How are Consumers Embracing Virtual Fittings?
- Changes in Consumer's Perception of Virtual Fittings –

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E-commerce has important advantages compared to traditional shopping (e.g. time, choice, price) but offers only a partial view of the shopping environment. In particular, the lack of physical apprehension is a major disadvantage of online purchasing (Beck & Crié, 2018). To solve this problem, a new technology has been introduced in the retail area. Virtual fitting is a service that enables consumers to examine the fit, length, and silhouette of clothing without a physical fitting, thus targeting self in the real world. With the fast development of the virtual reality technology, virtual fitting becomes another promotional option for retailers to consider.

From the consumer's point of view, virtual fitting offers a variety of benefits to consumers. First, it can be convenient in that it removes the hassle of trying out different clothes when purchasing clothing, and reduces the waiting time outside fitting rooms. Second, virtual fitting platforms are not only powerful decision tools for the on-line shopper, but also contribute to the fun factor of in-store shopping (Pachoulakis & Kapetanakis, 2012). Third, it provides new experiences to consumers while being used serving as hands-on marketing in offline stores.

Meanwhile, from a marketing perspective, image interaction attempts in stimulating experiences can have a positive effect on purchase intentions (Ann et al., 2005). Some studies indicate that virtual fitting can help enhance consumer perceptions and attitude such as enjoyment and fun (Kim & Forsythe, 2008), which could potentially help increase sales. This is because virtual fitting allows consumers to virtually try on an item before purchase and better realize how it would actually look on themselves (which typically does not look as good as on the models), thus potentially diminishing the impulse to purchase that could otherwise be stimulated by appealing promotional photos or other traditional product visualizations (Yang & Xiong, 2019).

Reflecting on these marketing phenomena, this study aims to analyze consumers' perceptions and behaviors with respect to virtual fittings. For time series analysis, we compare past and present consumer perceptions that have changed over time since the introduction of virtual fitting. To find out the change in perception of virtual fitting, we collected consumer postings containing the keyword "virtual fitting" in Korean portal sites. When virtual fitting was introduced in Korea in 2015, the collection period was from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016 and January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020. The top 50 keywords were extracted and used

for analysis based on term frequency. Degree centrality was measured to determine the importance of the word within the network.

In the years 2015-2016 (past) and 2019-2020 (present), consumers commonly accepted virtual fitting as an experience service. For example, augmented reality and virtual reality technologies, convenient technology, styling machine, body size, and size measurement device, and avatar simulation services.

Before the introduction of the technology (2015-2016), the search for the fit of clothing and footwear products (e.g., "wearing," "foot size," and "fitting") and device usage ("function," "screen," "payment," and "touch") were highlighted in consumer perception. With the emergence of "customizing" as a function for virtual fitting, we have confirmed that only fitting features were emphasized for virtual fitting technologies in the past, but now they are recognized by extending to customizing capabilities. According to the emergence of the "marketing" and "fragrance marketing," we confirmed that virtual fitting was recognized by consumers as a form of experiential marketing. While factors such as "fun" and "attractive" have been shown as positive consumer assessments of virtual fitting, "unnatural" were mentioned as a technical limitation. After the introduction of the technology (2019-2020), more technology-related keywords such as "AI," "robot," "Kiosk" and "tag" appeared as related keywords of virtual fitting. Therefore, virtual fitting was recognized by consumers as advanced technologies that can be applied in real life, and not as a marketing event.

Consumers have commonly accepted virtual fitting as a service providing experience, technologies such as AR/VR, convenience, styling devices, body shape and size measurement devices, and avatar simulation services. In the past, virtual fitting was recognized as a type of experiential marketing, but now it is recognized as a technology that can be used in real life and one that supports fitting and customization. Consequently, we confirmed that consumer perception changed as virtual fitting technology was used by consumers more frequently than before. The results of this study can add diversity to research related to virtual fitting marketing, which is currently attracting attention in the fashion and distribution industry and can serve as basic data in establishing marketing strategies for fashion companies.

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