Digital Technologies and Apparel Consumer Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review

Jin Su and Mon Thu Myin, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA
Xiao Tong, The University of Alabama, USA

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Introduction and Study Purpose. Various technologies (i.e., self-service technology, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), chatbot, mobile shopping, and omnichannel retailing) have been implemented in the apparel retail industry. Many published studies have focused on digital technology's impact on apparel consumer behavior. However, few or no systematic literature reviews on this subject domain have been published in the last few years. This study aims to undertake a comprehensive and integrated synthesis of the literature to discover the current state of the literature on apparel consumers' use of digital technologies. Systematic literature review (SLR) is a systematic and transparent review technique that synthesizes literature to build a foundation of research domains and identify knowledge gaps through knowledge assimilation (Bindra et al., 2022; Snyder, 2019).
Methodology. This study adopted Sharma et al. (2020)'s seven-step methodology, including (1) defining the research objectives, (2) deciding the search keywords, (3) inclusion and exclusion criteria, (4) retrieving articles from the search engines/databases, (5) obtaining final search results after the in-depth screening, (6) conducting analysis of the articles, and (7) identifying future research agenda. Figure 1 illustrates the step-by-step literature identification and screening process. This current study selected papers published since 2016. Following the inclusion and exclusion criteria and in-depth screening process, a total of 90 articles relevant to the role of digital technologies in apparel consumer behavior were selected to be included in this review.
Results and Discussions. This study used content analysis to categorize the types and sources of the papers, the distribution and evolution of the papers, theoretical approaches, and the research methodologies. Of the 90 articles reviewed, only three articles were literature review papers that are specifically on VR or AR in apparel retail. Published research on the role of digital technologies in apparel consumer behavior has significantly increased from 2016. Thirty-three articles were published in 2021, followed by 23 in 2020, 13 in 2019, seven in 2018, six in 2017, five in 2016, and three in early 2022. The top four journals regarding the number of articles published are the International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (n=41), Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services (n=16), Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management (n=13) and Clothing and Textiles Research Journal (n=9). Twenty-four types of digital technology appeared in the selected literature, including Omni-channel retailing (n=10), online shopping platforms (n=9), AI chatbot technology (n=9), AR (n=8), social media (n=8), and mobile commerce (n=7) and VR (n=6). In terms of geographical focus, the USA has the most publications (n=28), followed by the UK (n=15), India (n=10), Korea (n=7), China (n=7), and Italy (n=7). A variety of theories were employed to study this field, including Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (n=13) (e.g., Jain, 2021), Stimulus-Organism-Response model (SOR) (n=6) (e.g., Silva et al., 2021), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (n=3) (e.g., Irshad et al., 2020), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (n=3) (e.g., Lee & Chow, 2020), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (n=2) (e.g., Alexander & Kent, 2022),), Experience

Economy Theory (n=2) (e.g., Hamouda, 2021), Expectation-Confirmation Theory (n=2) (e.g., Thakur, 2018), Flow Theory (n=2) (e.g., Han et al., 2020), and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (n=1) (Kazancoglu & Aydin, 2018). Seven research methodologies were utilized in the studies included in the review, including survey, experiment, face-to-face interview, focus group interview, case study, observation, and literature review. Quantitative research methods using survey or experiment design were the most frequently employed methods (n=63) (e.g., Kim, 2019), while 16 papers used qualitative approaches (face-to-face/ focused group interviews or observations) (e.g., Nash, 2019). Only five papers were mixed methods research (e.g., Tupikovskaja-Omovie & Tyler, 2021). Regarding the statistical analysis used, SEM is the most frequently used technique (n=35) (e.g., Aw, 2019), followed by ANOVA (n=10) (e.g., Geissinger & Laurell, 2016), regression analysis (n=8) (e.g., Sohn et al., 2020), and ANCOVA (n=2) (e.g., Tran et al., 2021). For the qualitative studies, the thematic analysis was the favorite technique (n=8) (e.g., Siregar & Kent, 2019), followed by content analysis (n=5). With regard to the specific focuses in the articles reviewed, consumer perception and experience (n=24) (e.g., Kim, 2019; Park, 2020), consumer adoption (n=10) (e.g., Mishra et al., 2021), consumer motivation (n=7) (e.g., Watson, 2018), customer engagement (n=4) (e.g., Irshad et al., 2020), consumers satisfaction (n=5) (e.g., Chung et al., 2020) are the major study focuses. The most researched behavior was purchase intention (n =14) (e.g., Kautish et al., 2021), followed by usage intention (n=5) (e.g., Park et al., 2020), word of mouth (WOM) (n=4) (e.g., Saarijarvi et al., 2018), and loyalty (n=3) (e.g., Pandey & Chawla, 2018).

Figure 1. The literature identification and screening process
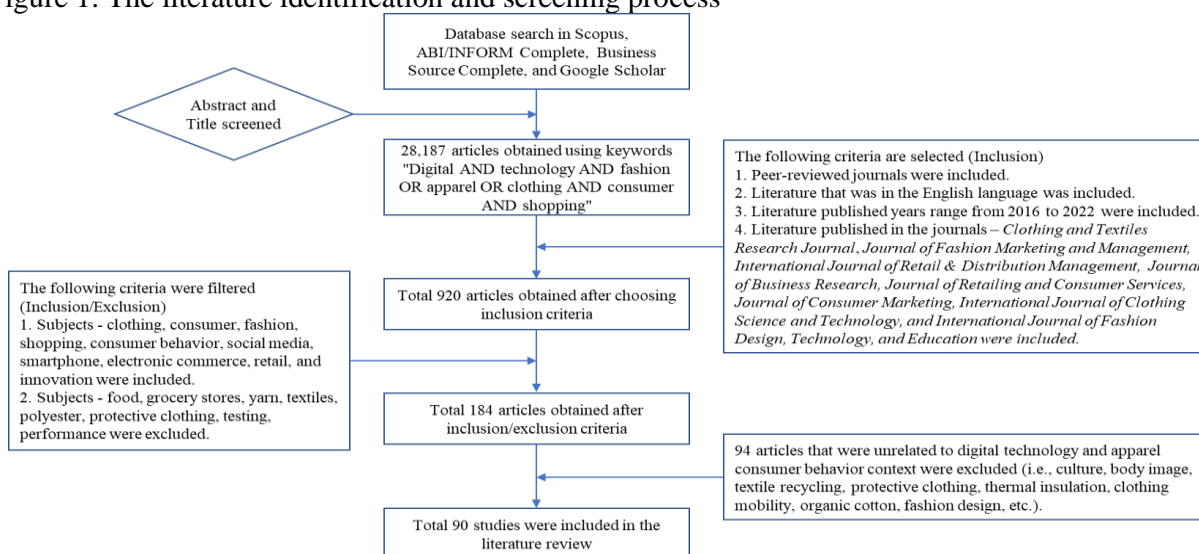
Conclusions and Future Research. This study has several limitations. For example, only articles published in the seven journals from 2016 were included in the SLR. The findings from this study indicate existing research gaps and provide directions for future research. Based on the findings, we propose that future studies consider more mixed-method research, other types of digital technology (i.e., phygital, generative adversarial network (GAN) technology), and research from emerging countries worldwide.

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