All the latest trends at the press of an app

Like many other types of industry, clothing is no exception. Its typical fashion-conscious customer is a person who likes a shopping experience which combines everything that modern technology offers alongside having a day out shopping in stores; in other words, shoppers will select a new look online as part of their in-store browsing. Rather than fight this development, the fashion business has recognized that fusing the two channels of shopping is key to attracting business. Now, some clothing companies are making use of technologies with image-recognition software which allows you to identify and match one image with another. Until recently, this type of technology has been used in security and marketing but increasingly, it's making its way into many other aspects of lives, especially into the world of fashion.

Basically, shopping apps using image-recognition software will let customers take a picture of an item of clothing on their phone. Then they link it to a retailer who might sell the item or something very similar. Once they find it, they can either order online or visit the shop. One of the early apps created for this purpose came from a company called Snap Fashion. Jenny Griffiths came up with the original idea while studying for her degree. After she graduated in 2009, she worked on developing the product and within twelve months notched up a quarter of a million users.

What had instantly attracted the users was the ease in which they could take a picture of a shoe or a piece of clothing and source where they might find it. So, if they saw something in a photograph in a magazine or in the street, within seconds they could discover where to buy it. The software behind Snap Fashion is able to analyse features such as colours, patterns and shapes and try to match them to a database or information from retailers.

Of course, Snap Fashion is not the only app exploiting image recognition technology. The competition is fierce. However, there isn't one single company who has managed to corner the market because the technology isn't 100% accurate and so no company can guarantee the customer a perfect match every time. For example, if the item of clothing has a complex pattern or original colour mix, then it's hard for the software to evaluate it. Similarly, the image can be affected if it's photographed moving or in a slightly strange position; for example, if you saw someone walking down the street wearing a dress you liked and took a photo, the image might not be clear enough or the folds in the dress could affect the analysis.

So, at the moment, the image-recognition technology can only cope with images of objects which are static. Take, for example, the cameras at an airport that automatically check your facial features with the image on your passport. It only works if you are still and even then it's prone to technological glitches.

Not everyone is convinced that app developers will ever solve this problem though perhaps it isn't as great a problem as many might think. After all, we are all used to using a search engine and typing in our key terms. When it doesn't deliver the exact results we were hoping for, we simply type in some other terms until we find it. Users expect some ambiguity in their answers and they quickly learn how to manage the system. Similarly, if the photo you put in doesn't provide an accurate match, maybe users will simply try again with a new image.

So overall, there's no doubt – despite the challenges to the technology – that the popularity of searching for the latest trends and styles in this way is set to grow. Certainly, in the world of women's clothing, it's already established and as for the men – expect to see similar apps for men's clothing appearing very soon.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

0 The writer thinks that the fashion and clothing business is …

- **A** making good use of technology. ☑
- **B** not making enough use of technology. ☐
- **C** only taking advantage of one type of technology. ☐

41 Image-recognition software …

- **A** has never been used commercially before. ☐
- **B** was invented to be used in security and marketing. ☐
- **C** has the ability to make connections between two different images. ☐

42 Shopping apps using image-recognition software let customers …

- **A** find out who sells the type of clothing they want. ☐
- **B** look at the latest fashions. ☐
- **C** receive suggestions on how they can improve their image. ☐

43 In the last sentence of paragraph 2, *notch up* means …

- **A** to sell clothes to. ☐
- **B** to achieve an impressive result. ☐
- **C** to recognize the images of. ☐

44 The Snap Fashion app recognizes an item of clothing …

- **A** according to the user description. ☐
- **B** by the shop it comes from. ☐
- **C** from its different features. ☐

45 The popularity of the app was due to its …

- **A** user-friendliness. ☐
- **B** accuracy. ☐
- **C** speed. ☐

46 Image recognition apps in the fashion industry …

- **A** are currently used by a very small handful of companies. ☐
- **B** lack 100% reliability. ☐
- **C** are very popular with the majority of clients. ☐

47 One challenge for the software is to recognize …

- **A** different people wearing the same clothes. ☐
- **B** clothing in different positions. ☐
- **C** certain types of clothing. ☐

48 The writer suggests that …

- **A** the industry needs to offer more choice. ☐
- **B** users need to be more precise. ☐
- **C** users need to be adaptable when searching. ☐

49 So far, the service …

- **A** has only appealed to women. ☐
- **B** hasn't existed for male fashions. ☐
- **C** hasn't worked on every type of device. ☐

50 The main aim of this article is to …

- **A** predict how virtually everyone will shop for clothes in the future. ☐
- **B** assess the rise of image recognition software in the fashion industry. ☐
- **C** compare the experience of in-store and online clothes shopping. ☐

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