; Identidade *Plus-size*, categoria que abrange formação de identidade e influências sociais.

**Limitações de pesquisa/Implicações:** Foram apontadas 14 lacunas teóricas a serem trabalhadas por estudos futuros, compreendendo o varejo online, questões identitária, demográficas, contextuais, metodológicas, culturais e sociais.

**Originalidade/valor:** O presente estudo representa um trabalho pioneiro no campo de pesquisa de roupas *plus-size* e, salvo melhor juízo, é o primeiro de seu tipo a realizar uma análise abrangente e sistemática dos estudos publicados em diversas áreas relacionadas ao tema. Enquanto o mercado de vestuário e varejo *plus-size* continua envolto em questões nebulosas, esta pesquisa destaca-se como uma valiosa contribuição ao fornecer insights profundos sobre o consumo nesse segmento. Além disso, ao identificar lacunas teóricas e fornecer sugestões para pesquisas futuras, o estudo promove avanços no conhecimento e na compreensão dessa área emergente. Sua relevância acadêmica e potencial impacto na indústria tornam-no uma peça fundamental no desenvolvimento de estratégias mais informadas e inclusivas para o setor de moda *plus-size*.

**Palavras-chave:** *Plus-size*; Obesidade; Consumo; Moda

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The consumption of plus-size fashion in Brazil is growing, moving about R\$7.2 billion in 2018, 60% above 2016, according to research by Associação Brasil Plus-Size (ABPS, 2021). On the counterpoint, the numbers do not exceed 10% of the movement relative to fashion retail as a whole, numbers that cause strangeness when aware of the fact that 55.7% of the country's adult population is overweight (Ministério da Saúde, 2018).

The plus-size market has great potential for consumption. However, there are no clear guidelines on dealing with this audience and the stigmas surrounding it. Even though obesity is considered an epidemic, a consequence of biological factors, the

predominant discourse blames the individual (Dickins, Thomas, King, Lewis, & Holland, 2011), veiling a prejudice rooted in Western society (Hartley, 2001).

The lack of investment and interest in the market, especially in physical stores, leads to a limited supply, causing the demands of the plus-size audience to go unmet by traditional retail. As a result, consumers are compelled to turn to an alternative market, the plus-size market (Dion & Tachet, 2020), a demand already born in a predatory environment since the market's leading players make the adjacent market invisible and reinforce their visibility. Even if fashion brands offer a wide range of sizes or exclusive areas for plus-size, these pieces and collections remain hidden in dedicated spaces in the back, basement, or on the top floor of stores (Rodhain & Gourmelen, 2018). Given this scenario, small and medium-sized retailers use new technologies to boost the online plus-size market. It generates an established niche with diversity, where even if not exclusively plus-size, it always offers variety to meet this demand (Zanette, Lourenço, & Brito, 2013).

The plus-size clothing and retail field still seems nebulous in the market. Several mistakes and uncertainties lead retailers and prevent the category from reaching its true potential (Dion & Tachet, 2020). The plus-size market, as known today, is a relatively recent development stemming from a combination of various social movements and factors. These movements encompass the population's increase in weight, consumer discomfort, growing self-acceptance of body image - propelled by social media and traditional media - and the need for expression concerning their bodies (Favero & Vieira, 2020). As a result, numerous actors, ranging from governments to fashion designers and retailers, have reacted and developed the plus-size market, which, despite becoming considerably more prominent, remains an adjacent market often invisibilized by the primary traditional fashion market (Favero & Vieira, 2020; Dion & Tachet, 2020).

An example of attempts to prioritize the primary market over adjacent ones can be observed in clothing size standards. Historical records reveal that clothing

sizes were defined inadequately, with limited samples and non-representative methods, leading to standardization directed towards idealized bodies, where even the average silhouette of a woman in some countries qualifies as plus-size - e.g., Australia (Hachett & Rall, 2018). This standardization - or lack thereof - becomes even more challenging for larger bodies, as plus-size clothing sizes are often merely enlarged versions of standard garments, disregarding the various changes that occur in specific body areas as people age, gain or lose weight. While it is impossible to produce clothing that fits everyone perfectly, the current lack of representation in sizing standards is particularly severe (Filipe, Carvalho, Montagna, & Freire, 2015; Alexander, Pisut, & Ivanescu, 2012; Park, 2013). Even in stores, size numbers on labels are frequently ignored or hidden by staff, who attempt to convey the message that the fit of the garment is what matters most. All these factors also affect plus-size individuals working in this market professionally. Even if they choose to work in a body-positive environment, they are not in a completely safe and judgment-free space, directly impacted by their weight in various aspects and subjected to a hierarchy that prioritizes slim men for higher positions, or even facing the reality that they may never perform specific functions as the physical space of stores is not designed for larger individuals (Gruys, 2012).

In the academic sphere, the field presents a low quantity of publications, needing to be explored more. Thus, this study aims to systematically review the themes “plus-size consumption” and “plus-size fashion”, exploring in depth the selected articles and offering a compendium with more precise guidelines for exploring this category in the market. Besides, it looks forward to offering a summary of discussions, conclusions, and limitations presented by the articles found that may be useful to encourage and guide future work. This study’s question is, “How does plus-size consumption occur amid these silencing attempts?”

The research aims to understand the consumption of plus-size clothes through a systematic review with articles published until 2021 in the Web of Science and Scopus

databases, and as specific objectives: identify the main aspects of the consumption of plus-size clothes; understand the presence of plus-size in the media; understand the impact of plus-size consumption on the individual and; recognize the particularities of the plus-size market.

The present study presents, besides this introduction, the compilation of the theoretical reference relevant to the theme, a methodological description, a systematic review of the articles selected, a presentation of the limitations, and a discussion of the final remarks. The studies found in the systematic review on plus-size consumption were divided into three categories: (i) those that discussed the plus-size consumer experience, focusing on diverse audiences in both physical and online environments; (ii) how these consumers are portrayed in the media, including body representation in e-commerce advertising, magazines, and mass media, as well as the experiences of plus-size models in the market; and (iii) the identity of the plus-size consumer and its nuances, stigmas, and coping mechanisms in a market permeated by an ideal of thinness that seeks to render them invisible. Lastly, the study proposes a new research agenda with methodological, theoretical, and cultural advancements.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Consumption of plus-size clothing**

The historical development of the plus-size fashion market can be traced back to the early 20th century. Lane Bryant, an American designer known for producing clothes for pregnant women, ventured into creating pieces for plus-size models as early as 1922 (Favero & Vieira, 2020). However, the post-World War II era saw a downturn in plus-size fashion as the industrialization of garments led to standardized designs that did not cater to the needs of the fat body (Wissinger, 2015). Homemade or tailor-made clothes, which were more likely to fit the body type of the buyer, gradually gave way to mass-produced garments that lacked diversity in sizing.

In the United States, the growing weight of the population began to impact the

fashion industry. In 1986, Vogue magazine launched the “Fashion Plus” campaign, showcasing plus-size pieces and models. However, the campaign’s impact could have been improved and discontinued after two years (Peters, 2017). By the 1990s, the U.S. market started producing clothing in sizes above the standard due to the observed increase in population weight. In 2010, Saks Fifth Avenue’s department store began selling products for the plus-size public, offering pieces up to size 52 (Favero & Vieira, 2020).

In the Brazilian market, two crucial indicators prompted the industry to target the plus-size audience: the high number of overweight individuals and the increased body acceptance among the fat population (Favero & Vieira, 2020; Colls, 2006; Peters, 2014). As more clothing options became available and representation in the media increased, this audience gained legitimacy and began advocating for greater inclusion in the fashion market (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). Clothes were recognized as playing a significant role in shaping and expressing an individual’s identity, contributing to social inclusion (Baker, 2006; Marcelja, 2015).

The consumption experience can be described as a consumer’s subjective response to any direct or indirect interaction with a company (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Schmitt (2011) emphasizes that the experience encompasses the entire consumption process, not just its result. Thus, the consumption experience is inherently subjective and influenced by personal perspectives (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Despite the increasing attention to the plus-size market, Scussel, Camatini, Rezende, and Petroll (2018) point out that the consumption experiences of plus-size consumers are predominantly negative due to issues such as lack of standardization, limited fashion trends, poor garment fit, and unattractive design. The subsequent sections will delve into the nuances and specificities of plus-size consumption.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

According to Sampaio and Mancini (2007), a systematic review is a literature search conducted methodically and systematically, collecting articles in specific databases and covering a given theme or methodology. This type of research is proper when one seeks to compile information from several studies to guide future work in the academic community. The difference between a systematic review and a bibliographic theoretical review lies in the systematic search, collection, and analysis of information (Sampaio & Mancini, 2007). This study follows this systematic approach based on works such as Galvão and Pereira (2014), Barbosa, Ferreira, and Christino (2022), and Ferreira, Pinho, Gonçalves, and Christino (2020).

At first, we used the Web of Science database to collect articles. In order to focus on articles about plus-size consumption, the following combinations of keywords were used: consum\* (All Fields) and "plus-size" (All Fields) or consum\* (All Fields) and "plus-size" (All Fields) or fashion\* (All Fields) and "plus-size" (All Fields) or fashion\* (All Fields) and "plus-size" (All Fields) and 2021 (Exclude - Publication Years), resulting in 60 articles. The "\*" was used as a wildcard, allowing for simultaneously capturing variations in keywords, such as words in both singular and plural forms. The use of quotation marks enables the search for compound words as an expression, while without their use, the search is conducted for individual words separately. After that, the filters were applied: Book Reviews or Art Exhibit Reviews (Exclude - Document Types), focusing the research on academic articles published in journals, filtering the results and finding a total of 52 articles. Among these, the titles, abstracts, and keywords were analyzed individually until a final number of 31 articles was reached (see Table 1). The 21 excluded articles, for example, addressed a marketing perspective, seeking to understand the plus-size retail, which did not fit the scope of the research, as the focus was on understanding the consumer itself and how this consumption is carried out within these environments.

#### Table 1 – Articles Web of Science

Keywords	<i>Plus-size AND Consum*</i> OR <i>Plus-size AND Fashion*</i>
Period	by 2020
Total	60
Filters	Exclude: Art Exhibit Reviews + Book Reviews
Total	52
Not found	4
Does not focus	18
<i>plus-size</i> consumer experience	8
The <i>plus-size</i> in the media	12
<i>Plus-size</i> Identity	11
Total	31

Source: Web of Science (2021)

Table 2 – Scopus articles

Keywords	<i>Plus-size AND Consum*</i> OR <i>Plus-size AND Fashion*</i> .
Period	by 2020
Total	38
Filters	Exclude: Conference Review
Total	37
Not found	1
Does not focus	3
<i>Plus-size</i> Consumer Experience	3
The <i>plus-size</i> in the media	0
<i>Plus-size</i> Identity	1
Duplicates	25
Non-academic journal	3
Foreign Language	1
Total	4

Source: Scopus (2021)

To enrich this systematic review, a second database was added. The exact search was performed in Scopus, applying the filters: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (“consum\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“plus-size”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“consum\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“plus-size”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“fashion\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“plus-size”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“fashion\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“plus-size”)) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBYEAR, 2021)), which resulted in a total of 38 articles, then we applied the filters: ( EXCLUDE ( DOCTYPE, “cr”)) and arrived at 37 articles. Of these, 25 duplicate articles were found, which were

immediately discarded. The other 12 articles were analyzed individually, following the same method of analyzing titles, abstracts, and keywords. Four articles were selected, read, and analyzed for the research (see Table 2). Articles written in languages other than English, Spanish, or Portuguese were not considered due to the authors' limited reading proficiency.

## **4 SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

### **4.1 Plus-size consumer experience**

We found 11 articles on the Web of Science platform on the consumption experience of plus-size clothing. Among them, Staton (2016) analyzes the relationship between BMI and clothing fit, while Lee and Hodges (2019) direct their work to the consumption of children's plus-size clothing, and Romeo and Lee (2015, 2014) to the difficulties of buying plus-size clothing for adolescents. In the realm of exercise clothing, we have Greenleaf, Hauff, Klos, and Serafin (2020), Christel, O'Donnell, and Bradley (2016), and Christel and O'Donnell (2016) analyzing female consumers' perceptions of plus-size exercise clothing. De Sousa and Melo (2018) and Seram and Kumarasiri (2020) address the consumption experience of fat individuals in physical stores that offer plus-size sizes. Acar, Ofluoğlu, Kanat, Ünal, and Altılgan (2017) seek to analyze the buying behaviour of plus-size customers in e-commerce. Matthews and Romeo (2018) address the impact of plus-size categorization on female consumers.

Some works have used the FEA model to analyze the functional, expressive, and aesthetic needs of plus-size clothing being catered to adolescents (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Romeo & Lee, 2014) and females consumers (Greenleaf et al., 2020; Christel & O'Donnell, 2016; Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016) consumers. Functional needs are related to quality, flexibility, comfort, and fit. Expressive needs are linked to identity expression, and aesthetic needs are correlated to self-esteem, beauty, and style (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). These women need help finding the clothing that meets these three needs. Functional clothing, generally, did not meet the other needs, and vice versa

(Romeo & Lee, 2015; Christell & O'Donnell, 2016). To meet aesthetic or expressive needs, these women change to clothes of the opposite gender (Romeo & Lee, 2014; Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016). The lack of clothing that meets expressive or aesthetic needs can compromise these women's gender expression and identity (Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016). Women appear to be the most dissatisfied with the lack of plus-size clothing options (Matthews & Romeo, 2018). Christel, O'Donnell, and Bradley (2016) further warn that the women in their sample did not feel worthy of expressing who one is through clothing- a fact conquered only in the face of weight loss. De Sousa and Melo (2018), in their work on consumers of plus-size speciality stores, found that functional needs are the primary and most accessible to be satisfied by these consumers - even though the other needs are recognized. This result was corroborated by Seram and Kumarasiri (2020). Mothers of plus-size children also reported in one of the papers that they had difficulty finding clothes suitable for their children's age and avoided shopping in their company for fear of the stigmatization felt (Lee & Hodges, 2019).

There is a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of physical and in-person stores. Physical stores generally lack variety in size and pattern standardization in sizing and fit (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Greenleaf et al., 2020; Staton, 2016). The lack of choice can bring these female consumers feelings of marginalization (Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016). Some reported bad experiences: stigmatization and ostracization from salespeople, paying high prices and experiencing physical segregation because of separate sections in establishments (Greenleaf et al., 2020; De Sousa & Melo, 2018).

Also, in specialized and in-person stores for plus-size, consumers reported feeling discriminated against and stigmatized (De Sousa & Melo, 2018). De Sousa e Melo (2018) conducted a study to analyze the consumption experience of individuals with larger body sizes in speciality plus-size fashion stores. The researchers conducted interviews that were later analyzed using thematic content analysis. The participants reported experiencing discrimination and social stigmas solely based on their body size. Despite

facing prejudice, they all agreed that clothing items are crucial in shaping their image and visual identity. However, although all participants purchase clothing items at least twice a year, none follow fashion trends. Instead, they base their choices on comfort and fit. When asked about speciality plus-size stores, all participants expressed post-purchase dissatisfaction due to significantly higher prices, lack of variety in clothing items, and inadequate garment lengths and designs.

In these terms, the online store can address many of these problems. However, online stores can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, female consumers reported preferring to store at online clothing stores due to convenience, more affordable prices, diversity of models, colours, and sizes, and the ease of accessing different stores simultaneously (de Sousa & Melo, 2018). Despite the importance of speciality plus-size stores, which were created to promote inclusion, managers must analyze the raised criticisms to prevent mass migration to the virtual environment, leading to the extinction of physical stores. Additionally, there should be a reflection on the experiential marketing approach, as there is a lack of concern regarding the customer's consumption process. On the other hand, some consumers dislike online stores for fear of problems with the fit (Romeo & Lee, 2015) or the lack of information and specifics about the desired product (Acar et al., 2017).

The in-person store was preferred in some studies. Seram e Kumarasiri (2020) aimed to explore customer preferences and identify issues in the plus-size women's fashion market in Sri Lanka. It was concluded that the majority of plus-size women were dissatisfied with the fit of the clothes and the design options, as most brands generally ignore the diverse body shapes of plus-size individuals (such as pear, apple, hourglass, and inverted triangle), despite some brands developing new size charts to match the Sri Lankan female body. It is recommended that clothing brands use models with different body types to reduce fit-related problems and offer a more comprehensive range of fashion options to meet the aesthetic needs of plus-size women in Sri Lanka. Further research is needed for various plus-size bodies to create more accurate sizing

standards. Notably, 89% of the sample prefers visiting physical stores rather than buying online, as it allows them to select the clothing that best suits their style and size, touch and feel the fabric, and check the actual colours of the garments.

On the other hand, Acar et al. (2017) analyzed the buying behaviour of plus-size consumers in Turkey's e-commerce. They found that consumers, especially women, prefer purchasing clothes that hide their weight while demanding stylish clothing suitable for their bodies. They claim to find plus-size clothes that match their styles, dressing preferences, colours, fabrics, and preferred patterns. They also need help finding affordable plus-size clothing, making promotional actions from brands and websites welcome. Most consumers prefer to see size charts and plus-size models while shopping for clothes online, and half of them point out insufficient introductory information on websites. The majority of consumers prefer to buy clothes in physical stores so that they can try them on and avoid negative surprises. Companies seeking a market share in the plus-size clothing market should produce stylish plus-size clothes that cover the body, similar to regular-sized clothes in design, pattern, and colour. Additionally, promoting their websites, organizing discount campaigns, and providing introductory information about products on their websites are necessary to meet consumers' demands.

## **4.2 Plus-size in the media**

Regarding plus-size in the media, 12 articles were found. Among them, ten were related to the impact of the representation of plus-size women in the media. Four papers (Lou & Tse, 2021; Agerup & Scharf, 2018; Clayton, Ridgway & Hendrickse, 2017; Cinelli & Yang, 2016) address the impacts of exposure to plus-size bodies. Other four (Plotkina & Saurel, 2021; Hendrickse, Clayton, Ray, Ridgway, & Secharan, 2021; Shoenberger, Kim & Johnson, 2019; Scussel & Dellagnelo, 2018) turn their studies to the representation of plus-size women in online and e-commerce advertisements. Regarding other media, Pounders and Mabry-Flynn (2019) and Peters (2019, 2017)

work on plus-size representation in advertising in popular magazines. Finally, one article works on the perspective of plus-size models. Czerniawski (2011) analyzes the experience of these models in the marketplace.

Under the impacts of plus-size body representation in the media, it was found a higher body satisfaction and purchase intention of consumers facing an average size or plus-size model in fast-fashion brands (Lou & Tse, 2021; Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017); in addition to bringing health benefits, such as potential avoidance of negative emotions, generated for example by social comparisons (Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017). It has been found that obese models are not harmful to fashion brands, and the overall effect is not significantly different from using normal-weight models, regardless of culture or the consumer's weight (Agerup & Scharf, 2018). Furthermore, plus-size models appear to increase resource allocation and message content encoding and can be used as a persuasion strategy to increase attention and memory related to the campaign (Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017). Cinelli and Yang (2016) present a counterpoint to the previous arguments, where the acceptance of plus-size models by plus-size women depends on the consumer's belief about the possible change in her body. If the consumer had the belief and persistence that her body would change and that model did not represent her, the acceptance and influence of the advertising would be low. Those who believed their body was that one and that it could not change reacted better to the advertising because they felt represented. When the model's body was irrelevant to the advertisement, the perceived similarity was irrelevant - as for hygiene products, cosmetics, shoes, and accessories (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). Thus, Lou and Tse (2021) suggest that no definitive or universal model biotype appeals to all audiences, depending on other factors, such as belief in their body malleability (Cinelli & Yang, 2016).

Regarding the representation of the plus-size body in e-commerce advertising, it was found that American consumers indicated that the presentation of plus-size

models affected the intention to buy. Plotkina e Saurel (2021) analyze the impact of female models' body size, pose, and ethnicity on the clothing purchase intention in online stores. The research indicates that the presentation of models affects the purchase intention in online retail. Despite the ideal body standard reflecting a slim body, American consumers tend to identify more with plus-size models rather than thin models, which can stimulate the purchase intention and does not present a potential harm to online retail purchases. Models in natural poses lead to greater identification and higher purchase intention. There was no observed correlation between the model's body size and her pose, and non-idealized models also tend to increase the purchase intention, as they better represent the consumer and facilitate the visualization of how the clothing would look on them. A stereotyped and idealized representation does not result in a positive intention.

Plus-size models also generated greater body satisfaction in their target audience, while skinny models can have the opposite effect (Hendrickse et al., 2021). However, Schoenberger, Kim, and Johnson (2019) warn about digital alterations in photos and advertisements featuring plus-size models, compromising their authenticity and decreasing purchase intent. Using critical discourse analysis, Scussel and Dellagnelo (2018) found a positive image of the fat woman in lingerie media without the expression plus-size. It contributes to the inclusive character of women, portrayed with their bodies in their entirety, as well-resolved, independent, secure, and confident women treated as equal before other bodies (Scussel & Dellagnelo, 2018).

On the representation of women in other media, Peters (2019) and Peters (2017) study the representation of fat women in fashion advertising in the early and late 20th century. First, the author discusses the "stoutwear" industry, a precursor to plus-size fashion. The research was done in magazines between 1915 and 1930 and pointed out that there was no objective and concrete definition of a plus-size body then. The main themes of the magazine's report were about the fit and design of clothing under the silhouette of the fat woman. This content roots big clothes in fast fashion. It creates a

“correct way” to look fat by physically remodelling the body with underwear or applying illusions that make it look more petite. These practices continue to impact clothing construction for larger women (Peters, 2019). Second, Peters (2017) analyzes a series published by Vogue magazine between 1986 and 1988 under the name “Fashion Plus.” Using the Foucauldian lens, the author suggests that by representing the fat woman’s body in performances that were not portrayed in the media. Its discourse emerged as a way of resistance in the face of how the fat body had been stigmatized, subjected to control, and constructed in fashion since the early 20th century. The series was short-lived, such was the stigma of the time, and the fat body, although necessary for diversity, had a secondary role until then (Peters, 2017). Finally, Pounders and Mabry-Flynn (2019), when studying consumer response to cases of plus-size models in a magazine, argue that there is a stigma about the healthy body, the real body. Some consumers believe a fat woman cannot be healthy, reiterating conceptions represented in the media that stigmatize fat consumers. However, despite the presence of negative discourse, the overall feeling of consumers is positive, tending towards an appreciation for inclusion.

Finally, Czerniawski (2011) discusses the fashion industry’s backstage for plus-size models using a Foucauldian lens. According to the author, plus-size models must shape their bodies according to a series of opinion leaders. Even though they are fat, models have a work ethic of self-discipline, strength, and diligence and manage and manipulate their bodies to attract the eyes of the fashion industry. If a model loses weight, clients tell her to do whatever it takes to gain weight, even by unhealthy methods. Models develop a repertoire of professional techniques to increase their “physical capital”, such as the tape measure, constant body surveillance, strict diets, and exercise, all to become products that agents fix and wear to sell. Plus-size models labour under a continual sense of imperfection. Whether sources of embarrassment or pride, they are treated as objects of control and domination. The self-vigilance and discipline required in aesthetic work are unethical. While models invest in their bodies,

they alienate themselves and transform their bodies into manipulated and consumed objects. There is no subversion (Czerniawski, 2011).

### 4.3 Plus-Size Identity

In our database, 12 articles on plus-size identity were found, among which Limatius (2019, 2018) and Sartori and Cerqueira (2017, 2016) worked on the analysis of plus-size blogs, Christel and Dunn (2018) work the desirable terms to refer to plus-size, while Zanette and Brito (2019) and Volonté (2019) discuss the thinness ideal in fashion. Peters (2014), Silva (2016), and Patterson-Faye (2016) work on the use of fashion in the formation of a plus-size identity. Evans, Gruys, and Bishop (2018) investigate the social consequences of clothing size standards, while Zanette et al. (2013) address the weight stigma in creating an identity project.

About the fashion blog as a propellant of a plus-size identity, Limatius (2019) identifies that the words “plus-size” and “fat” were the most frequently used words to define the plus-size body. There was a movement of reappropriation of the word “fat” for activist bloggers, as a descriptive word, without derogatory intent, which in an optimistic view, would represent a step toward a structural change in the identity of the fat person (Limatius, 2019). Christel and Dunn (2018), meanwhile, argue that the terms to refer to the classification of more clothes were ways to marginalize and categorize female consumers into sizes, reinforcing stigmas attached to plus-size, such as “fat,” “unhealthy,” and “excluded.” Beyond this, identity works at a micro level.

Limatius (2018), on the other hand, explores how writing a fashion blog and interacting with other bloggers can empower plus-size women in terms of their sense of agency and community (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Respondents state that blogs were created to generate public support and a sense of belonging, serving as a valuable platform for plus-size women to promote their interests and knowledge in fashion. The interactive resources, sense of community, and agency enhancement of fashion blogs can empower plus-size women. However, the analysis also reveals negative aspects,

including stress, time management issues, internal divisions, and competitiveness. The leading cause of these divisions is the increasing commercialization of blogs, which some bloggers consider problematic. Despite this, commercialization also increased the sense of agency for plus-size women, as they had more clothing options and visibility. There are aspects of blogs that some women find empowering while others do not, such as the use of specific terminology or how they perceive empowerment in commercial blogs. Regarding bloggers, the term “body positive” was problematized by most interviewees due to its commercialization, but “fat acceptance” was widely recognized as valid. Finally, it is essential to highlight that the nature of blogs changed in 2017 due to the more significant influence of social networks like Instagram and YouTube.

Analyzing plus-size fashion blogs, Sarturi and Cerqueira (2017) found discourses that broke with prejudices, acting as instruments for breaking prejudices and promoting information about fashion for plus-size women. These blogs reinforce resistance to the normative beauty ideal of Western society and value the beauty of plus-size women. Discourses that challenge specific exclusive aesthetic standards were also found, emphasizing self-esteem and the personality of the readers. The results show how individuals relate to and position themselves about these issues. The content stimulates self-esteem and personality development, where fatness is not seen as a flaw, and the body is not idealized but acknowledged as it is. The bloggers appear concerned about their beauty and can be considered role models and influencers on a relatively new subject, contributing to the identification of other women with larger bodies.

This beauty ideal in Western society can be considered a normative discourse of thinness (Zanette & Brito, 2019) or a thinness ideal (Volonté, 2019). Zanette and Brito (2018), when seeing fashion as biopower (Foucault, 1976), argue about the subjectification (Foucault, 1982) and governability (Thompson; Hirschman, 1995) of consumers who shape their bodies according to fashion dictates. The work points out that the normative

discourse of thinness is particularly relevant in influencing the experience of female consumers with fashion, as it suggests that fat bodies are not worthy of using fashion as technologies for themselves, making consumers feel that their bodies are aesthetically offensive, and preventing overweight individuals from becoming “subjects of fashion” due to their body size, leading to exclusion from the market.

The processes of subjectivization to the biopower of fashion – the creation of the fashion subject – would involve a change in their bodies or the market to provide better technologies for overweight consumers. To establish themselves as “subjects of fashion,” fat consumers submit to subjectivation modes based on disciplinary techniques, such as altering or hiding the body, making their bodies compliant. However, there is also a process of becoming a fashion subject by challenging the discourse of thinness, rejecting blind subjectivation to the biopower of fashion, and relying on resistance confronting beauty standards. It is debatable whether some discourses and exclusion strategies, such as pressuring for a thin body due to health issues, are morally justifiable. Should markets and governments promote thinness considering obesity as a health problem? If so, how can it be promoted without excluding overweight consumers and making them feel morally imperfect? Besides being excluded in fashion, the female fat body is seen as unpleasant and a burden carried in many areas of life. As a result, activists and researchers may view fashion as a liberating or oppressive tool.

Volonté (2017) studies, through the theory of practice (Warde, 2005), the privileged and inert position of thinness in fashion. The author seeks to show that the inertia of the thin ideal is better explained because it has become part of a practice, and this ideal has been incorporated into the habits, routines, objects, and bodies of those dedicated to the practice of fashion. The practice’s inertia produces its actors’ inertia, and awareness of the harms of the thinness ideal is insufficient to change it. Two arguments support this theory. First, at the origin of the tyranny of thinness in Western cultures, technological development produces a limited size of clothing,

defining what is technologically viable for the fashion industry and what is not. This discussion points to the thin ideal not being a cultural change in people's tastes but a consequence of a change in the practice of fashion. Second, as the thin ideal is part of the fashion practice, it is more resistant to change than expected. Thinness is not only a standard of perfection in people's minds. However, it is also embodied in the models, making it particularly difficult for all protagonists of the system to change their attitudes and practices regarding the standards to be followed.

This ideal promotes the exclusion of fat bodies, is considered unworthy of using fashion as technologies for the self, and disseminates disciplinary technologies such as changing or hiding the body, reinforced by morally accepted discourses related to health (Zanette & Brito, 2019). This discourse is embedded in a practice, incorporated into habits, routines, objects, and the very bodies of those who engage in the practice of fashion, as well as rooted in a technological apparatus that defines the fat body as technologically unfeasible for the industry, which is not true (Volonté, 2019). The body influences fashion and vice versa, permeating by coercions and promoting various forms of identification or communication (Silva, 2016). However, suppose ideal beauty standards still influence women and society simultaneously. In that case, it hinders self-acceptance and potentializes forms of exclusion of those who do not fit the prevailing standard (Silva, 2016).

Peters (2014) states that plus-size women activate, deactivate, and struggle in varying ways with their fat identities through their daily practices of self-affirmation, such as dressing up, writing and commenting on blogs, and shopping. According to the author, corpulence stands out in how they perceive they should dress. They feel marginalized and limited in shaping their identities within the structure, with few offerings, varying measurements, and standards, among other problems already discussed, faced in retail, and that hinders their identity expression (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Christel & O'Donnell, 2016; Seram & Kumarasini, 2020; de Sousa & Melo, 2018). Evans, Gruys, and Bishop (2018) once again discuss the various gaps in retail as detrimental to

identity development through fashion consumption. Things like segregation according to body type, the so-called “plus-size fare,” lack of options, and lack of standardization of measurements, characterize spatial, temporal, and economic retail barriers for this niche market. Zanette et al. (2013) again point to these problems as inhibitors of expressive consumption.

Finally, Patterson-Faye (2016), through the theory of sexual script based on black feminism, discusses black, fat, and female sexuality and the use of plus-size fashion. There is a recurring image and stereotype in the United States of the “Mammy” figure, the black and fat woman portrayed as smiling, docile, and asexual, assigned to care for white children and their families. This figure is crucial to the submissive position of the “Mammy,” as she personifies the opposite of Western beauty ideals and poses no threat to Eurocentric structures of race, gender, and sexuality, making her “harmless.” She is silenced by her clothing and rendered invisible to white men. While this figure exists worldwide, the “Mammy” is no longer the only way to discuss the intersection of black, fat, and female sexuality. Historical and contemporary black female identities, including the “Mammy,” need other ways to redefine and construct their sexualities.

Plus-size fashion allows for an alternative and complete visualization of fat bodies. Unlike the dominant fashion world, plus-size fashion highlights visibly fat bodies, actively inscribing meanings into their bodies and experiences. Black, fat women use plus-size fashion to project, choose, and wear clothes that help them, their partners, and their communities rewrite cultural scripts that define what is attractive, sexy, and elegant.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Based on the systematic review, there are some theoretical advances in the consumption of plus-size fashion. The consumption experience, especially for women, was pointed out several times as unsatisfactory or unpleasant. It is due to factors such as lack of availability and variety of items, difficulty in achieving needs

related to style, lack of standardization of measures that affect a proper fit, and even segregation of plus-size clothing (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Greenleaf et al., 2020; Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016). Female consumers have shopping strategies against adverse effects, such as buying clothes of the opposite sex (Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016), not bringing plus-size children along when shopping (Lee & Hodges, 2020), or shopping online (de Sousa & Melo, 2018). Online clothing stores present convenience, greater variety, and better prices (de Sousa & Melo, 2018). However, its consumption still faces resistance since it inhibits the experience of feeling the clothes, seeing the fit on the body, and everything else that the in-person experience should represent (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Acar et al., 2017; Seram & Kumarasiri, 2020). It has also been detected how, due to all these structural and social problems in plus-size shopping, the expressive role of clothing, and its identity meaning for those who buy, is undermined (Christel, O'Donnell, & Bradley, 2016; Seram & Kumarasiri, 2020).

In the media, a recent movement to destigmatize the fat body in fashion is perceived, but even with the observed increase in content with plus-size models, it still occupies a supporting role (Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2019; Peters, 2019; Peters, 2017). When the advertisement is not related to body shape (for example, hygiene ads or accessories ads), plus-size models have no adverse effect on purchase intent or brand image (Cinelli & Yang, 2016). However, people differ due to several factors when it comes mainly to clothing consumption. Even though there is agreement on the benefits of using plus-size models over skinny models regarding self-acceptance, identification, purchase intention, and brand visibility (Lou & Tse, 2021; Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017), using plus-size models does not seem to appeal to all audiences. There is a direct relationship between how the consumer views her body and her ideal body type. However, when it comes to plus-size consumers, the perceived size of their body and ideal size (Hendrickse et al., 2021), as well as how they view malleability in their body size (Cinelli & Yang, 2016), becomes paramount. Fat women will not necessarily identify with plus-size models if their perceived

body is smaller than their actual body or when the consumer believes that her body is temporary and that those measurements and the model do not represent her. Finally, it is evidenced by the backstage of plus-size, where professionals are subjected to self-surveillance techniques and harmful body control, moulding their bodies according to each client, becoming a product ready to be shaped and sold as needed (Czerniawski, 2011).

The plus-size identity is permeated by a series of coercions and deconstructions, which will invariably become part of the fat person (Peters, 2014). Sometimes the same tools that aid and empower these people are used for reprimand and exclusion (Limatius, 2018; Limatius, 2019). Fashion is perhaps the most prominent tool among them, by being placed as an extension of their identity, their “self” (Peters, 2014). The act of dressing is taken by the duality of a market that simultaneously segregates and limits fat women’s access to clothing by managing physical space, high prices, and scarcity of options. Nevertheless, that is also a means by which women can express themselves, promote (or repress) their fat identity, deconstruct the stereotypes inferred by society (e.g., “mommy” and the fat, black female body), and create their own identity for themselves (Patterson-Faye, 2016). Even plus-size bloggers have reported a toxic and competitive context resulting from intense content commercialization (Sarturi & Cerqueira, 2017). This scenario comes from the thin ideal, reinforced all the time and has already been incorporated into society’s practices, with thin ideals internalized in their very essence (Zanette & Brito, 2019). This ideal leads women to alter and mould their bodies to try to fit in and feel worthy of enjoying something like fashion, which mainly affects the female body, which is more prone to submit to idealized standards. The thin ideal is in a privileged and inert position, acting to protect its privileged group. Even if there are necessary changes, first, the privileged group needs to recognize this privilege and then work together to bring about radical changes in various parts of society and, perhaps, begin to work on the issue of exclusion and stigmatization of thousands of fat bodies (Volonté, 2019).

## 6 FUTURE RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

When it comes to plus-size consumption, Christel and O'Donnell (2016) analyze plus-size swimwear through the FEA model (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). They suggest an in-depth study of the subject, analyzing aesthetics and colour patterns. In another study, this time focused on clothing practices by plus-size women who exercise, Christel, O'Donnell, and Bradley (2016) suggest an in-depth exploration of the practice of cross-dressing in this setting. It is in line with Romeo and Lee (2014), who assess the possibility of a study on why men's and adult clothing meets the needs of teenage plus-size women and what defines comfort for this audience. Seram and Kumarasiri (2020) recommend studying the relationship between different types of female body shapes (Pear, apple, straight, hourglass, and inverted triangle) and the fit of garments. From this, we have the first propositions:

**Proposition 1:** The functionality of clothing for plus-size teenagers.

**Proposition 2:** Relationship between different types of female body shapes and the fit of plus-size garments.

About consumers' perception of plus-size models, Shoenberger, Kim, and Johnson (2019), who analyze perceived authenticity as a mediator, suggest analyzing the relationship between body image and self-esteem. On the other hand, Cinelli and Yang (2016) work the implicit theories about the malleability of one's own body and suggest examining the discrepancies between objective and subjective self-perception. Hendrickse et al. (2021), despite a line of work focused on body satisfaction, also perceived possible influences of body self-perception, suggesting research examining the effects of the discrepancy between participants' ideal and actual bodies. Clayton, Ridgway, and Hendrickse (2017) also address the issue and suggest research on how commercials influence social comparisons and body satisfaction. One can suggest from these gaps the following propositions:

**Proposition 3:** Impacts of the discrepancy between the ideal body and the

actual body of plus-size consumers.

**Proposition 4:** Influence of plus-size commercials on social comparisons and body satisfaction.

On plus-size identity, there is Limatius (2019) and Sarturi and Cerqueira (2017), both working with blogs aimed at this audience. The first suggests research on the impact of the difference between the ideal body and the actual body of female consumers. In contrast, the second sees an opportunity to analyze textual and visual discourses conveyed in blogs.

**Proposition 5:** Relationship between textual and visual discourses in plus-size blogs.

When analyzing the country of origin of the publications analyzed, a preponderance of North American publications is observed, followed by Brazilian, Portuguese, French, and Swedish publications. Plotkina and Saurel (2021), Lou and Tse (2021), Pounders and Mabry- Flynn (2019), Matthews and Romeo (2018), and Cinelli and Yang (2016) pointed out as limitations of the fact that their research was based only on the United States. Zanette et al. (2013), Zanette and Brito (2019), and Seram and Kumarasiri (2020), who conducted their work in Brazil and Sri Lanka specifically, call for more work conducted in developing countries. Thus, the proposition is arrived at:

**Proposition 7:** Consumption practices of plus-size consumers in developing countries.

Several articles indicate a majority white sample among the respondents (Plotkina & Saurel, 2021; Lou & Tse, 2021; Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2019; Matthews & Romeo, 2018). The consumption of black women/men still lacks further study and their respective representation in the media, such as in blogs about plus-size fashion (Sarturi & Cerqueira, 2017). In addition, Evans, Gruys, and Bishop (2018) analyze the exclusion that plus-size women suffer in the clothing market and suggest that the relationship between ethnicity and body image be studied.

**Proposition 8:** Consumption of plus-size clothing for black women.

**Proposition 9:** Plus-size advertising media for black women.

**Proposition 10:** Clothing consumption and the identity of black plus-size consumers.

Another limitation is the low gender diversity, with the sample focusing on the female gender - considered more prone to suffer social pressure due to body and weight (Polce-Lynch et al., 1998). Several authors suggest analyzing the male plus-size consumer (Lou & Tse, 2021; Lee & Hodges, 2019; Zanette & Brito, 2019; Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017; Cinelli & Yang, 2016) and alternatively, analyzing plus-size fashion blogs whose author is a man (Sarturi & Cerqueira, 2017; 2016).

**Proposition 11:** Male consumption of plus-size clothing.

**Proposition 12:** The plus-size advertising media aimed at the male gender.

There are some limitations involving product categories. Shoenberger, Kim, and Johnson (2019) study the consumption of underwear and swimwear, Scussel and Dellagnelo (2018) study the consumption of underwear, and both suggest application to other product categories. Importantly, Cinelli and Yang (2016) found possible consumer indifference to models' weight in advertising pieces when the advertised product is non-body related, such as shampoos or accessories.

**Proposition 13:** Consumer reaction to using plus-size models in advertisements of non-body related products.

Among the samples studied, the perception of a series of structural and social problems is perceived to impair the experience in face-to-face stores (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Christell et al., 2016). Counterpoint is also perceived as a series of advantages in online stores (de Sousa & Melo, 2018). However, some female consumers still prefer the hostile experience of the in-person store, mainly needing more confidence in the online purchase and the product purchased (Romeo & Lee, 2015; Acar et al., 2017; Seram & Kumarasiri, 2020). Further research is needed on the consumption of plus-size fashion in the online environment. It would be interesting to compare cases where the practice has established itself in its consumers' and daily lives

and where it still needs to be established. Furthermore, please indicate where the online market needs to strengthen to better establish itself as a practice that helps combat stigmatizing and marginalizing problems in in-person stores (de Sousa & Melo, 2018).

**Proposition 14:** Motivations, negotiations, and (non) consolidation of plus-size fashion e-commerce.

As for methodological limitations, Plotkina and Saurel (2021), Lee and Hodges (2019), Pounders and Mabry-Flynn (2019), de Sousa and Melo (2018), Matthews and Romeo (2018), Cinelli and Yang (2016), Romeo and Lee (2015), Zanette et al. (2013) pointed to a lack of external validity due to a minor - always less than 100 participants - and homogeneous sample, often collected in a single location, such as a university or Amazon's research program, MTurk. Thus, research with a larger sample size is suggested, in addition to quantitative research, to reinforce and seek to generalize the findings and conclusions. Other authors have pointed out the lack of validation of the studies due to the methodology involving a controlled experiment outside a real context of the application, especially when it comes to the analysis of consumer reactions to the use of plus-size models in an environment without brands or advertisements involved (Hendrickse et al., 2020; Shoenberger et al., 2019; Cinelli & Yang, 2016). There is a need to replicate these studies in experiments based on real application contexts.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The consumption of plus-size clothing goes through a series of areas and nuances that could be presented and analyzed in this systematic review. The decision to use articles from different areas led to conclusions that allow a broad understanding of the plus-size consumer and several aspects that surround the experience and consumption within the market, from prejudice and stigma to technical aspects of

manufacturing and numbering garments.

We can describe the experience of consumption of clothes by fat people as a negative experience, due to the lack of availability and variety of clothes, besides an inconsistent and not very inclusive standardization. To get around these difficulties, the participants point to various solutions, such as cross-dressing, buying several pieces at once, or the most common, online shopping, which despite having great potential, still faces some fear among consumers.

The plus-size in the media presents an accelerated growth but still assumes a supporting role, especially in the fashion world. Products directly related to the body advertised by plus-size women are not necessarily well regarded by consumers, even if they are fat. Part of this is due to the individual's perception of their body, which can be influenced by their idea of the ideal body and body malleability. Despite this, there were no reports of negative influences from using plus-size models in advertising non-body-related products.

The plus-size individual is governed by the thin ideal, a privileged and inert ideal that simultaneously reinforces those who fit and excludes those who diverge from it. The identity of these individuals is moulded on top of this ideal. A series of coercions hover over them, but even small acts such as self-expression when dressing or communication when blogging generate small deconstructions in the stigma of the fat body and act as essential steps towards self-acceptance of the body.

The plus-size individual is the hostage of a system that privileges thin people in several fields. As a consumer, simple acts such as choosing what to wear are denied. As a professional, the lack of preparation and infrastructure can make them disadvantaged about thin people. Some articles reinforce that the fat body offers disadvantages when exposing a brand or product. However, the findings of Clayton, Ridgway, and Hendrickse (2017) and Cinelli and Yang (2016) should be taken into consideration when analyzing these cases since the rejection of the fat body in ads, especially when coming from plus-size consumers, seems to come first from a rejection of the body itself. For larger bodies to

be accepted in the media, a work of deconstruction of the pressure a fat person exerts on himself is necessary. This deconstruction work can come from several areas, be it blogs, movies, advertisements, or the actions of organizations that seek to fight against prejudice. This deconstruction is essential for the plus-size market to stop being a niche market and become more expressive. With a monetary impact on the consumption of this type of clothing, the plus-size market could be interested in solving several of the flaws pointed out throughout this article, such as problems with the numbering and variety of clothes.

This study's most significant theoretical contribution lies in the significance of systematic literature reviews as essential tools for outlining and debating existing contributions, providing a clear understanding of the frontiers of knowledge in the field of plus-size clothes, fashion, and consumption. Through this methodological approach, the research stands out by identifying theoretical gaps and offering a solid knowledge foundation that points the way for future research and studies in this ever-evolving field. By delving into the research findings and emphasizing the relevance of systematic reviews, the authors establish a clear statement regarding the unique theoretical contribution of this study to the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the intersections between fatphobia, plus-size clothes, fashion, and consumption.

The plus-size clothing field has several paths to follow, and several studies can be conducted there. Among the publications, online retail, identity, demographic, contextual, methodological, cultural, and social issues still need future investigations and make the field fruitful for further research. This research has limitations, and for future work, it is suggested that more databases be used, as well as the consideration of articles written in languages other than English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

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Contribution	[Author 1]	[Author 2]	[Author 3]
1. Definition of research problem	√	√	√
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)			
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)		√	√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review		√	√
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√	√
6. Data collection		√	√
7. Statistical analysis			
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√	√
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√		√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√	√

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