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Brick and Mortar Retail, Online Shopping and Everything in Between: How Technology is Being Integrated into the Fashion Industry

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Brick and Mortar Retail, Online Shopping and Everything in Between: How Technology is Being Integrated into the Fashion Industry

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By Kera Bussey-Sims

Background

- In this digital age, technology is being integrated into every aspect of human life. My goal was to learn more about the various ways that technological advancements have changed, and will continue to change, the way people shop for clothing. I chose to research the technological integration from the perspective of an original brick-and-mortar establishment (Nordstrom) as well as the perspective of an online retailer (Amazon Fashion).
- Applying my knowledge of business practices, supply chain methods and marketing, in addition to hands-on experience gained during my trip to Seattle, Washington, I have written a research paper that summarizes different technologies that are changing the shopping experience in-store and online.

Methods

- **Small Independent Project:** I traveled to Seattle, Washington for three days during which I conducted interviews with four Fashion Forecasters at the Nordstrom Fashion Office and conducted an interview with a Senior Product Manager of Echo Look at the Amazon Headquarters.
- **Independent Research:** This semester, I have conducted my own research with the guidance of Dr. Glenn Bryan. This has included database research as well as reading academic journals and additional online resources.

Small Independent Project: Seattle, Washington

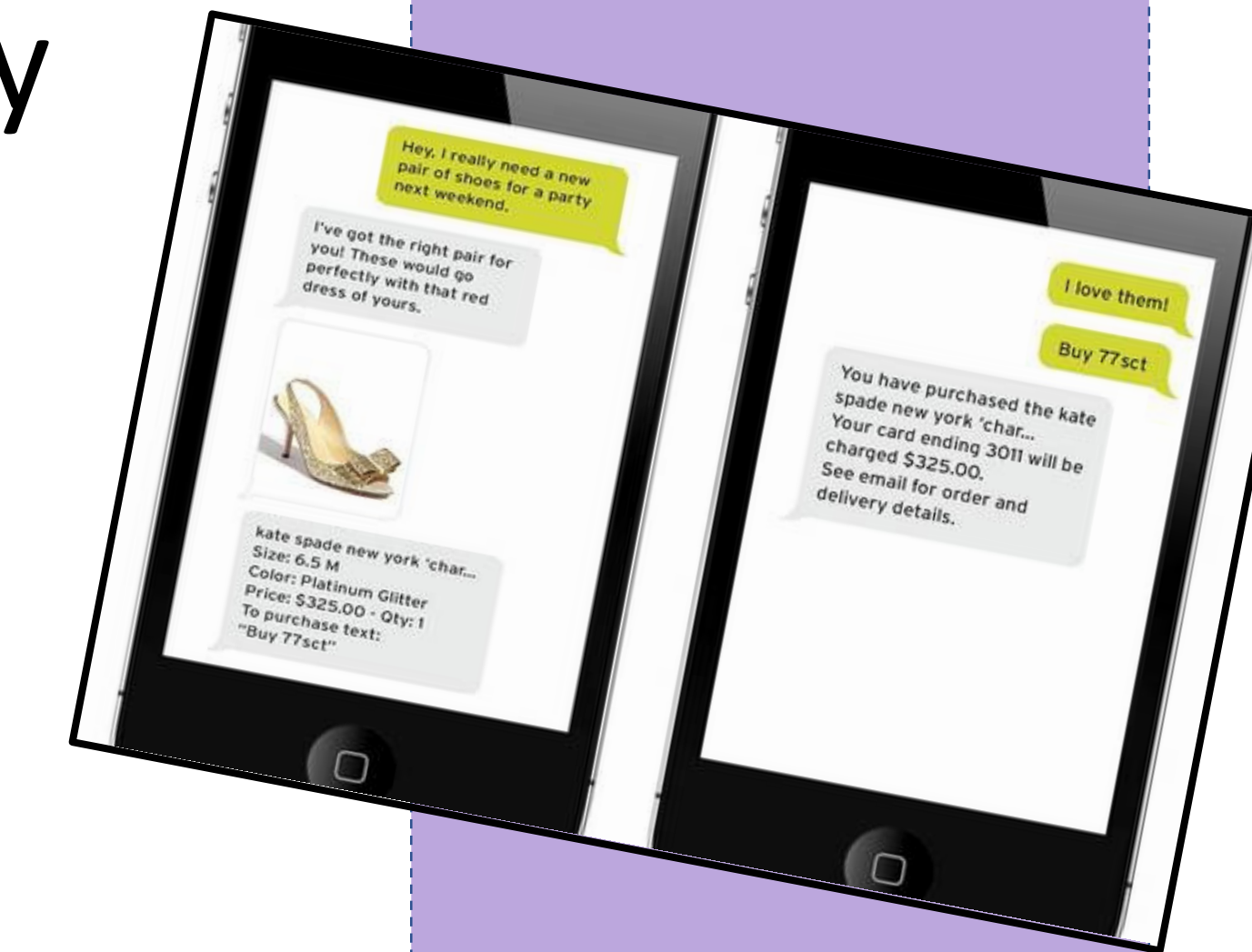
- I assumed that the increased integration of technology in fashion was beneficial for the consumer, but detrimental for employees in the fashion industry.
- Technology can actually work as beneficial tool for fashion employees instead of posing a threat to their careers.
- For example, subscription box services, though they are based online, require a human interpretation of the Style Profile.
- Fashion Forecaster, Jennifer, stated that the advancements in technology have benefited her team due to the ease of accessibility of runway shows and street style from all around the world in just a few clicks. A computer will never be able to provide the same storytelling that a human can. Her position requires cultural experience, historical knowledge and creativity that an AI could not supply.



NORDSTROM

Nordstrom

- Strong focus on customer service: high touch
- **Company-wide ordering system:** Sales associates can view availability of any item from any register in the store.
- **TextStyle:** Allows sales associates to send photos of merchandise in their customers' size and preferred color. Customer can respond, "BUY," and their order is instantly placed.
- **Reserve online, Try-on in store:** Through the Nordstrom App, customers can reserve items prior to their arrival.
- **UberRush:** Nordstrom has incorporated technology in delivery by partnering with UberRush for same-day delivery in select locations.



Amazon

- Focus on serving customers through convenience.
- Amazon has a reputation for being a well-priced, convenience shop, not an online retailer that is optimized for merchandising luxury brands with high price tags. This has dissuaded many luxury brands from selling their products through Amazon Fashion.
- **Data:** Access to a vast amount of gives the company insight into every single step of the consumer purchase journey from awareness to loyalty creating opportunities for Amazon Fashion to identify trends faster and capitalize on them through advertising and reproduction of trends through their own private labels.
- **Echo Look:** Retains all the same capabilities (such as providing news, reading audiobooks, setting alarms, providing weather updates, and controlling smart home devices) as its predecessor, but the Echo Look has a build-in camera and style assistant.
- **Style Check:** Echo Look feature that allows users to submit two photographs in two different outfits and provides the user with a second opinion as to which outfit is better.
- **Private Labels:** Since 2009, Amazon has experimented with producing their own private label. April 2016 marked the seven years of AmazonBasics label and now carries over 900 products.



The Future of Retail

To remain a competitive retailer, it is vital to transition towards omni-channel selling; incorporating more technology and redefining the purpose of a physical retail store.

- **Connected Wall:** Displays photos, runway shows, anything on a social platform. Customers can also browse looks, order drinks, and reserve a fitting room.
- **React tables:** When items are placed on this table, the display will pull up recommendations, available sizes, and similar products.
- **Smart Mirror:** Customers can adjust lighting, call a sales associate and complete purchases in their fitting room. The mirror uses RFID tagging to suggest other products and pull item information.
- **RFID tagging:** Use of electromagnetic fields to transfer data from physical objects to digital touch points.

Results

I have found that both online and brick-and-mortar retailers are shifting towards an omni-channel (integration of online, social media, in-store and mobile) approach by implementing new technologies such as RFID tagging, digital fitting rooms and subscription boxes.