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VIRTUAL REALITY AS A NEW MEANS OF CREATION, PRODUCTION AND AUDIOVISUAL COMMUNICATION IN FASHION

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ABSTRACT

The research is an analysis of the advantages that virtual fashion has created in fashion communication since the COVID 19 pandemic began in 202 and its link to the different phases involved in fashion processes.

INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic, created by Covid 19, has produced a paradigm shift/ change. While the real world slows down, the virtual world speeds up exponentially. Life is experienced from the audiovisual medium, precipitating new communication systems through various diverse screen formats. This context offers virtual fashion the opportunity to permanently establish itself within the industry. In an April 2019 article in Vogue Business it was considered that virtuality in the field of fashion was in a very incipient phase and that it would take about ten years to fully implement it (McDowell, 2019). The pandemic has exponentially accelerated this metamorphosis.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The primary methodological approach is qualitative, which allows the researcher to get close to the heart of a subject. It employs auto-ethnography through a reflection of the authors professional and educational experience in the fashion industry. Observational and object based research was adopted to study the meticulous review changes in fashion that have happened, which have been reflected in media, brand and international fashion week websites and commercial platforms, as well as social networks. In addition, conferences, exhibitions and fashion shows have been analyzed throughout during the transitional process. This has been complemented through secondary research that has reviewed relevant books, doctoral thesis and scientific articles that established how the approach of this article has been sparsely researched within the scientific field.

STUDY AREAS

Communication has always been fundamental in the field of fashion because without promotion and dialogue with the potential user, fashion is meaningless. Virtuality opens up new possibilities in this field, also affecting other processes of fashion such as design, production, marketing and sensory experience.

#FIRETALKWITHME, curated by Ana Locking at CentroCentro of the Madrid's City Hall, is one of the first exhibitions that focuses on the singularities that emerged

in fashion communication during the first phase of the pandemic. It was a compilation of the most relevant fashion brand campaigns of the international scene for 2020. In this public exposal, a trend towards audiovisual, digitization and virtuality could be observed.

Fashion shows /catwalks, as well as exhibitions and other fashion events, have become a highly relevant case study of virtuality. This fact is reflected in all the calendars of the international fashion weeks. Streaming supplants reality, but new formats are also emerging that are closer to the concept of fashion film and that represent innovative ways of presenting collections. The show of an artistic nature is transformed into a film whose script accompanies the concept of the collection. In addition, the viewer decides which model to choose before it does not even come into existence.

Virtual reality also opens the way for the treatment of fashion not only as a creative industry but more linked to a piece of art, sculptures in motion, in which things can happen that would never be possible in the real world subjected to gravity and economic and material conditioning factors. The characterization and setting are defined according to the objectives of each project, allowing solutions outside the conceptual limitations of the physical world.

The fashion shows of the international fashion weeks in New York, London, Milan and Paris Fashion Weeks have been broadcast in digital format in the last editions. Their analysis allows us to identify that the vast majority of brands have opted for the fashion film format with real models and clothes. However, those who have dared with virtual reality are anecdotal. Among them, Accidental Cutting by Eva Iszoro stands out, who with her collection for spring summer 2021 “Apocalypse the new reality” (referring to the Covid 19 pandemic) (see Figure 1) has been the only one who has opted for this format at London Fashion Week in the edition September 2020. In her collection: KONSUM autumn winter 2021, Iszoro goes further, participating in the virtual show through her own avatar. Meanwhile, on the New York catwalk, Pizzaslime surprises with The Shows a virtual proposal in the format of an advertising spot directed by Cole Kush and Dan Streit. Another brand that joined the virtuality on that same catwalk was OqLiq for its autumn winter 2021 collection. Philipp Plein in Milan has shown a totally virtual fashion film, with recordings that tend to be spectacular, with phantom avatars.

In the field of entertainment, we find a particularly noteworthy performative event: Le Bal de Paris by Blanca Li. It is an immersive live show in virtual reality.

Regarding the design phase, the creative substitutes / complements the pencil and 20th century vector design programs with specific software for virtual garment design. The concepts associated with pattern making, confection, budget, etc. are maintained and amplified in a single digital platform, favoring the work of the creative team in a delocalized way.

The mannequin/ stand is replaced by the avatar, whose measurements and appearance are customized to adapt it to the body needs required by the design.

New companies and fashion design consultancies emerge whose professional profiles are associated with the audiovisual and video game industry, such as Incommon Sense Studiö, Pin Attack, The Fabricant, Noform or Seddi.

The production model changes. The promotion of the pre-order concept not only allows the alteration of the order between production and commercialization to promote the absence of stock and, therefore, sustainability, but also the optimization of the study of purchasing trends by being able to recreate great diversity of models with chromatic alternatives, textures, applications, etc. An example of this can be found in the Swedish brand Atacac. Founded in 2016 by Rickard Lindqvist, it stands as a paradigm of this type of commercialization / production. In 2020 it led to the founding of [a] industri, leaving the leadership in Atacac, a consultancy dedicated to the production of garments with cutting-edge digital production systems.

In relation to commercialization, the concept of e-commerce or online store is not new, but the utilization of virtual garments and other fashion objects it is. However, the impossibility of moving during the massive confinements experienced at a global level, as well as the direct social encounters, have led to its rise in record time.

Real storefronts have been replaced by hyper-realistic virtual formats, having to find innovative ways to connect with the consumer through images and videos that confuse/confound the human eye. The coordination between virtual space and avatar offers possibilities that favor a much more flexible user experience by being able to define and alter the shape, background, movement, transparency, scale, detail, point of view, soundtrack and also personalization through the dressing room concept.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Virtual fashion blurs the traditional boundaries between the design, production, marketing and communication phases, altering their order to suit needs.
2. Fashion becomes a more sustainable system from all points of view.
3. The hyper-realism achieved does not allow to visually distinguish reality from fiction.
4. The work structure model changes, promoting a mainstreaming of the teams towards more audiovisual profiles and new immersive and sensory experiences. It also facilitates internationalization, relocation and teleworking/telecommuting. By reducing contact, it is a safer means of expression in times of pandemic.
5. Computer science and programming make it possible to occupy new market niches linked to custom design versus standard sizing.
6. Possibility of testing the prototypes in many different fabrics establishing a comparison between their behaviors.
7. A more fluid link between traditional production systems, associated with fabrics, and digital ones, associated with 3D printing and laser cutting, among others.
8. The custom avatar replaces the standardized mannequin. Or it can be omitted.
9. The scenarios are also personalized, generating new environmental possibilities at the meeting point between the brand and the consumer. This enhances the user experience.
10. The body is not designed as a static but dynamic entity, being able to define body movement and trajectories for specific fashion shows and presentations for each client.

11. The camera can film from any angle and zoom allows the analysis of the garment from the fiber to the distance as a drone. This new look allows the revision of the traditional fashion shows standards.

12. The design avoiding the gravity, alien to that one of the physical world, allows us to propose unusual/uncommon/ extraordinary scenes.

13. The versatility of virtual fashion is so wide that it allows both maximum adaptation to the market and the emergence of solutions that expand the spectrum of creative fashion to unimaginable limits.

14. The physical fashion product is questioned as the only one likely to be sold, to generate income for a fashion brand or audiovisual artist. Fashion is more open than ever to making profits in other fields such as cinema, video games or advertising. They are also conceived as digital piece of art encrypted with codes such as NFT Non Fungible Tokens, capable of being signed and sold to art collectors.

The final conclusion that is drawn from this research is that it is intuited to be at a turning point that implies a definitive paradigm shift/ change. Despite being in an incipient phase, whose evolution is still uncertain, it has enormous possibilities that become far-reaching/ transcendental.

Figure 1



Note. Image from show presented at official schedule of London Fashion Week September 2020, *Apocalypse the new Reality* SS 21. Fashion brand: Accidental Cutting- Eva Iszoro.

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