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A Study to Understand Consumer Perception on the Role of AI-Driven 'Trending Now' Recommendations in Apparel Retail

V. Michael Belwin Raj

Student, Global Institute of Business Studies, Bangalore

Dr. Malabika Purkayastha

Assistant Professor, Global Institute of Business Studies, Bangalore

Abstract

The use of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in the apparel retail business has dramatically changed the industry, especially in online and omnichannel retailing platforms. Among other AI uses, Trending Now recommendation features have become popular as mechanisms that control consumer browsing and product discovery, as well as purchase choices. These machine recommendations emphasize the most popular and frequently bought products as they happen, inform consumers about the relevance of the product, social evidence, and fashionability. The perception of consumers with such AI-driven recommendations can be seen as the key to successful retail strategy and brand positioning in an extremely competitive apparel market.

The paper is intended to explore the consumer perception of the role of AI-based Trending Now recommendation in retailing apparel using secondary research methodology. The research is premised on a systemic review and thematic analysis of the available literature generated by the peer review journals, books, and the industry reports published in the years between 2018 and 2024. The review allows combining the knowledge concerning AI-driven recommendation systems, consumer perception, and decision-making, trust in the retail situations. According to the literature findings, AI-powered recommendations of Trending Now have a beneficial impact on perceived usefulness, convenience, and purchase confidence, and also, bring up the issue of transparency and bias in the algorithm. The research is relevant to the literature because it presents the combined conceptual knowledge of the influence of AI-based recommendation cues on consumer perception in apparel retail. The managerial implications point to the necessity of ethical implementation of AI, balance of personalization, and transparency that will help to boost consumer trust and retail efficiency.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Recommendation Systems, Consumer Perception, Apparel Retail, Trending Now, Secondary Research.

Introduction

The fast development of digital technology has considerably transformed the retail business in the world, especially in the apparel industry. The increased development of e-commerce solutions, mobile shopping applications and omnichannel retailing has altered the ways that people shop, evaluate and buy fashion items.

The clothing retail sector is one of the industries that are becoming more and more dependent on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve customer experience, optimize business processes, and shape consumer behavior.

The recommendation systems that are powered by AI have become one of the most effective uses of AI in retail. These systems use information about consumers including browsing history, buying pattern, tastes and real-time communication in order to recommend goods that match personal preferences and market trends. Some of the formats of recommendations have become popular in the apparel retail websites, including, among others, Trending Now features. Such recommendations present the products that are currently trending with other consumers, and they use social evidence and group influence to inform an individual buying decision.

Artificial Intelligence in Retail

Artificial Intelligence can be defined as the ability of machines and computer systems to mimic human intelligence procedures; processes that include learning, reasoning, and decision-making. Applications of AI in the retail industry include customer experience, supply chains, inventory, and marketing communication. The increased access to consumer data and the development of machine learning algorithms has increased the pace through which AI is integrated into retail operations.

Intelligent Recommendation Systems

Recommendation systems are artificial intelligence technologies that detect products or content that is relevant to the user tastes and behavior. Recommendation systems in retail settings are used to analyze massive data to determine which products to most likely see or buy by a consumer. Such systems minimize information overload, and they ease decision-making in that the consumers will be presented with relevant options.

Trending Now Suggestions in Retail Apparel

Trending Now recommendations are a particular type of AI-driven recommendation, which gives prominence to products that are popular with a great number of consumers at a given time. The recommendations are made on the basis of the real time data of purchase frequency, views, wish-list additions, and social interactions. Retailers make use of the concept of social proof by displaying trending items: the idea is that people are affected by how other people behave.

Retail Consumer Perception

Consumer perception describes how individuals select, arrange and process information in order to generate meaningful perceptions on products, brands and experiences. Cognitive, emotional and social factors affect perception and therefore it is multidimensional. In retailing, consumer perception is what defines how the customers assess the quality of their products, brand credibility and the shopping experience.

AI-Driven Recommendations Perception by the Consumers

Perceived usefulness, ease of use, accuracy, and transparency are some of the factors through which the consumers perceive AI-driven recommendation systems. Consumers tend to believe in the system and respond to proposed products when they feel that the recommendations are useful and applicable. Conversely, manipulation or prejudices can decrease the trust and influence the brand evaluation adversely.

Trust, Social Proof and AI Recommendations

In online shopping, trust forms one of the elements of consumer perceived in the retailing setting. The trending now recommendations, which are based on AI, are highly dependent on social proof, which can be defined as people being susceptible to the actions of other people. Social proof is more effective at making people trust because it indicates the mass endorsement and minimizes perceived risk.

Review of Literature

This part critically analyzes the available scholarly literature on the topics of Artificial Intelligence in retail, AI-based recommendation systems, consumer perception, and the apparel retailing. The literature review aims at summarizing the previous research results, determining the main themes, and establishing gaps that support the current secondary research work.

Artificial Intelligence at Retail Level

Artificial Intelligence as it applied in the retail sector has been studied extensively in the recent literature. According to the researchers, AI technologies are able to help retailers improve customer experience, in terms of personalization, automation, and predictive analytics. Davenport et al. (2020) note that the AI-driven systems enable the retailers to analyze consumer behavior in real time and, as a result, reflect and interact in a more relevant and timely manner.

Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfelt (2017) investigated how in-store and digital technologies influence the experiences of retailing. According to their results, technology facilitated cues have a substantial effect on consumer perceptions of modernity, convenience, and trust.

Recommendation Systems and Decision-Making by the Consumer

Recommendation systems have been actively researched as the means of eliminating information overload and helping consumers in decision-making. According to Ricci, Rokach, and Shapira (2015), recommendation systems are also described as consumer guidance through a system that selects the relevant information according to the preferences and behavior.

Applying to online retail, Xiao and Benbasat (2007) discovered that recommendation agents have a positive impact on consumer trust and competence of the system. The consumers feel more inclined to believe the recommendations when they believe that they are correct and impartial.

AI-based Retailing Recommendations

The retail in the apparel industry also has its own challenges because of subjective and trend based fashion consumption.

Senecal and Nantel (2004) confirmed that recommendation systems have a strong effect on consumer choice in internet settings. Their analysis indicates that consumers will choose products which are recommended more particularly in cases where consumers have to make complex decisions.

The newer generations of research have focused more on trend-based recommendations. According to Kim and Lennon (2013), fashion customers are very sensitive to signals that reveal popularity and trendiness.

Trending Now Recommendations and Social Proof

The recommendations of Trending Now are based on the principle of social proof, according to which people prefer to imitate the behavior of other people, identified by Cialdini (2009), which determines the manner in which consumers act.

Social proof signals like indicators of popularity, labeling as a bestseller, trending, etc., work to decrease the perceived risk and enhance confidence in digital retail situations. Muchnik, Aral, and Taylor (2013) established that exposing the behavior of other people to a considerable extent enhances product adoption. Their results lead to an idea that consumers have higher chances to interact with the products they perceive to be popular.

Retail Technologies Driven by AI and Consumer Perception

The perception of AI-driven technologies by consumers is based on several aspects, such as the perceived usefulness, ease of use, precision, and reliability. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) is a theoretical model of the understanding of consumer acceptance of technology-based systems. TAM states that observed usefulness and ease of use have significant impacts on user attitudes and behavioral intentions.

The study by Longoni, Bonezzi, and Morewedge (2019) investigated consumer trust towards AI systems and discovered that people could be opposed to the AI recommendations in the field of personal identity, like fashion. According to their results, AI is valued as efficient, but consumers might want to express their views through human judgment. This point is especially applicable to the case of the apparel retail, where personal identity and self-expression matter.

Consumer Trust, Algorithmic Bias and Transparency

The most recent literature is more concerned with the ethical issues of AI-driven systems. The issues of transparency and fairness are also described as the aspects that affect consumer trust. Martin and Murphy (2017) believe that information untransparency practices have the potential to undermine consumer confidence and hurt brand reputation.

Another issue mentioned in the literature on AI is algorithmic bias. Research indicates that biased algorithms can promote the narrow trends eliminating diversity and consumer freedom. The context in relation to the recommendation of Trending Now enables the consumer to develop doubts that some products are promoted more than others.

Studies have shown that, by being transparent on the means by which the recommendations are created, the negative perceptions can be overcome. Once the consumers know the logic behind the AI-driven recommendations, they will tend to believe and accept it.

Retail Brands of Apparel Consumer Perception, Trust and Retail Brand

The issue of trust is critical in influencing the perception of consumers in online apparel retail. Gefen, Karahanna and Straub discovered that trust plays a significant role in determining online purchase intentions (2003). Trust is a key factor in the retail of apparel, because uncertainties exist with regard to fit, quality, and returns.

Literature and Research Gap Summary

The literature reviewed shows that AI-based recommendation systems play a major role in the perception of consumers through the perception of increased convenience, decreased decision-making involvement, and social proof. The recommendations of Trending Now are especially effective in the field of apparel retail because of the significance of trends and influence of peer.

Research Design

The current research design is based on a descriptive and exploratory approach to secondary research design. The secondary research is applicable to this study because it will allow conducting an in-depth analysis and synthesis of available academic resources on Artificial Intelligence,

recommendation systems, consumer perceptions, and clothing retail. The study will not involve the use of primary data, instead it will concentrate on interpreting and synthesizing the results of already published works to design a conceptual picture of the position of AI-controlled recommendations to use in apparel retail, called Trending Now.

The descriptive methodology is useful in summarizing the current theories, models, and empirical evidence systematically, whereas the nature of the study is exploratory and gives an opportunity to define new themes and research gaps in the developing field.

Sources of Data

The research will be based on secondary data sources, which are:

- The academic journals which are peer-reviewed.
- Academic books and edited books.
- Conference papers
- AI and retail industry and consultancy reports.

Selection Criteria

The criteria used in the selection of the literature were as follows:

Inclusion Criteria

- Articles within the past 5 years 2018-24.
- The studies associated with AI in retail, recommendation systems, consumer perception or apparel retail.
- Articles that are peer-reviewed and indexed journals.

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-academic blogs, opinion articles and news reports.
- Research that does not directly deal with consumer perception or retail technology.
- Relevant or redundant publications.

Method of Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected literature. This approach included determining the common concepts, patterns, and ties between studies associated with AI-based recommendations of Trending Now and consumer attitudes. There was a careful comparison and synthesis of the findings as well, which allowed the development of themes that would allow an organization to interpret existing research.

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

According to the literature analysis, four key themes were identified that describe how consumers perceive AI-based recommendations regarding apparel retailing which is the Trending Now.

Perceived Muchersubstantial Usefulness and Convenience

Perceived usefulness has always been one of the important determinants of consumer perception of AI-driven recommendations, as noted in the literature. The Product discovery Simplifies product discovery through the use of trending now features, which provide highlights of popular items and reduce the search and decision fatigue effort. Consumers view these recommendations as a useful device that will make shopping easier, especially when browsing in huge online outfits.

Trend Validation and Social Proof

Social proof is another theme that comes out as a leading topic in the research of Trending Now recommendations. Signaling popularity and mass approval, these recommendations justify a consumer decision and neutralize a feeling of risk. Trend validation is a vital factor in perception of the apparel retail, as fashion preferences are determined by societal influence.

Trending products are usually considered by consumers as stylish, acceptable, and safe products. This sense increases the trust and satisfaction levels and promotes the positive views on the recommendation functions based on AI and the retailer.

Trust, Transparency, and Algorithms Influence

Consumer perception in AI-based retail setting is a vital factor that is determined by trust. According to literature, consumers get more responsive to the recommendation, when they trust the algorithm that is behind it. Openness in the process of creating the recommendations of the “Trending Now” has a positive impact on the belief and acceptance.

Non-transparency or such a perception of manipulation can however cause skepticism. The consumers will doubt about the popularity of the trends, whether they are truly popular or are marketed strategically. Thus, to ensure a good perception by the consumer, transparency and ethical implementation of AI are necessary individualization.

Managerial Implications

The results of this research have a number of practical implications to the retailers of apparel. First, retailers ought to model AI-powered recommendation of Trending Now that would be a true reflection of consumer behavior as opposed to voluntarily promotional purposes. Real trend is more authentic, increases trust and credibility.

Future Research

Future studies can be either primary or mixed method, which empirically validates the perception of the consumers towards AI-based recommendations of Trending Now. Longitudinal research would be able to track the dynamics in perception over time, whereas qualitative research would give more insight into the feelings of consumers and ethical issues in relation to AI in the fashion retail sector.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the consumer perception of AI-based Trending Now suggestions in clothing retailing in relation to the overall secondary research method. The results show that there is a major impact about such recommendations in consumer perception because they make it easier, build social proof, and influence trust. Simultaneously, the issues of transparency and individuality precondition the necessity of the balanced implementation.

The paper is a contribution to the existing literature since it combines the AI-based recommendation system with the consumer perception in the clothing retail. Regarding the managerial implications, the research highlights that ethical and transparent AI strategies that focus on the consumer have the potential to improve the level of trust and long-term retail success.

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