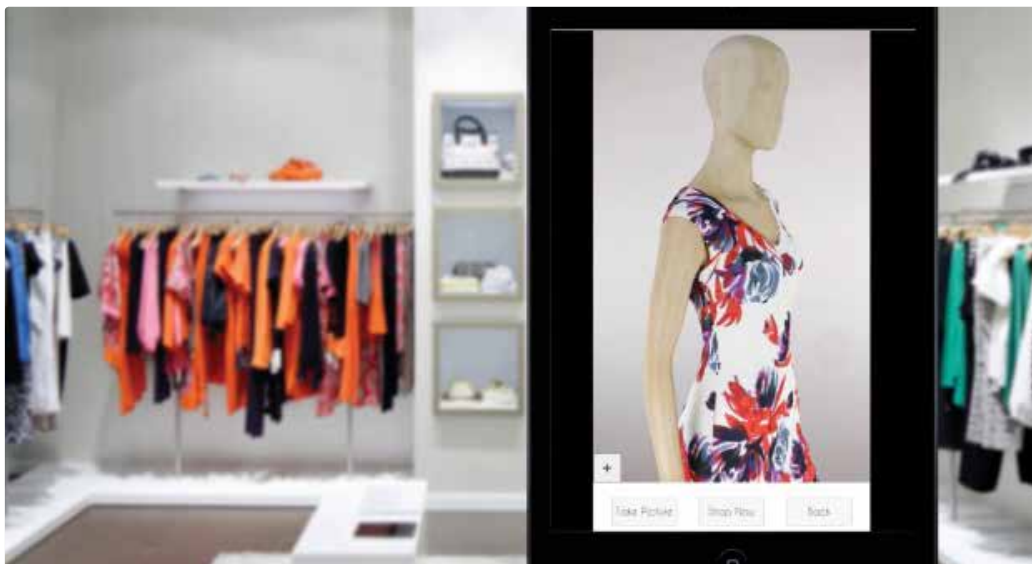


Size Matters

Apparel companies are increasingly using sizing technologies based on AI and AR to reduce returns due to wrong fits

– Gargi Banerjee



AI and AR will provide a bird's eye view on sizes preferred by majority of the clientele.

Shopping cart abandonment is a painful reality that affects offline and online retailers alike. One reason for this is size unavailability. Imagine the irritation a customer feels after they browse for a garment online, order it based on the available sizing chart, only to return it because it does not fit properly? When it comes to

clothes, size is all that matters and the last thing any customer wants is to be seen in an ill-fitting garment!

According to SaleCycle, the average cart abandonment rate for online fashion retailers in Q4 2017 was 65.9%, and incorrect sizing is a big reason for this multi-billion dollar problem. There is a way to reverse this trend and transform these abandoned carts

into recovered ones by using technology.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

To cater to growing shopper demands on one hand and deal with diminishing margins due to online returns on the other, fashion retailers globally are turning to technology-based sizing solutions. Amazon paved the way in 2017, when it



acquired Body Labs, a 3D modelling start up that made 3D depictions of human bodies.

The global ecommerce major's attempt was to blend the digital with the physical and create an augmented reality (AR) environment where a potential customer can have a virtual experience. While mass customisation of this technology is still underway at Amazon for its private label apparel brands, to encourage customers to try out its merchandise, it is offering them the 'try-before-you-buy' Prime Wardrobe service. Last year, it debuted Scout, an AI-based visual shopping tool to help shoppers figure out what they want to buy in a more visual fashion and which it plans to extend from furniture and home décor to clothing and handbags.

THE RIGHT VISUAL ATTRIBUTES

Several service providers are taking technological strides to address the problem of returns faced by apparel retailers. Mirrorsize, a startup



Arup Chakraborty,
founder, **Mirrorsize.**



Puneet Jain
and **Yatin Jain,**
directors,
ODHNI.



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Tech like 3D printing and 3D scanning, will boost the integration of made-to-measure products for fashion brands

founded by Arup Chakraborty in 2018, harnessed the power of AI to develop a device agnostic (smartphone and tablet) sizing solution. Chakraborty explained how “advanced mesh processing techniques are in vogue by using a 20K+ dense mesh”. Based on the binary image inputs, a 3D model is created on the run and then deformed on the mesh to get the precise accuracy.

At present, Mirrorsize offers two solutions – GetMeasured, which helps retailers offering bespoke services to get precise body measurements of remote customers. As a result, shoppers need not visit the store physically to get measured. Rather, they can place an order by getting their body measurements right from their home. This allows retailers to expand their operations nationally and globally.

The second solution, 'Size2Fit', is created for ready wear retailers. It gives precise size recommendation to customers, which in turn gives

them the confidence to shop from their homes. Mirrorsize is also working on a solution called 'Draping', which will let customers virtually “feel the garment move” similar to a physical drape to get a better sense of style and fabric.

Chakraborty said, “Going forward, the fashion and apparel businesses will accelerate the integration of omni-channel strategies. Tech innovations, like 3D printing and 3D scanning, will accelerate the integration of made-to-measure products for many fashion brands in the immediate future.”

Another customer-centric solution is Lyflike, developed by BigThinX, a Bengaluru-based AI startup founded by Chandrika Hazarika and Shivang Desai. It is essentially an app that can create a 3D avatar that looks and moves like you with three full length pictures that one has to upload.

With the help of AI customers can 'try on' any apparel by merely feeding the picture of the product into the app. It acts

Analysis

like a 'pocket stylist' helping shoppers experiment with different designs, patterns and fabrics. Further, they can accessorise and visualise the outfit with a switchable 360 degree background environment.

Similarly, Sridhar Manthani and Rajesh Kumar's Streamoid too uses AI across the value chain in a number of flagship retail products. It offers a variety of solutions like 'Outfitter' that makes visual merchandising seamless by taking any outfit and creating a unique look around it. It also provides other solutions for customers like 'Refine By' that can help customers widen or narrow their search based on relevant attributes.

Feel the need for an expert stylist? The fashion conscious can use 'Stylebot', a chatbot that uses advanced AI capabilities to mimic how personal styling assistants

“ AI will enable bespoke brands like ours to serve across borders and have better reach in the global market.

Ankur Kathuria and Shailesh Dayal, brand co-owners, Regis Clothing.



SEE, INTERACT, BUY

Fashion retailer, Zara, ditched its traditional mannequins and window displays for an interactive AR shopping experience in 2018. All customers had to do was download the Zara app available on iOS and Android.



And they could see models Léa Julian and Fran Summers wearing looks from the brand's studio collection, as they posed, and walked in 12 short scenes. This experiment gave shoppers a chance to see how the clothes will look in real life. They could also purchase the outfits as a whole or item-by-item with the touch of a button in the app or within the store.

search and recommend products. It does this after a fun interaction to understand the context of the conversation.

Rajesh Kumar, CTO of Streamoid Technologies said, "The beauty of an automated service like Stylebot is that retailers can offer reliable styling

service to a large number of customers in real time." Streamoid's first advisory stylebot, AISHA, was launched in 2017 collaboration with abof.com on its Facebook messenger. The brand later stated that it saw a 10% conversion rate for users interacting with AISHA.

THE REAL USE CASE

The bigwigs in the fashion retail industry are tight-lipped about the use of these out-of-the-box AR and AI sizing solutions. But excitement is palpable among the newer crop of fashion stylists and brand owners. Delhi's Shailesh Dayal and Ankur Kathuria, owners of Regis Clothing, which designs customised shirts, are excited about the possibility of growing their reach using these technologies. They stated, "AI will enable bespoke brands like ours to serve across borders and have better reach in the international market."

Megha Kumari and Jigar Mali



from the brand Megha & Jigar, an online store for customised traditional wear too are enthusiastic. They believe that right sizing technology can improve conversion rate by 21% on an average. "Technologies like AR have definitely dropped the percentage of returns, the result of which has smashed the overall return rates," they state.

Calling it the most effective way of meeting the customers' needs, they added, "The statistical information from AI and AR can give a bird's eye view on sizes preferred by majority of the clientele. This ultimately solves more than half of the problems related to sizes and fit."

Puneet and Yatin Jain, Directors of ODHNI ethnic wear call data and statistical information derived from AI and AR as the "new gold". They opined, "Garment manufacturers can reform their manufacturing practices, track market demands, precisely identify their target audiences and accordingly tap them using these technologies. By meeting buyer demands,



Megha Kumari and Jigar Mali, Co-founders of Megha & Jigar portal.



they can increase their own revenues. Moreover, product return rates can be reduced by 5% to 6%."

DATA NOT THE ULTIMATE CURE-ALL

Not every retailer shares this enthusiasm. While pointing out that remarkable differences that exist among Indian body types in every region, Nidhi Yadav, Creative Head and Founder of e-tailing venture AKS Clothing, said, "Technology can minimize the incidence

of errors. But it cannot be treated as a panacea for all sizing issues, especially when the sample size is in millions and each person is different in terms of body type."

However, she agreed that "proper sizing cannot be ignored" and technologies like 3D whole-body scanning will be a big boon for the apparel industry in times to come. She is also hopeful that the amalgamation of Big Data and pattern analysis will be useful in creating the profiles of customers and prospects.

Overall, while use of right sizing solutions is yet at a nascent stage in India, it does signal exciting times for customers and retailers alike. Customers love innovation and will veer towards brands that deliver the best novel experiences. By adopting the right technologies, retailers can save time and energy, improve their customer experience and most importantly, boost their growth. ■



Nidhi Yadav, Creative Head and Founder AKS Clothing.

