

A Minecraft-style landscape featuring a field of purple and green pixelated flowers in the foreground. In the background, several hot air balloons with plaid patterns are floating against a clear blue sky. The scene is rendered in a blocky, pixelated style characteristic of the game.

# Digital Fashion: Seizing the Market Opportunity in 2023 & Beyond

BRITISH  
FASHION × true  
COUNCIL

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# BRITISH FASHION COUNCIL



## BFC preface

The British Fashion Council is a not-for-profit organisation focused on the relentless innovation, responsible growth and amplification of the British fashion industry. We champion British fashion as a creative force on the world stage by pioneering world-class programmes that unlock and elevate British creative talent. This is fuelled by an extraordinarily diverse community of advocates, icons, experts and fans.

Fashion is a universal language. It fuels cultures, empowers identity, elevates the everyday and is appreciated by generation after generation for its extraordinary creativity.

No other country in recent history has produced more world-class designers than Great Britain. Beyond our remarkable spectrum of home-grown businesses across the global industry, our creativity fuels some of the most iconic, valuable and loved brands on the planet. As an industry in the UK, we employ over three quarters of a million people and we make an enormous contribution to our economy, £29B to GDP, and to our national reputation in global culture.

The BFC partnered with True Search, specialists in executive search for leadership in technology and gaming, to create this report. It focuses specifically on digital fashion: the market opportunity today in 2023, what to expect in the future, the talent needed, the reasons for engagement, and those who are already doing great work in this space.

The report interviews BFC patrons, designer members, international brands, and innovators in fashion, gaming, technology and after-effects. The ambition is to understand the opportunity and create an action plan for those interested in entering the space with varying degrees of budget, and to understand why it is important as they make decisions for the future growth of their business.

This will inform how the BFC engages in the space, how we evolve our global platforms to amplify British talent, and it will inform the programme for our BFC community, including the designers, brands and individuals that sit as a part of our ecosystem. As we help to prepare business for the future, it is vital that we explore evolving sustainability practices and new frontiers of innovation.

The opportunities are exciting. This report considers new technologies, the opportunities of AI, meaningful customer engagement, the sustainability upside and talent.

**Caroline Rush | CEO, British Fashion Council**

Image: Chet Lo  
AW23 FOH  
Haydon Perrior



## true preface

True Search and the British Fashion Council are delighted to partner for the following research into the treasure trove of opportunities that digital fashion presents today and how to build the capabilities to seize them.

As a leading technology-focused executive search firm, True has spent the last decade recruiting talent at the intersection of creative industries and break-of-the-wave technologies. In this time, we have watched the once distinct verticals of gaming, media, entertainment and sport converge as the definition of content has transformed.

Consumers, no longer satisfied with passive consumption, now have the tools to co-create: they expect agency in the creative development of their experiences, products and communities. The entwined technological shifts towards dematerialisation and decentralisation<sup>1</sup> are increasingly allowing this agency to become a reality.

Within this context, the gaming sector has transformed into a universal pastime, surpassing the size of the rest of the ecosystem put together. In a bid to show up where culture is happening, the fashion world has taken note and entered the fray.

We define digital fashion as the activities associated with how we express ourselves through garments in digital worlds. We at True Search believe that these activities are here to stay and that we are on the precipice of their next wave of adoption.

Together with the British Fashion Council, we've interviewed over 30 emerging leaders within digital fashion and packed this report full of useful advice for novices and evangelists alike: from the designers taking their first steps into the industry, to the executives sitting at the top of the largest luxury groups.

**Rebecca Simmonds | Principal, True Search**

methodology

# BFC x True

30+ interviews with industry experts from leading brands, virtual spaces, investors and consultancies. 55% of our contributors are either British or work for UK-based businesses. This percentage was relatively simple to maintain due to the sheer amount of talent coming from the region. A number of brands we interviewed were unable to be accredited, due to their inability to go on the record on the subject at this stage. We have also pulled qualitative information from a vast range of different sources in order to provide a concise view of the industry today.

**“The best opportunities so far have come from London and Paris... I would say over 50-60% of Red DAO’s portfolio companies are from these cities. It is really interesting to see geographically where the strongest talent has come from so far.**

**Megan Kaspar** | Emerging Technology Investor and Founding Member of Red DAO, the world’s first fashion-focused decentralised autonomous organisation

Image: Megan Kaspar digitally dressed in Fendi by DRESSX, shot by Alberto González for Haute Living

# executive summary

Digital fashion describes how we express ourselves through virtual clothing, powered by cutting-edge frontier technologies, in virtual, physical and augmented environments.

The immediate market opportunity for these offerings today centres around attracting the next generation of consumers; revolutionising customer engagement capabilities through the development of communities of passion; and accessing a much richer and immediate dataset of customer preferences. Digital design practices are being adopted across the industry, and, as a result, the infrastructure to produce digital fashion is already in place. What is missing is an understanding of the market opportunity and how relatively easy it is to capture.

In the mid-term, however, digital fashion has the potential to help solve every major challenge that the fashion industry and its brands are facing: transparency, traceability, textile waste, and returns.

Digital offerings will also create more commercial value for brands at every stage of this lifecycle: from capturing downstream revenue after the initial purchases in the secondary markets, to crowdsourcing strategic intelligence on forecasting, to building more immersive, cohesive, and thus attractive omnichannel customer journeys. They allow a more meaningful and symbiotic relationship between creator and consumer, and offer the ability to be “beyond creative,” unconstrained by the materiality of fabric, the practicalities of IRL design, or even gravity.

Digital fashion is a game changer. The executives that see these changes in consumer behaviour early and capitalise on them will become the most successful and sought-after leaders as the next wave of adoption hits.

This report does not suggest that digital fashion will become a brand’s most important category overnight, because neither the technology nor consumer behaviour is there yet. It does, however, suggest that building an offering today and gaining insights from experimentation across the space should be seen as a gateway into a future revenue driver—a gateway with a relatively low opportunity cost.



Image:  
The Doge Crown,  
designed by  
Dolce & Gabbana  
and purchased  
by Red DAO  
in October 2021



## Digital Fashion Frontier Technologies

- Blockchain
- Generative AI
- Augmented Reality
- Gaming Engines
- Machine Learning
- 5G



# BFC & True's Digital Fashion Action Plan

We asked all our contributors what advice they would offer up-and-coming brands considering building their first digital offering. Five key themes emerged:

## **Incorporate Digital Design Practices**

Emerging digital prototyping and design tools improve the sustainability, efficiency and quality of physical production and free designers to think beyond the limits of the physical world.

## **Use Digital Fashion as a Forum to Test, Learn and Iterate**

Digital fashion offers a space for experimentation with relatively low barriers of entry and low risk. Stay agile, assess resonance, adjust, and adapt your strategy accordingly. There is no playbook, no right or wrong answer: Find out what works for you!

## **Find Your Community**

Learn about the various virtual environments and the communities that frequent them. You will be able to build better, more loyal brand followings and an engaged digital community by designing with native creators and keeping the capabilities of these specific platforms in mind.

## **Crowdsource Creativity**

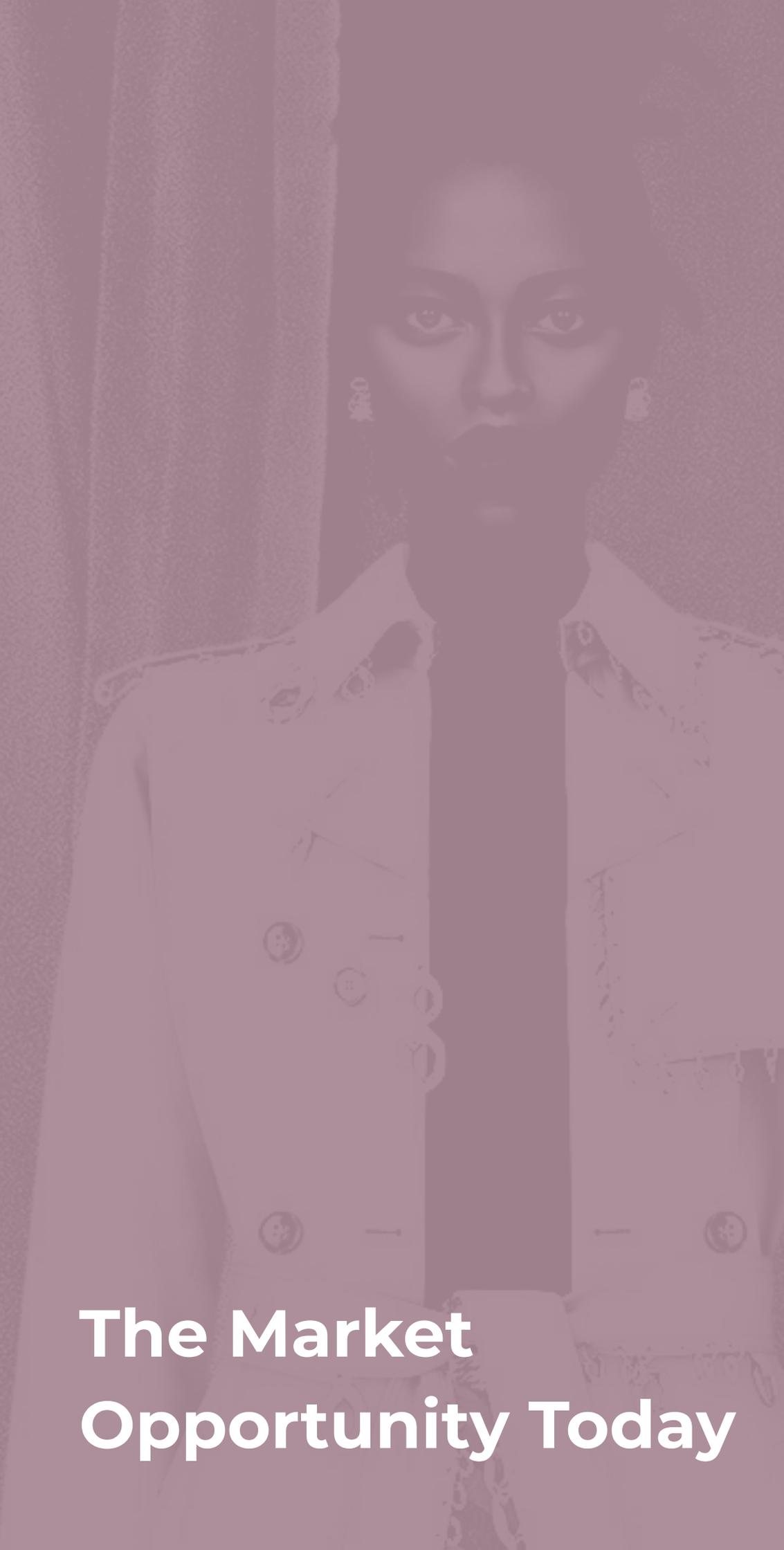
Use the disintermediated relationship between creator and consumer that digital fashion provides to crowdsource ideas from your communities for design, merchandising and branding decisions. Give your communities the ability to make decisions on what is produced and when.

## **Invest in Talent Today**

See digital fashion as a future revenue driver for your business. Partner with, hire and upskill talent in order to capture this opportunity. Build your capabilities to capture and utilise the data and insights on your customer base that the medium provides.

Image: DREST Supermodels Launch, December 2020





# The Market Opportunity Today

the market opportunity today

# Distinguishing Between Signal & Noise

“When I distinguish between signal and noise, I look at Ethereum's transaction volume in USD being more than that of Visa's. I look at Fortnite's apparel revenue amounting to more than the total revenue of Burberry. I look at the fact that Roblox has more time spent on a daily basis than TikTok does. The September issue of Vogue China had an entirely digital design on the cover. I look at these things and say, 'This is too big not to be a movement.'”

## Alice Delahunt

Former Chief Digital and Content Officer at Ralph Lauren and Global Director of Digital and Social at Burberry. Founder and CEO of SYKY, a 2023 World Economic Forum technology pioneer, blockchain-enabled incubator, marketplace and community for digital designers and consumers.



Image: SYKY, created when the SYKY team briefed Midjourney to design the store windows of a minimalistic, futurist luxury brand inspired by the architecture of Ancient Greece.



**The digital identity space could generate more than \$600B by 2030 <sup>2</sup>**

Web3 Studios

the market opportunity today

## Sizing the Market

Given the industry's nascency, most leading brands have refrained from making any commercial data on revenue available. In this absence, the findings of businesses such as blockchain data provider Covalent present some of the most relevant reference points to understand the potential commercial value of digital fashion today. In February 2023, Covalent reported that Nike had earned \$185M dollars in NFT sales revenue and generated \$1.3B in NFT sales volume since mid-2021, making them the most successful brand in the space.<sup>3</sup>

In August 2022, leading Web3 financial advisory and investment boutique Web3 Studios conducted an analysis on how big the digital identity <sup>4</sup> economy will be by 2030. They aggregated metaverse estimates from leading research and consulting firms to land on an estimated market value between \$470 and \$650B. They also compiled average market size estimates from leading companies across every digital identity vertical and pressure-tested them with industry experts, resulting in a digital identity economy worth an estimated \$640B by 2030.<sup>5</sup>

the market opportunity today

## Navigating Uncertainty

2023 is a markedly different and more fragile macroeconomic environment than the preceding years, which has significantly shifted consumer—and therefore the fashion industry’s—behaviour.

Rising inflation rates across most major economies are continuing to challenge the market, demanding an entirely new style of governance for businesses prioritising profitability over the more recent prevailing sentiment of “growth at all costs.”

Geopolitical developments, such as the Ukraine war, have further disrupted an already pressurised global supply chain and exacerbated a global energy crisis.

The world map for growth in retail and technology has shifted, with a larger proportion of addressable audiences sitting in regions such as APAC and MENA and away from maturer markets such as NA and EMEA.

The continuous decline of the cryptocurrency market from mid-2022 created a cascade of challenges for players in the space. This has been accompanied by a “metaverse winter,” a decline in consumer interest in Web3 and subsequent cynicism.

The 2022 changes in EU legislation requiring brands to provide transparency in the traceability of their products have increased the scrutiny brands are facing for their damaging environmental and social impact.<sup>6</sup>

According to Crunchbase, global venture funding in Q2 2023 decreased by 18% each quarter to \$65B; a 49% decrease compared to the second quarter of 2022, when startup investment totalled \$127B.<sup>7</sup>

Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] CGI and motion capture digital fashion design and creation for H&M's Metaverse Design Story campaign on model Vittoria Ceretti

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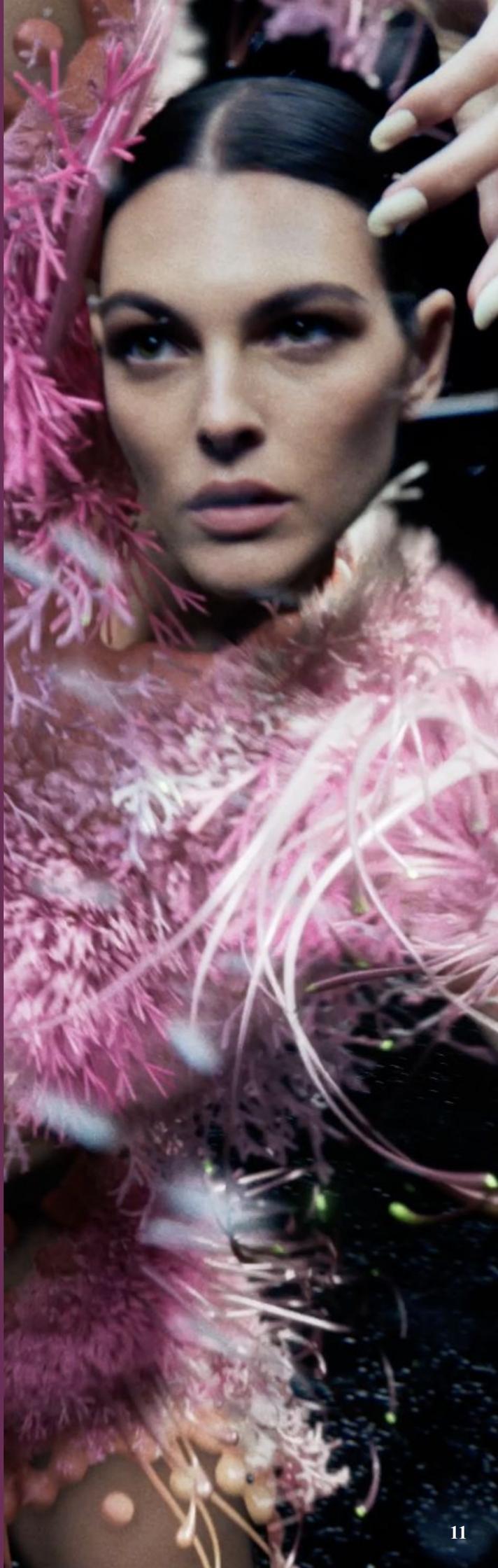




Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] CGI and motion capture digital fashion design and creation for H&M's Metaverse Design Story campaign on model Vittoria Ceretti

## Implications for Talent

As a result of all the above, the need for talent that understands how to work in both legacy and digital fashion environments effectively has never been more acute. Many of the leaders that have emerged across the digital fashion ecosystem have little experience in a market of this nature and are therefore less well versed in the style of leadership it requires.

The access to and support of experienced operators and corporate innovators able to balance the pace and agility needed to move with the times with robust general management will become a key ingredient for success in the space.

# Digital Fashion Timeline: 2023 at a Glance

Much of the foundational regulatory and legislative infrastructure to allow for further development of the space was laid in the first half of 2023. It's also been a year of innovation in the fields of wearables and generative AI.

## March

### **Metaverse Fashion Week Returns for its Second Year**

*Decentraland's second annual Metaverse Fashion Week saw 60+ leading brands in attendance, but only 26,000 unique visitors compared with the 108,000 attendees in 2022.<sup>8</sup>*

## June

### **The Apple Vision Pro and AI-assisted avatar creation tool debuts at the Apple Conference**

*The tech behemoth unveiled its long-awaited first AR headset enabling the most immersive blended reality experiences to date, equipped with an AI-assisted avatar creation tool for photo-realistic avatars: the perfect visualisation tool and canvas for the photo-realistic garments of the future.<sup>10</sup>*

### **The US House Committee on Science, Space and Technology AI Hearings**

*The committee held a hearing to discuss the ethical implications of AI and the importance of responsible governance. AI has the potential to revolutionise core processes of fashion production and retail, but the fashion industry will ultimately have to face important questions surrounding topics like intellectual property rights, artistic licence, deep fakes, etc.<sup>12</sup>*

## February

### **Hermès wins US trademark trial over “MetaBirkin” NFTs**

*Luxury player Hermès takes artist Mason Rothschild to U.S. District Court over the release of his 100 “MetaBirkin” NFTs and wins, setting a strong precedent for intellectual property rights in the virtual world as well as IRL.*

## May

### **CLO Virtual Fashion and Epic Games announce landmark partnership**

*CLO Virtual Fashion, a global leader in digital garment solutions, and Epic Games, the developer of Fortnite, announced that the companies purchased shares in each other due to their strong belief “that digital garments will play a significant role in the future of digital entertainment and metaverse platforms.”<sup>9</sup>*

### **EU lawmakers approve the most comprehensive regulatory framework for digital assets to date**

*The EU brings crypto-assets, crypto-assets issuers and crypto-asset service providers under a foundational regulatory framework, aiming to “protect investors, preserve financial stability, while allowing innovation and fostering the attractiveness of the crypto-asset sector.”<sup>11</sup>*

Image: SYKY, created when SYKY briefed Midjourney to imagine a Spring / Summer menswear runway show with highly intricate moth-inspired garments with a neutral color palette, April 2023



the market opportunity today

# Let's Get Phygital!

“Phygital” strategies connect physical garments with digital counterparts and find new ways to integrate virtual and in-real-life (IRL) experiences.<sup>12</sup> This form of physical-digital fashion means objects that can be worn in real-life and can also hold value digitally, either as a wearable in a virtual reality such as gaming skin, or as an on-chain asset that represents ownership, authenticity, proof of attendance, and other utilities such as an NFT.<sup>13</sup>

Daniella Loftus—British founder of digital fashion house DRAUP, pioneering content platform This Outfit Does not Exist, and a founding Red DAO member—subdivides phygital fashion into three categories:

**In Real Life fashion (IRL)**

Physical fashion produced with or alongside a digital backendor twin.

**On Real Life fashion (ORL)**

Digital clothes are rendered onto a photo or video of the wearer.

**Unreal Life fashion (URL)**

A fully digital back end and front end to be worn on avatars.<sup>14</sup>

These three forms of twining will allow online wardrobes to be seen as a complement to our physical ones—to augment and blend, rather than to interfere with or replace.

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Image: Alva Claire wearing Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] non-gendered breastplate 001 digital fashion collection. Worn on Alva Claire live at The Fashion Awards 2022

# Emerging Phygital Technologies

## Gaming Engines

A gaming engine is the software framework designed for the development of video games. Gaming skins are digital costumes in games, a term popularised by Epic Games' Fortnite in 2017. Epic revealed that the business made \$50M from just one line of NFL-inspired skins in 2020.<sup>15</sup>

## Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs)

NFTs are unique digital assets recorded on the blockchain, used to certify both the ownership and authenticity of an item. They also offer creators an opportunity to receive ongoing compensation for their work through royalties.<sup>15</sup> The most prevalent use case today is speculative trading and enabling holders exclusive benefits, such as access to special events, online communities or merchandise.

## Near Field Communication (NFCs)

An NFC is a short-range wireless technology that enables a short-range data exchange between devices in close proximity. By combining NFC tags with NFTs, brands are able to link physical products to their digital twins, providing customers with detailed and updatable information, authentication and traceability. This continuous ability to extract data will enable brands to reward customers or even compensate them for brand loyalty and for wearing items.

## Augmented Reality (AR)

AR overlays virtual objects IRL and in real-time, enabling users to see and interact with virtual content that appears as if it is a part of their immediate surroundings. As hardware such as Apple's Vision Pro becomes more advanced and established, AR will become an increasingly prominent part of the fashion/tech landscape. Eventually we will be able to integrate contextual, in-real-time overlays of augmented reality to augment and customise our physical fashion choices.

**When we began DRESSX, we envisioned it as a fashion tech company. There are various technologies that can be implemented to effectively address the issues we are focusing on. Web3 and blockchain are just two examples. We also heavily rely on augmented reality, machine learning and AI.**

**Natalia Modenova,**  
Co-founder of DRESSX

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Image: DRESSX founders Daria Shapovalova and Natalia Modenova wearing DRESSX art collection and Balm.Labs dresses, digitally dressed by DRESSX.

Photo: Olga Helga



# *true talent tip*

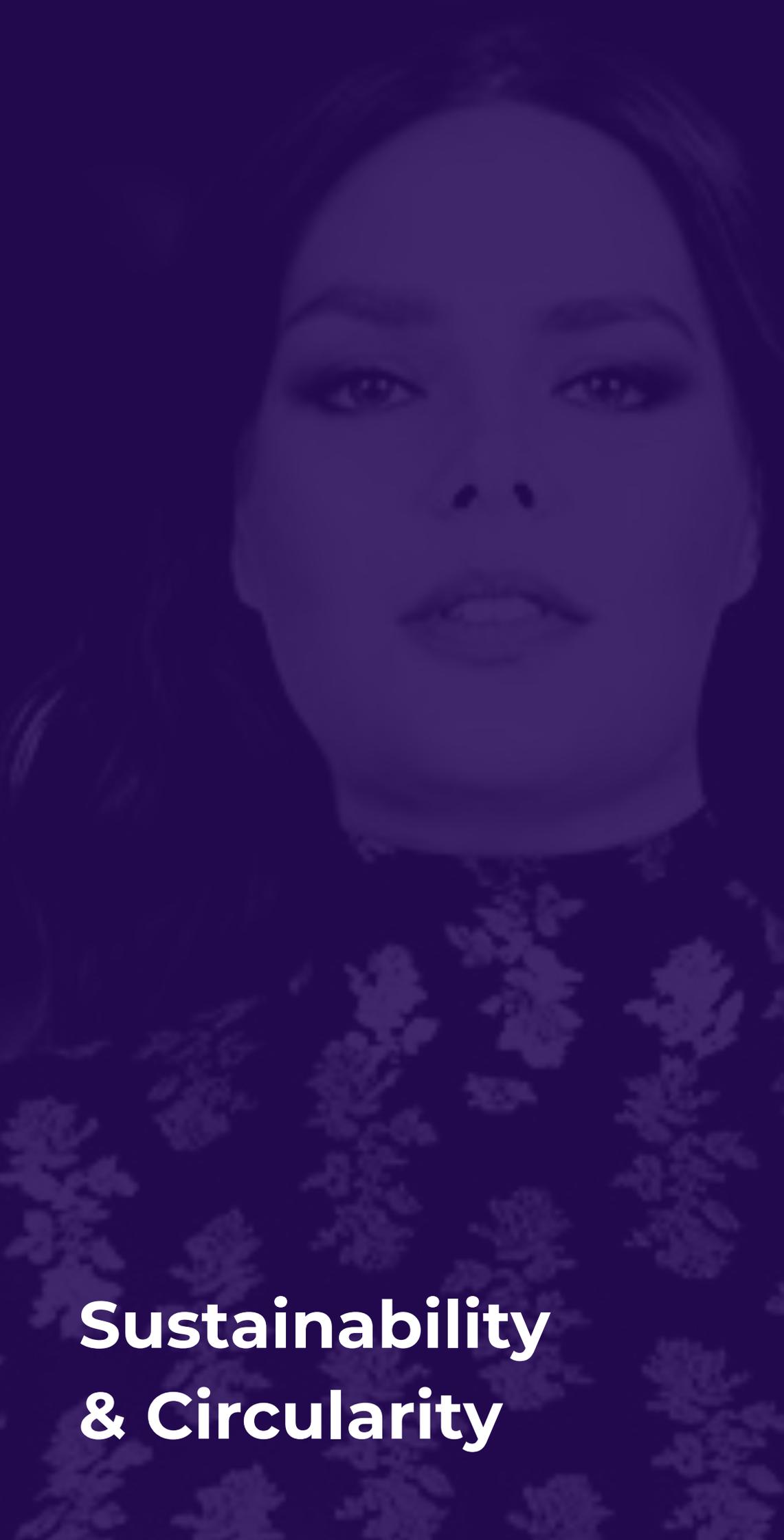
## **Building Data Capabilities**

Only organisations that have invested in building and advancing their data capabilities will be able to fully leverage the value of these emerging phygital technologies. Building an in-house data function, and hiring critical leaders at the VP or C-level, will enable better data collection and drive actionable insights across the business. Hiring senior data leaders to build these capabilities is becoming common-place within the fashion ecosystem, with organisations attracting top talent. Notable placements include Kshitij (KK) Kumara, formerly the chief data officer at Farfetch, and Marie Gulin Merle, formerly chief digital officer, PVH Corp.<sup>16</sup>



**Try augmented  
reality-enabled fashion  
created by Poplar Studio  
for yourself!**

Image: Daniella Loftus wearing design  
by Larissa Castellano Pucci for DRESSX



# Sustainability & Circularity

Image: DREST Supermodels  
Launch, December 2020

Imagery created when the SYKY team briefed Midjourney to design a flowing dress inspired by a butterfly's wing pattern and accompanied by a fashion editorial that showcased the design, April 2023.



sustainability & circularity

## The Sustainable Side of Digital Fashion

“The business model of traditional brands is completely broken: developing seasonal collections or drops, betting on designs, building stock loads of inventory and then praying that everything gets sold. It's very clear that not one single brand in the world has ever consistently sold out everything at full price. It's impossible.

**Gonçalo Cruz**

Co-founder and CEO at PlatformE

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Frontier technologies have the potential to solve many of legacy fashion's pain points when it comes to sustainability. Digital prototyping and design tools such as CLO3D or Browzwear are increasingly being implemented across the industry to improve the sustainability, efficiency and quality of IRL production. The textile waste associated with traditional pattern making, sampling and packaging processes—and the unnecessary strain this puts on global supply chains—are quite simply being innovated away.

From the use of AI prototyping in design, production and marketing process; to tracing the provenance of physical items through NFC tagging; or simply the consumption of digital fashion products and experiences in place of IRL, there are some very clear use cases emerging.

**It's about disrupting the operational process of fashion: how you speed up production, how you make it more sustainable, and how you leverage generative AI for marketing post-production.**

**David Ripert** | CEO at Poplar Studio

Whilst still in its infancy, generative AI has emerged over the last few years with the promise to augment these processes, bringing both physical and digital garments to market faster and more efficiently whilst also improving customer journeys.<sup>17</sup> According to a McKinsey & Company analysis, generative AI could add \$150B, and up to \$275B to the apparel, fashion, and luxury sectors' operating profits over the next three to five years.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the emerging scale-up ecosystem in digital fashion directly address sustainability within their mission statements. At the same time, much of the early claims of Metawashing surrounding blockchain-enabled strategies, particularly the high levels of energy consumption needed for mining on layer-1 blockchains such as Ethereum, are fading. The 'Merge' in September 2022, which saw Ethereum upgrade from its original proof-of-work mechanism to proof-of-stake, saw a 99.95% reduction in the blockchain's energy consumption.<sup>18</sup> Many of these projects are also now created on layer-2 solutions such as Polygon, which require even less energy and gas fees for the end user.



Imagery created when the SYKY team briefed Midjourney to design a flowing dress inspired by a butterfly's wing pattern and accompanied by a fashion editorial that showcased the design, April 2023.

# A Digitally-Enabled Circular Fashion Economy

The twining of digital and physical fashion has the capability to extend the life cycle of physical garments and support the creation of a circular fashion economy. Blockchain-based technologies allow for digital assets to be owned and shared, and at the same time allow the original creator to capture downstream revenue through secondary transactions. Tying physical garments to these digital counterparts will therefore enable fashion to become a value-based asset class, where brands are able to access and commercialise every stage of a garment's lifecycle. The true value of digital assets will not be unleashed until the quality of their digital designs are better understood. British startups such as DRAUP and the Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] have made it their mission to make digital clothes more accessible and their artistry more widely recognised.

Image: Institute of Digital Fashion: 001 IoDF Launch 'An Emblem for Change' IRL x URL Billboard Activation for London Fashion Week 22'



“During the last bull run in the space, digital art was getting all of this attention but digital fashion wasn't. And so I thought, 'Okay, what's the problem?' Originally, I thought it was an infrastructure issue. But there was also just a lack of resonance in terms of what was being created in the space and lack of understanding for why it was valuable.”

**Daniella Loftus**  
Founder and CEO of DRAUP



Experience this activation from the Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] for yourself!

industry spotlight

# The Institute of Digital Fashion



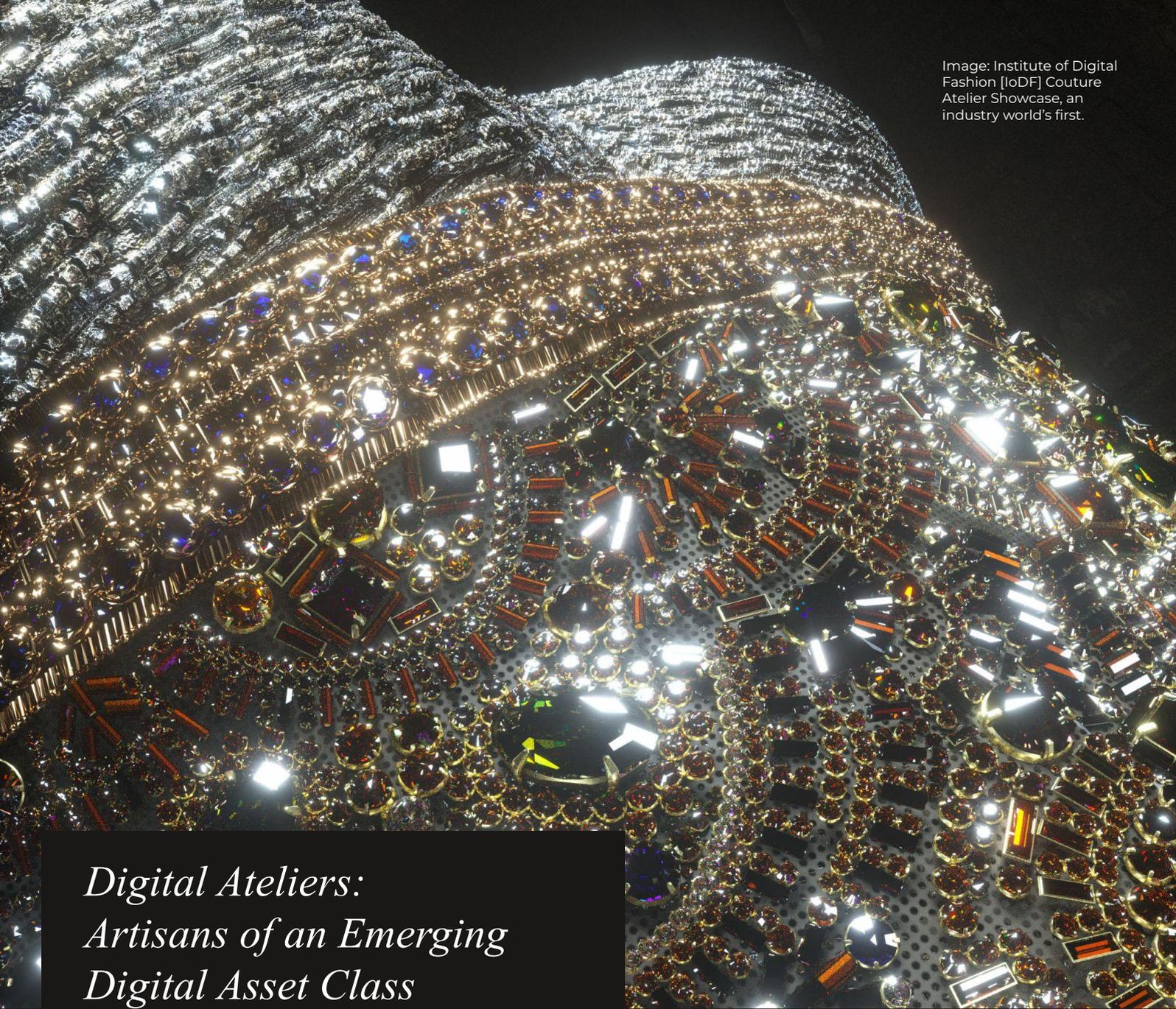
Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF]  
Co-founders Leanne Elliott Young, CEO  
and Cattytay, Creative Director

**Founding IoDF was driven by a powerful vision to revolutionise the fashion landscape, and foster democracy, sustainability and innovation. Our goal was to forge a platform that uses technology as a democratic tool for change.**

**Cattytay and Leanne Elliott Young**

Co-founder and Creative Director at IoDF and Co-founder and CEO at IoDF

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## *Digital Ateliers: Artisans of an Emerging Digital Asset Class*

The Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] is a London-based digital atelier of world-class experts. The team holds six world's firsts in digital fashion, including their famed couture atelier piece shown above. Working side by side with a physical atelier over six months, every digital fitting and fixture was meticulously designed and customized to the millimeter, in line with physical haute couture design standards. This kind of artisanal feat pushes the industry further: to understand craftsmanship of digital garments and their value.

**We share, showcase, and demonstrate what goes on inside our atelier: through social media, through our IRL x URL Academy, and the teaching. Technology isn't a quick fix, and there's no fast route to creative artisan, which is a common misconception that we are here to disprove and educate others towards.**

**Cattytay and Leanne Elliott Young** | Co-founder and Creative Director at IoDF and Co-founder and CEO at IoDF

IoDF has also taken on the role of educator to brands, helping them understand and demystify these technologies.

**We work, studio flow to shop floor, to educate brands on how to create, broadcast and showcase digital and physical creations.**

**Cattytay and Leanne Elliott Young** | Co-Founder and Creative Director at IoDF and Co-founder and CEO at IoDF

### *true talent tip*

**Positions for 3D team members at physical fashion brands have shot up in the last year from non-existent to now a firm place in the workflow. For more context as to where to find this talent, see page 51.**



Image: Damara Inglês, Fabric of Reality with Sutu for RYOT, 2019

sustainability & circularity

# *Broadening the Utility of Digital Assets*

**So many people come to think about interoperability as chiefly a technical problem about the movement of assets through virtual spaces. But right now, the problem is much more about the alignment of economic incentives.**

**Blake Lezenski**

Partner Program Director, Farfetch Dream Assembly Base Camp, Outlier Ventures

Extending the life cycle of digital assets by giving them more utility will be critical to the space's sustainability and rate of adoption. At present, all the virtual spaces where consumers wear digital garments are closed platforms. It is impossible to flaunt your digital clothing across them without purchasing separate items for each platform.

Many see this unification of economies and digital identity as a defining feature of the metaverse, but there are multiple challenges to overcome in order to make this interoperability a reality. First, there must be an establishing of universal standards for systems and open-source technologies. Then, there must be an aligning of economic incentives so that platforms and creators are able to mutually benefit from an interoperable ecosystem.<sup>19</sup>

Once a consumer can take their digital garment from space to space—only then will digital fashion become a truly scalable commerce channel for brands.

## industry spotlight

### Tommy Hilfiger's Multi-Metaverse Hub

Tommy Hilfiger made waves in March 2023 for Metaverse Fashion Week when the brand launched the first-of-its-kind multi-metaverse hub in partnership with 3D technology and virtual reality platform provider Emperia. Consumers were able to explore popular metaverse destinations—like Decentraland, Roblox, and DRESSX—offering a range of immersive experiences, including digital fashion, NFT collections, and virtual try-on options. By incorporating e-commerce functionalities, users were able to purchase physical and digital versions of featured items, including their very own Tommy varsity jacket.<sup>20</sup>

“Our team is focused on how we can get digital fashion into the hands of our consumer, what platform, where, when, and how we can get physical and digital closer together... it allows us to meet our customers' needs and our community faster, in a more sustainable way.”

**Jemma Spiers-Ware,**  
Senior Director, Digital Fashion and Innovation at PVH, Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein

*continued  
on next page*

Image: Tommy Hilfiger  
x Decentraland, MVFW 2023



An AI design competition was hosted within Decentraland, inviting users to leverage the world's creator tools to create a piece of digital fashion in the brand's signature preppy style. The winner's submission was hand selected by Tommy Hilfiger himself, and was created by DRESSX as a digital fashion collectible, AR filter and wearable for Decentraland.<sup>21</sup>

**“I think we were all blown away by how much the community engaged, how much we saw our brand reflected the community's work as well.**

**Jemma Spiers-Ware**

Senior Director, Digital Fashion and Innovation at PVH, Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein

The event served as a powerful proof of concept for interoperability and the potential of creating a highly engaging brand moment with a seamless customer journey across these various metaverses and the Tommy Hilfiger website.



Image:  
Tommy Play  
on Roblox,  
NYFW 2022



# Design & Merchandising

Image: DREST x Prada, Spring 2021

design & merchandising

# *Incorporate Digital Design Practices*

“It’s so cool that nowadays you can create the whole collection of clothes in 3D. You can just put it on Instagram and have people vote or order pieces that are not even produced yet. It takes such a huge weight off in terms of production, sustainability and the process of pattern making.

**Damara Inglês**

Metaverse Designer and Strategist

## **Opportunities for Up-and-Coming Designers**

Made to order models—garments that are designed and made according to a customer’s specifications—are often the launching point for emerging designers’ careers. Augmenting these slow and often wasteful processes with digital design inputs from a brand’s community and twining strategies promises to make production more efficient, sustainable and profitable. Customers are also more likely to be comfortable with longer lead times and higher prices for garments they can already wear digitally and feel they had a hand in creating.



Image: Damara Inglês x DRESSX, Crypto Fashion Week, March 2022

design & merchandising

## Crowdsourcing Creative & Strategic Intelligence

The co-production of design offers some of the most exciting opportunities for innovation in the space. Digital fashion house The Fabricant have perhaps most directly shown the potential of this opportunity through the development of their studio, a “digital fashion platform where anybody can create, own, wear and monetize their unique fashion.”<sup>22</sup>

“Users can combine different raw materials, patterns and trims—uploaded by designers and brands—to make a new unique garment with shared authorship.”<sup>25</sup>

### The Fabricant

The fashion is presented in easily accessible 3D visualisations that are enabled by Epic’s Unreal Engine. The platform itself operates on the Flow blockchain, creating NFTs with secure copyright ownership that allow the seamless distribution of royalties among all co-creators. Utility partners such as Web3 gaming platform The Sandbox and avatar tech company Ready Player Me then enable the interoperability of these NFTs into their partner metaverses.<sup>23</sup>

Image: Larissa Pucci x Sgicreator, Foulara SS21 Campaign



“If you decentralise the creative acts, you’ll mobilise a lot more creative capital. Enlist the community of your most engaged brand fans and consumers to help decide what you make, and then only make what people have said that they want. Feeding your product development, manufacturing and supply chain with digitally-orchestrated design inputs is an absolute game changer.”

### Tareq Nazlawy

President at Science.Magic Studios; Former Senior Director of Growth at Adidas

design & merchandising

# A Forum to Test, Learn & Iterate

Digital fashion environments provide a space to experiment and iterate upon ideas whilst collecting real-time data on how they are landing amongst consumers. Digital designers, unbound by the practicalities of IRL production, and encouraged by the intrinsically more experimental style of a digital audience, may be more comfortable testing fantastical concepts. These ideas are then able to be updated and developed instantly.

“Think beyond the laws of physics—there are so many possibilities for creativity in a digital world, where you aren’t constrained by the materiality of fabric, or gravity!”

**Rachel Waller**

Global VP of Marketing,  
Channel Innovation  
at Burberry

“It really gave me an opportunity to see my work in a new way. With a physical collection, you make it, and then release it, and that’s that. But the digital space gives you this opportunity to push it that one and then another step further.”

**Bradley Sharpe**

Fashion Designer

Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] x Bradley Sharpe for Decentraland Fashion Week: Depicted here Metaverse showroom, NFT wearable and event snapshot March 2022.

**“To brands and designers of any size, I would advise that any digital experimentation or innovation is led by the brand’s own needs and vision first, with the tech following second. It’s better to start with a challenge or a goal, then evaluate if any digital tools can play a role.**

**Maghan McDowell**  
Senior Innovation Editor  
at Vogue Business

**“I have a strong belief in experience-driven moments, ones that are beyond gimmicks or PR stunts... I think the ‘why,’ the creative purpose, is lost with many tech-heavy events where the tech seems to become the primary talking point. The artisanal vocabulary needs to be in context of the tech, not on the side.**

**Leanne Elliott Young**  
Co-founder and CEO at IoDF



Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] Oscar’s Awards 23 IoDF’s collaborative garment digital x physical design with Zac Posen worn by Bailey Bass.

**design & merchandising**

*Utilising Frontier Technologies  
to Support Your Vision (not vice versa)*

industry spotlight

# DREST: Pioneering Virtual Luxury Styling

London-based scale up and True client, DREST, was the first luxury fashion styling mobile game to launch globally. The platform allows players to curate their own editorial looks by dressing hyper realistic supermodel avatars in the latest fashion and beauty looks.

All these virtual items are purchasable IRL through either the brand partners' websites or luxury ecommerce partner, FARFETCH.

These looks are then graded and awarded reward points by other players, which in turn translates into in-game currency, allowing access to a wider array of runway looks, avatars and exotic locations. Over 250 leading brands are featured in the DREST metaverse, which enables them to gather insights on which products are resonating where.

We asked DREST CEO, Lisa Bridgett, what advice she would give to aspiring digital designers:

**“It's not like you're going to design a magnificent skirt and it's going to just exist in that incarnation. Think about how you want its digital interpretation to manifest, how your consumers can feed back into your digital garment to get this beautiful symbiotic relationship in creation... it will open up the level of creativity and innovation.**

**Lisa Bridgett**  
CEO at DREST

**We take real-life fashion and we render it digitally. We've got a content and creative team of 28, responsible for making this fashion beautiful, putting it on 16 different avatar body sizes, and animating it to become the visualisation of luxury.**

**Lisa Bridgett**  
CEO at DREST

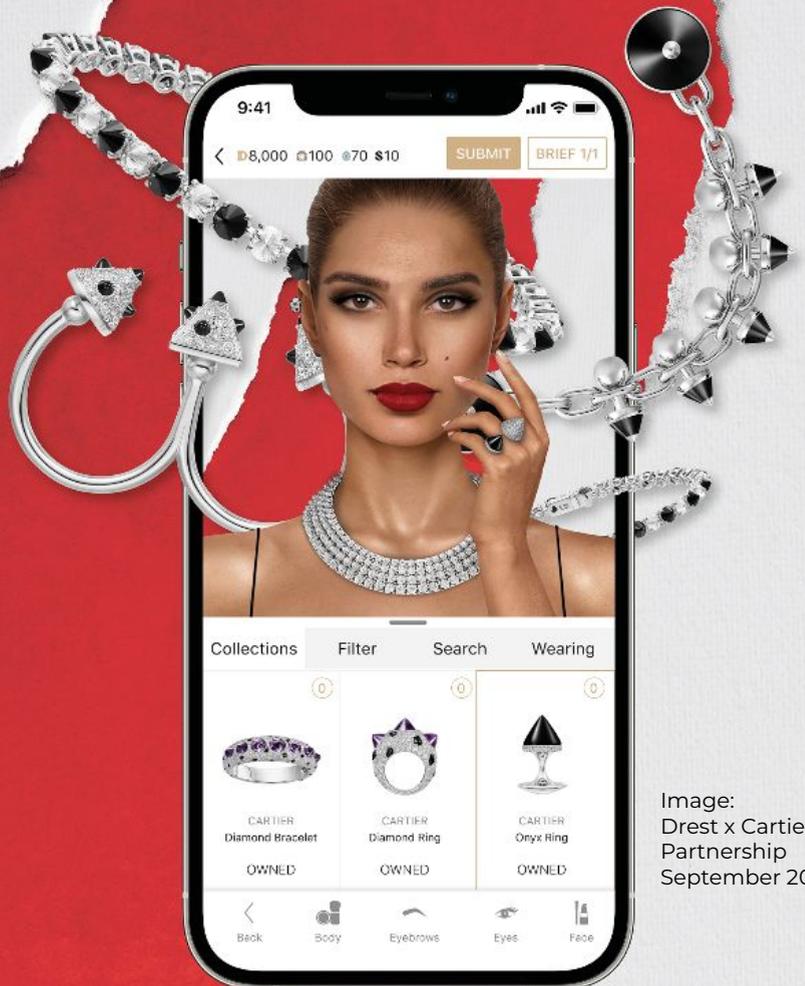


Image:  
Drest x Cartier  
Partnership  
September 2021

# Marketing & Customer Engagement



Image: SYKY, created when SYKY briefed Midjourney to imagine a Spring/Summer menswear runway show with highly intricate moth-inspired garments with a neutral color palette, April 2023.

marketing & customer engagement

# Finding Your Community

**Niche is the new mass market and community is the future of fandom.**

**Cathy Hackl**

Chief Futurist at Journey and Founder of VerseLuxe

Digital fashion offerings allow the creation of more direct and meaningful relationships between brands and communities of consumers. Brand communities help foster an emotional connection with customers that ultimately increases their lifetime value and incentivises them to become brand ambassadors in their own right. These forums also offer a chance to test new ideas and products; measure their satisfaction with existing offerings; and serve as an effective customer support channel. At the same time, blockchain-enabled strategies make it possible for brands to track these customers and their purchase activity across several platforms.

Gaming platforms and other types of gamified social networks, have developed a level of sophistication unseen across the rest of the creative industries when it comes to how they create fandom and leverage real-time insights to deepen the engagement of their communities.

**We want to be visible where culture is happening, and really it's impossible to deny that culture isn't happening across all these kinds of different digital touch points. People are spending more and more time, and more money, on mobile games, digital experiences and digital goods.**

**Ivan Dashkov**

Head of Emerging Marketing Tech and Web3 at PUMA Group



## industry spotlight

# Burberry's Gaming Strategy: Finding the Right Partners

Ahead of true interoperability becoming a reality, building partnerships with gaming platforms remains the only way for brands to reach the 3.1 billion users projected to be spending time and money on these digital goods and experiences by 2027.<sup>24</sup> With so many Web2 and Web3 platforms to choose from, a robust partnerships strategy is paramount to a brand's long-term success in this sphere. British luxury house and BFC Patron Burberry has embraced gaming partnerships as a pillar of its innovation strategy.

Burberry's 2021 / 22 Strategic Report: "Gaming is one of a number of unique spaces where we can trial and assess innovations that embody our values, while also offering an opportunity to share an open creative space with our communities."<sup>25</sup>

Highlights include Burberry's:

- 2021 collaboration with Mythic Games to create their first NFT collection for Blankos Block Party
- One-off drop of its limited edition Lola handbag in Roblox in July 2022
- Esports inclusivity campaign with leading esports organisation Gen.G in July 2022
- November 2022 partnership with cult-classic Minecraft

VP of Marketing and Channel Innovation  
Rachel Waller advises brands seek out partnerships with gaming platforms that share their brand ethos or principles.

**Burberry and Minecraft start from a very similar set of values: rooted in the outdoors, we both believe in the power of adventure, creativity and community. It is that synergy which makes our partnership so true to both our brands, and why it generated this level of excitement amongst players and customers alike... We had a circular flow of inspiration where we included brand motifs in the game, which then appeared on the clothing capsule, which then also appeared back in the game."**

**Rachel Waller** | Global VP of Marketing, Channel Innovation at Burberry

## *true talent tip*

**The more complex the digital fashion ecosystem becomes and the faster its innovation cycles move, the more important it becomes to invest in strong partnerships capabilities. The best place to look for top talent in this space is within the VP or director layer of the gaming platforms' leadership.**



## industry spotlight

# PUMA's Community Building Across Multiple Touchpoints

**There's no playbook for brands. We kind of saw ourselves as a leader, somebody that had to pave the way and create our own way of doing things in these environments.**

**Ivan Dashkov** | Head of Emerging Marketing Tech & Web3 at PUMA Group

We interviewed Ivan Dashkov, Head of Emerging Marketing Tech & Web3 at PUMA, on the many ways the sportswear brand has shown up in both Web3 and Web2 spaces to engage with their communities over the last two years.

Image: PUMA x Meta Avatars, April 2023



**Discord is like the clubhouse where everybody's hanging out, discussing the different projects, and giving us feedback. They're very vocal and active and we do lots to keep them happy because these people are like our brand ambassadors.**

**Ivan Dashkov** | Head of Emerging Marketing Tech and Web3 at PUMA Group

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## The Core Pillars of PUMA's Strategy

### Tokenised and tiered access to brand communities and experiences

September 2022: The brand dropped its first collection of premium 4K NFTs equipped with limited edition redeemable physical sneakers, and first access to future PUMA products, experiences and Discord channel.<sup>26</sup>

March 2023: They celebrated their 75th anniversary with the drop of 10k Super PUMA PFP NFTs. This drop had more storytelling including a video series and NFT comic books based on the characters exhibited on the NFTs.

All these NFTs granted immediate access to PUMA's Discord channel, a free communications app and hotspot for gaming communities to share content with their friends. The Discord community of these PUMA superfans is now 36,000 strong and provides a space to interact with each other and the brand.

### Branded dedicated spaces across IRL x URL Environments

September 2022: PUMA Black Station, the brands "experimental 3D spatial playground"<sup>27</sup> was launched during New York Fashion (NYFW) week.

Their FUTROGRADE show at NYFW featured runway models IRL alongside their avatars in fantastical environments on giant LED video walls.

Those who were unable to attend IRL were able to do so online. Football star Neymar Jr. was 3D scanned and walked the runway in an avatar form.<sup>28</sup>

### Partnerships with studios across the entire Gaming Ecosystem, including:

- NBA 2K: Take Two Interactive
- Metaverse Fashion Week: Decentraland
- Need for Speed: Electronic Arts
- Pokèmon Go: Niantic

### April 2023: Partnership with Meta Avatar Store, the platform to customise avatars across Facebook, Messenger, Instagram and VR

The partnership offers seven lifestyle looks for their inclusive range of body shape and hair type options.

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As PUMA's strategy outlines, digital fashion audiences reward authenticity first, but interacting with communities in an authentic way and investing in their feedback requires commitment and consistency over the long term.

2022 was a record year for the brand with sales increasing by 18.9% to €8.5B whilst its EBITDA increased 15% to €641M.<sup>29</sup> This, in part, was attributed to the momentum of PUMA's Web3 and metaverse strategies.<sup>30</sup>

**Hiring great community managers, who are native to the various social channels your brand enters, is key to the success of these endeavours. They will be able to feed activity, relay constant feedback, and keep a pulse of all developments on these forums. Often the right candidates for these roles are people already participating in these communities.**

*true talent tip*

Image: PUMA x Meta Avatars, April 2023



Image: BFC x Roblox, "The Fashion Awards Experience" November 2021

industry spotlight

## Roblox Capturing the Next Generation of Consumers

Much of the initial activity where notable brands enter digital fashion environments is intended to increase brand awareness across the next generation of consumers. Gen Z consumers are set to account for 40% of the global personal luxury goods market by 2035, gaining a share of the segment's market spend, which has emerged as a critical growth lever for brands.<sup>31</sup> At the same time—as historically relied-upon performance marketing channels such as social media and SEO become increasingly more expensive—it has never been harder to acquire customers.

**Gaming skins are the perfumes of the future.**

**Damara Inglês** | Metaverse Designer and Strategist

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A gaming skin, or avatar fashion item as they are referred to in Roblox, offers a “gateway” purchase at a relatively inexpensive price point for Gen Z and Gen Alpha consumers, akin to a branded perfume or lipgloss.

True client Roblox, an immersive platform for communication and connection, has emerged as the leading destination for brands to experiment with avatar fashion. The platform, which allows players to buy, sell and create virtual items and experiences through a virtual currency called Robux, made headlines in May 2021 when a digital-only Gucci bag sold on its secondary marketplace for more than its IRL counterpart.<sup>32</sup>

1.8 billion digital fashion items and accessories were sold on the platform in 2022.<sup>33</sup> We were lucky enough to discuss why brands are attracted to Roblox with Winnie Burke, Head of Fashion, Luxury, Retail and Beauty Partnerships:

**Brands are looking to connect with our audience. We have 66 million daily active users: these are all digital natives. Our fastest-growing demographic is 17 to 24, whilst 55% of our audience is over the age of 13. This is a very coveted demographic, who are really hard to reach individuals, spending about 2.3 hours a day on Roblox.**

**Winnie Burke** | Head of Fashion, Luxury, Retail and Beauty Partnerships at Roblox

The scale of the Roblox universe can be intimidating to brands looking to enter into a partnership. There is no need to go too big as brands get started. Instead, they recommend a crawl-walk-run strategy.

**They may want to start a little bit smaller with a lower barrier to entry... like creating a digital product for the marketplace, before diving right in with a persistent experience.**

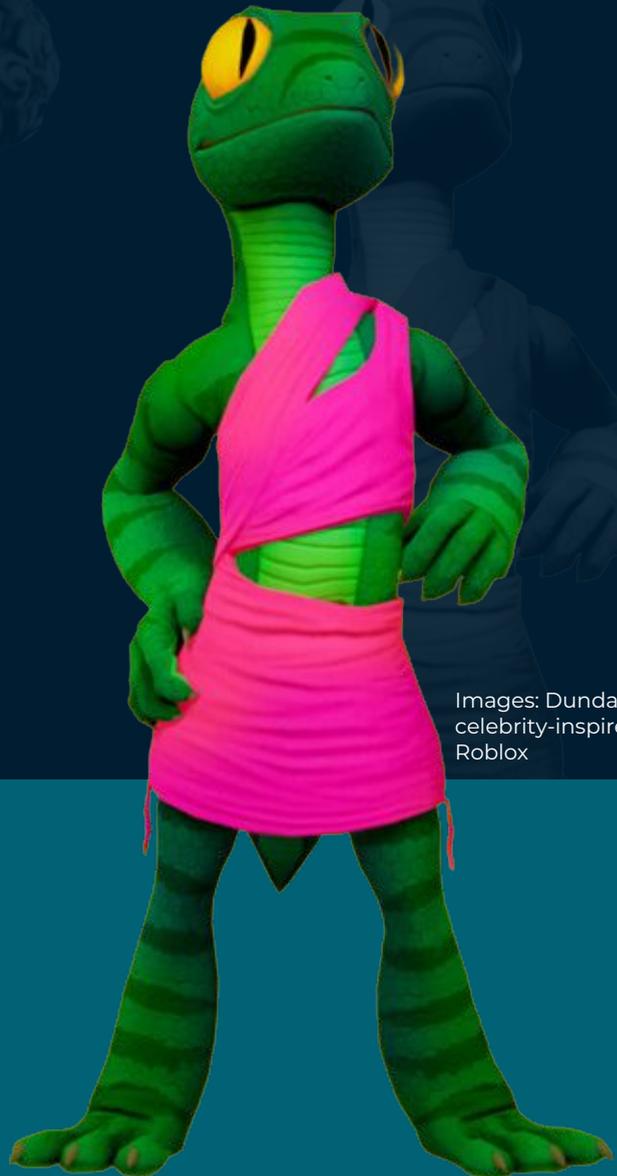
**Winnie Burke** | Head of Fashion, Luxury, Retail and Beauty Partnerships at Roblox

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Images: Dundas x DRESSX celebrity-inspired drop via Roblox





Images: Dundas x DRESSX celebrity-inspired drop via Roblox

### **The Influence of IRL Trends on Avatar Fashion (and Vice Versa)**

According to Roblox x Parsons School of Design's recent report on metaverse fashion trends, 70% of Gen Z's consumers are taking style cues from their avatar for their IRL style. Another 70% say their avatars dress similarly to their IRL style.<sup>34</sup> The Spring-Summer 2023 season also saw a number of examples of brands taking note of the Roblox aesthetic, such as Coperni's boxy Roblox-inspired silhouettes or Loewe's and Louis Vuitton's pixelated designs.<sup>35</sup>

### **Roblox x BFC Award for Metaverse Design**

In 2021, the BFC and Roblox launched the first ever Fashion Award for Metaverse Design, which was awarded to digital designer cSapphire and presented by Alessandro Michele, former Creative Director of Gucci, in an immersive fashion awards experience on Roblox. The experience amassed 1.2 million total visits and an average time spent of 5 minutes and 25 seconds. Visitors to the awards were able to purchase a range of digital items, some of which were created exclusively for this event by Gucci. Proceeds went to the BFC Foundation Charity.

## Enticing Core Luxury Customers to Try Digital Fashion

Appealing to younger demographics without alienating fashion's core consumer base presents a tricky balancing act, particularly within the luxury space where demographics skew older. A number of contributors pointed to how industry leading players such as Gucci have chosen to develop their digital fashion propositions through experimental online spaces positioned as playful younger siblings to their core brands. Their Dream Big team created a dedicated business unit in 2021 known as Gucci Vault, serving as the home for the brand's ambitious forays into the metaverse and Web3 realms. It's a separate entity, in order to insulate Gucci from risk, while also enjoy the benefits of experimentation. Kering, Gucci's parent company, has pursued a similar strategy with their innovation-focused business unit KNXT ("Next").

### Rebranding the NFT

The biggest challenge our contributors pointed to specifically with blockchain-enabled digital fashion strategies is the friction associated with adopting this new technology, such as creating digital wallets, which can be difficult to understand for non-crypto natives. As a result, the next wave of brand experiences will likely involve layers of blockchain-enabled mechanics that are hidden to the consumer.<sup>36</sup> Terms such as "NFT" are already being replaced by the more consumer-friendly "wearable" or "digital good" and setting up crypto wallets to hold these digital twins are likely to become a concealed part of creating an account for a brand that consumers are not consciously aware they are creating.<sup>37</sup>

A perfect example of this can be found in Dior's "quiet" experimentation with Web3 tech. Their recent B33 sneakers contained an NFC chip connected with an authentication NFT, and a digital twin collectible, but these futures were communicated with a notable absence of terms like "NFT" and "Web3."<sup>38</sup>



Image: DREST x Christian Louboutin, July 2020

# Supporting the Omnichannel Customer Journey

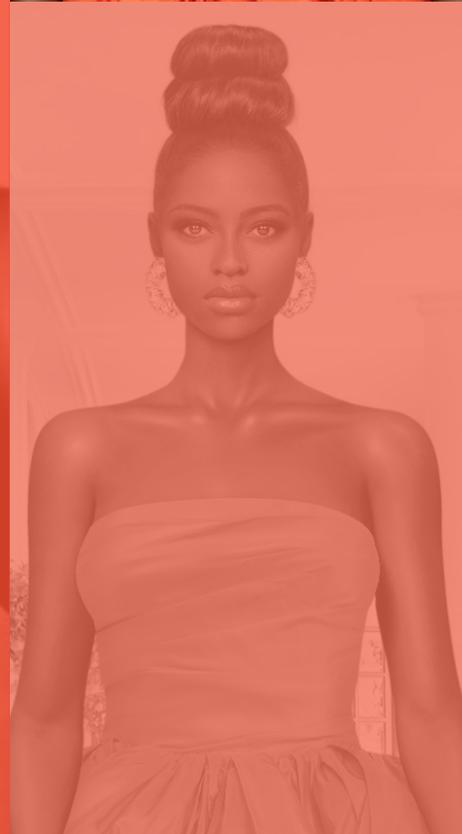


Image: DREST x Le Bristol  
Paris, July 2022

supporting the omnichannel customer journey

## Emerging Omnichannel Solutions

Digital fashion is enabling online shopping experiences to become more intuitive, engaging, personal and reflective of a brand's vision. Given all of the choices that consumers have today, a quality experience across all customer touchpoints and a seamless blend of online and offline channels has become paramount to success.

True has seen the rise in demand for “chief experience officers” in recent years, specifically tasked with curating these holistic brand experiences. The phygital capabilities of digital fashion are also being utilised to solve for one of shopping online's biggest challenges for brands today: returns.

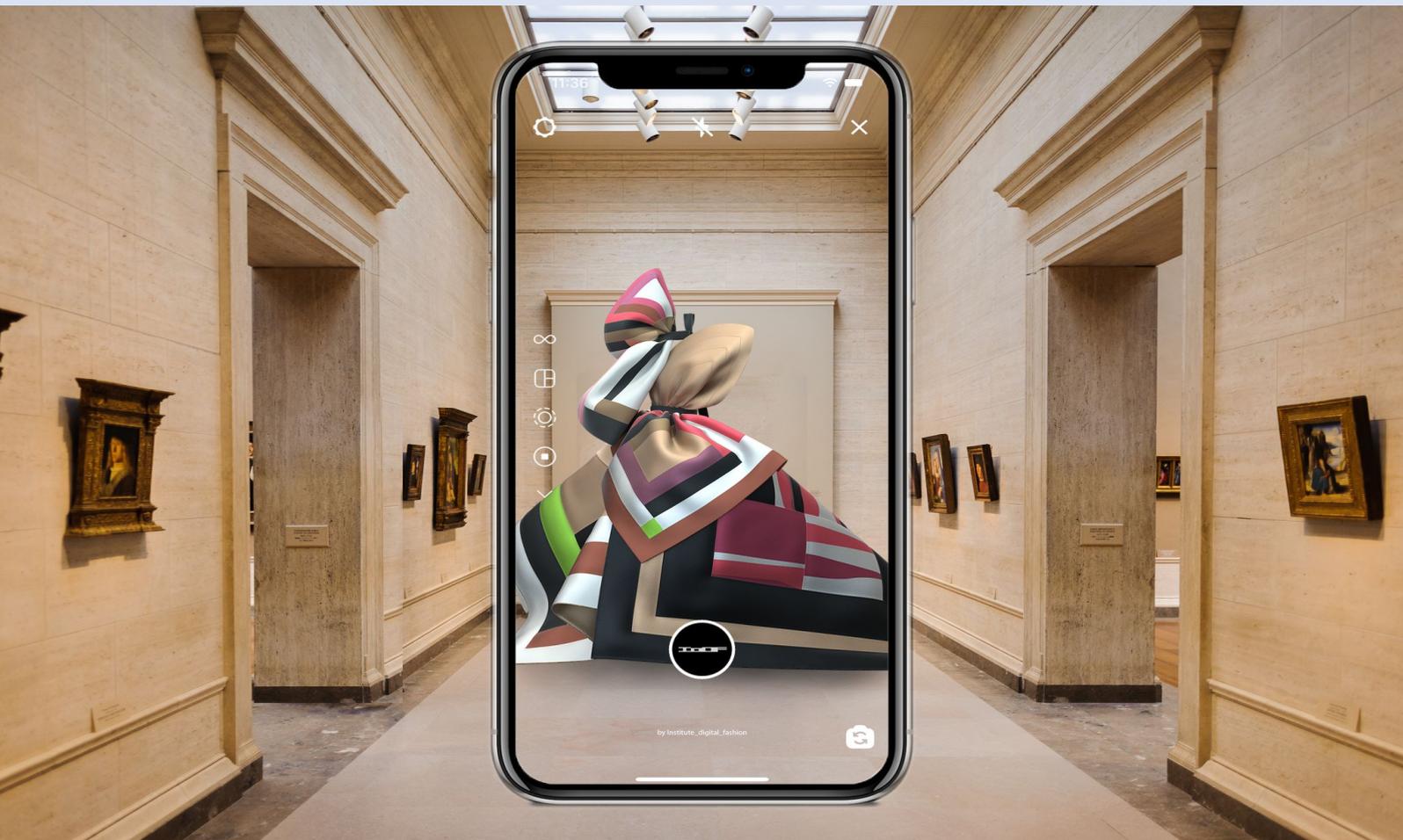


Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] x Roksanda; Tate Britain London Fashion Week An NFT Experience sold in pounds, not crypto on the brand's website, an industry world's first.

**“Fashion brands have always evolved around storytelling. They are essentially selling dreams and identities. Consumers that are investing in a particular brand see it as an extension of their own identity and self-expression.**

**Evelyn Mora | Founder and CEO at VLGE**

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### 3D Digital Styling and Try-on Experiences

True client BODS is revolutionising e-commerce experiences by leveraging gaming technology that allows online shoppers to virtually style outfits and digitally try-on IRL fashion. Consumers create a customisable, 3D version of their body and style it with precise renderings of a garment's design detail and fit.<sup>39</sup>

### Virtual Storefronts and Experiences

Virtual store platforms develop immersive, 3D-rendered e-commerce experiences for brands that promise to combine the personalisation of an IRL experience with the convenience of ecommerce. They are able to generate much more measurable engagement and in turn facilitate greater product discovery. Companies such as Obsess have measured a 74% higher dwell time in their virtual stores compared with a traditional ecommerce site which boosts the likelihood of a customer checking out an item by an average of 184%.<sup>40</sup>

**People do not expect the interaction to be purely commercial because they can always make a purchase online. They expect the interaction to be an experience.**

**Blake Lezenski** | Partner Program Director, Farfetch Dream Assembly Base Camp, Outlier Ventures

### In Store Virtual Mirrors

DRESSX and Printemps joined forces in May to introduce digital fashion to the physical space of Printemps' department store. The innovative pop-up store allowed visitors to try on and purchase five custom-made digital outfits using an interactive human-sized screen, record videos in the digital attire, and explore additional AR outfits from the DRESSX library.<sup>41</sup>

As impactful as these tools will be, they are still early in their development and lack the standardisation that we will come to expect. At the same time, their degree of immersiveness will always be dependent on the capabilities of the hardware used to consume them.

**Every interaction your brand has, whether it's engagement online, a transaction in store, or through an e-commerce platform, the data that gets produced from those interactions are a core advantage that you have.**

**Blake Lezenski** | Partner Program Director, Farfetch Dream Assembly Base Camp, Outlier Ventures

### *true talent tip*

Every interaction and customer touch point enables brands to collect data throughout the customer journey. However, only organisations that have built their data foundations will be able to monetize the value of data. This emphasises the importance of investing in data architecture and data engineering, before you can begin to attempt analytics or data science. Fundamentally, this is the first step of a chief data officer position, to build the foundations before progressing into creating business value.

Image: Institute of Digital Fashion [IoDF] x Roksanda; An NFT Experience sold in pounds not crypto, on the brand's website, an industry world's first.





Image: Chanel x Bloomingdales, Multi-brand Virtual Shopping Experience, November 2022

## industry spotlight

# Emperia Creating Immersive Virtual Shopping Experiences

London and New York-based start up Emperia has emerged as a leader in the creation of immersive virtual shopping experiences. Emperia clients are able to create and maintain these virtual shopping locations through the Emperia platform. The experiences are accessible through a brand's website or within various virtual spaces such as gaming environments. They bring much more creativity and differentiation than simply replicating a brand's physical stores: notable examples include putting BFC Patron Chanel on the Moon, Lacoste inside a Crocodile, and Burberry in the Sky. The platform blends these fantastical settings with elements of in-store experiences. They can be refreshed seasonally to align with a brand's merchandising strategy to create an omnichannel cohesiveness.

Co-Founder and CEO Olga Dogadkina has already worked with a number of the world's leading names in fashion and retail. We sat down with her to discuss why these brands decided to partner with Emperia, and what metrics the platform uses to measure their success.

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# *The biggest focus area for Emperia moving forward is personalisation.*

Emperia Shopping Experiences Key Performance Metrics:

- Conversion rate uplift
- Gen-Z traffic uplift
- Engagement time and user journey

Emperia provides both the virtual environment that sits on their front end, and also a content management system and data suite. They are able to see and track what exactly is happening in that virtual world and capture even minor interactions in the user journey. The platform is then able to utilise this data to continually enhance these shopping experience with more personalized products and environments.

**“What if we noticed that you convert best when you're shopping in a sunset environment, rather than the morning? Imagine you could change, not just the products, but also the entire setting in which you shop based on your preferences.**

**Olga Dogadkina**  
Co-founder and CEO of Emperia

Images: Chanel x Bloomingdales, Multi-brand Virtual Shopping Experience, November 2022





**Talent**

Image: DREST Supermodels  
Launch, December 2020

## 2023 Digital Fashion Talent Trends

As the fashion world converges with the rest of the creative industries, and innovation cycles quicken, access to top, multidisciplinary talent is becoming a key condition of success in the space. True's Consumer practice has supported the movement in both directions, from hiring media and gaming talent into Ralph Lauren's digital team, to placing fashion merchandising leadership into the Web3 behemoth Yuga Labs.

As was the case with the advent of new retail business models, the executives that first saw changes in consumer behaviour and capitalised on them became the most successful and sought after as the next waves of adoption hit. Today, there are still a relatively small number of these early adopters whose backgrounds bridge the gap between fashion and the broader technology ecosystem. A significant amount of that talent has moved positions over the last 12 months.

### Key Digital Fashion Leadership Shake Ups

- Alice Delahunt, former Chief Digital Officer at Ralph Lauren founded SYKY, a next-generation luxury fashion platform. She tapped her former Head of Global Digital Marketing, Roxanne Barretto Iyer, as SYKY's chief operating officer.
- Both the former leaders of the Gucci Vault and Metaverse Ventures transitioned to sizable CEO roles since exiting Gucci. Nicolas Oudinot landed at Pernod Ricard and Robert Triefus became CEO of Moncler-owned, Stone Island.
- Co-lead of Adidas' Three Stripes Studio, Tareq Nazlawy, has become president of ScienceMagic.Studios, a digital assets venture studio
- Avery Baker, 24-year Tommy Hilfiger veteran, chief brand officer and president, announced in July that she is stepping away from the brand.

Notably, many of these individuals—having built highly sought-after expertise—have been afforded the opportunity to step into significant leadership roles at other brands or their own start up ventures.

In the luxury segment, three of the top eight global heritage brands by revenue have welcomed new creative directors in the first half of 2023:

- Pharrell Williams moved to Louis Vuitton
- Sabato De Sarno moved to Gucci
- Daniel Lee moved to Burberry

All of these brands have been leading the way in digital fashion innovation, so it will be interesting to see how this momentum is affected by these changes in creative direction.

**A number of people who oversaw or closely worked on early Metaverse and Web3 projects have since gone on to other roles, whether that is independent startups or other brands, because their expertise has become so valuable. I have seen this happen at Adidas, Gucci, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and more.**

**Maghan McDowell**  
Senior Innovation Editor  
at Vogue Business

Image: Harrods x Burberry, The World of Olympia, created by Emperia, June 2021

## Breaking Down Silos Between Insular Industries

Perhaps one of the most unlikely challenges when it comes to building multidisciplinary teams, that a number of contributors pointed to, is navigating the current gulf that exists between legacy fashion and Web3 communities. Both ecosystems can still be remarkably insular in their outlook and behaviours, with cynics existing on each side.

“When we post an article about digital fashion on Vogue's Instagram, there can be a lot of vitriol from consumers...some might have an apocalyptic mindset of anything digital...what can be a very close-minded, misinformed mindset. And then on a different side of the same coin, we have Web3. [When established brands enter the space] the vitriol and the demands made from the ‘Web3 community’ can be inhospitable.

**Maghan McDowell** | Senior Innovation Editor at Vogue Business



Image: Daniella Loftus dressed in Tribute Brand's SIREK Dress

# Democratising Access to the Fashion Industry

An exciting element of digital fashion is its ability to democratise the fashion world. The decentralisation that sits at the heart of the emerging industry puts more power in the hands of its consumers and lowers the barriers of entry for up-and-comers to find success. This decentralisation will ultimately lead to a more diverse, inclusive and meritocratic industry.<sup>42</sup>

A number of the report's contributors are leading grassroots initiatives focused on incubating and accelerating the development of talent in this space:

## **BFC NEW WAVE: Creatives**

In 2018, the BFC launched NEW WAVE: Creatives, an annual celebration of the 50 most innovative and inspiring young creative talents from around the world. The list has included digital creators from 2020.

## **SYKY Collective x BFC**

In June 2023, the digital fashion startup announced the first cohort of its SYKY Collective, a year-long incubation program supporting 10 digital designers (the Collective) to develop their brands under the mentorship of a number of high-profile players in the space, including the British Fashion Council.

## **Institute of Digital Fashion Talent Board**

Making digital fashion accessible to newcomers is at the core of IoDF's ethos. Their philanthropic platform, pitched at minority groups, provides an environment for aspiring creators to navigate the digital realm seamlessly. IoDF acts as a catalyst for newcomers, helping them embrace Web3 technology and realise their creative visions.

## **Farfetch x Outlier Ventures**

### **Dream Assembly Base Camp**

In May 2023, the luxury ecommerce platform and Web3 investor announced the second cohort of its 12-week accelerator program, curated in order to help drive the future of Web3 luxury commerce.

## **Roblox x Parsons School of Design**

In November 2022, the social experience platform and New York Art and Design School announced a multi-faceted partnership, including a course collaboration where students will learn to create hyper-realistic and inclusive 3D digital apparel.

Image: True client  
Superplastics x  
Tommy Hilfiger,  
Tommy Factory:  
The Making  
of a Fashion  
Show Experience  
at NYFW 22/23



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“When you look at the major brands and look at a lot of the major creative directors, the reality is that is not indicative of global culture and global diverse talent... [The future is] going to be about the fashion industry becoming even more of a meritocracy than it is. Consumers are going to decide who the next big brands are, the way they decide who the next big creators are.”

**Alice Delahunt**  
Founder and CEO at SYKY

Image: True client  
Superplastics x  
Tommy Hilfiger,  
Tommy Factory: The  
Making of a Fashion  
Show Experience at  
NYFW 22/23

# talent

## Finding, Attracting & Retaining Top Talent in the Space

Building successful strategies in the digital fashion space both inside established brands and in emerging scale-ups necessitates finding cross-sector and cross-functional talent able to bridge the gap between these key intersections: fashion & technology; innovation & profitability; and go-to-market and product, data and technology expertise.

### Fashion & Technology

Leadership within the space requires a deep understanding of fashion and retail while also having a comprehensive understanding of the technology, including SaaS, software development and gaming. In many cases, individuals will come from a fashion retail background with limited knowledge of technology, or vice versa. This presents an obstacle that requires the strategic hiring of expertise from diverse domains to ensure a well-rounded and effective team.

### Innovation & Profitability

Very few of the leaders that have come up through digital fashion have experience in building, managing, and developing diverse teams at scale across multiple functions to deliver a shared vision through the difficult market conditions the space is currently facing. Much of the executive leadership with growth and general management credentials will not have any direct experience in digital fashion or Web3. These kinds of searches are heartland for True, particularly within the context of founder support positions, succession planning, or leadership for joint or new ventures within existing corporate structures.

These situations often involve a game of trade-offs. It's often better to prioritise operators who have seen the growth, scale, innovation, and style of P&L management required for these market challenges—over evangelism for, or direct experience of, the digital fashion space.

**You need to have leaders that can be extremely dexterous in the way they operate in these new groundbreaking business model businesses.**

**Having leaders with the ability to speak to a diverse set of employees: to speak to the creators, to speak to the analytics, to speak to the technologists.**

**Lisa Bridgett**  
CEO at DREST

### Go-to-Market & Product, Data and Technology Functional Experience

Building out digital fashion strategies and business models requires a technical understanding of the entire life cycle of digital garments from design, production, commercial partnerships and go-to-market strategies, as well as how this can integrate with IRL models and supply chains. Many of our contributors highlighted the importance of finding “hustlers,” who can get things done, rather than pure strategists. The cycle of testing, learning and iterating, that this report has outlined, needs leadership with consistently strong execution, at pace, to succeed.

Creating organisational momentum within a global legacy fashion house whilst also moving with the agility and the pace the digital space requires is exceedingly difficult. An extraordinary feature of this emerging space is that the maximum amount of experience an ‘expert’ could have is 4-5 years; thus many of the initial hires brought in to inform and help build these strategies within established brands are often notably younger than their peers across the rest of the business. Effectively managing these global, diverse and decentralised teams, that will come to define the industry, comes with a distinct set of challenges.



Image: IoDF Team Members; Noor, Dhanju, Parker Gibson, IoDF Co-founder and CEO Leanne Elliott Young, IoDF Co-founder and Creative Director Cattyay wearing 001 IoDF COLLECTION

talent

## Digital Design: Sourcing Talent from Adjacent Industries

“When we started PlatformE, the core pillars of our team came essentially from visual effects in cinema... Today it's much easier to train a fashion designer who knows how to design physically how to utilise software in order to replicate this process digitally.

**Gonçalo Cruz** | Co-founder and CEO at PlatformE

One of the most challenging aspects of hiring digital fashion talent is finding individuals with applicable skill sets in adjacent industries and convincing them to move into the space. For example: The animation, computer-generated imagery and visual effects worlds are a perfect initial hunting ground for individuals with the depth of experience needed in 3D rendering and computer graphics to become digital fashion designers. Yet in recent years—with the democratisation of digital design tools and much more readily accessible software and education—more talent is choosing to build careers in digital fashion. Individuals who have come up through physical design, who understand the intricacies of draping, the physics of specific materials, sizing and fit, have a clear advantage when transitioning to designing digital or phygital offerings.

Image: This Outfit Does Not Exist Founder, Daniella Loftus, wearing Studio PMS hat digitally dressed by DRESSX, June 2022

## conclusion

# What's Next?

Fashion is about making products that you didn't know existed today, but won't be able to live without tomorrow. Digital fashion is simply the next interaction of this cycle, able to enhance brand values through storytelling mediums that are more representative, personalised, immersive and transparent.

As this report has highlighted, there are immediate benefits to building out digital fashion offerings, including supercharging marketing and customer relationship management capabilities and supporting more cohesive and personalised omnichannel experiences. In the mid-term, however, phygital strategies will help solve the biggest challenges that fashion industry and its brands face today including transparency, traceability, textile waste and returns. All this will be instrumental in creating a sustainable, circular system for fashion and textiles by the end of this decade.

Digital fashion will also allow a much more meaningful and symbiotic relationship between creator and consumer; and offer the ability for designs to become “beyond creative,” unconstrained by IRL practicalities and continuously adaptable.

As innovation accelerates and the boundaries between traditional and digital fashion, gaming and tech industries blur, access to skilled multidisciplinary talent becomes a necessity for success. So take our talent tips on board and invest in building out these capabilities today. Approach these emerging technologies with curiosity. Play with how they can augment current systems and processes, and build cultural capital. As much as we hope this report will act as a “how-to” guide, the multitude of approaches we've outlined underscore that there is no playbook. There is no right or wrong answer, so find out what works for you!

**In three to five years, Gen Alpha—who are 12 right now and are virtual and AI natives—will have changed the luxury and fashion paradigm once again, the way millennials and Gen Z did with mobile. For them, what happens in the virtual space is equally as real as what happens in the physical world. The coming of age of Gen Alpha, combined with the beginning of a post-smartphone future, will change fashion.**

**Cathy Hackl**

Chief Futurist at Journey  
and Founder of VerseLuxe

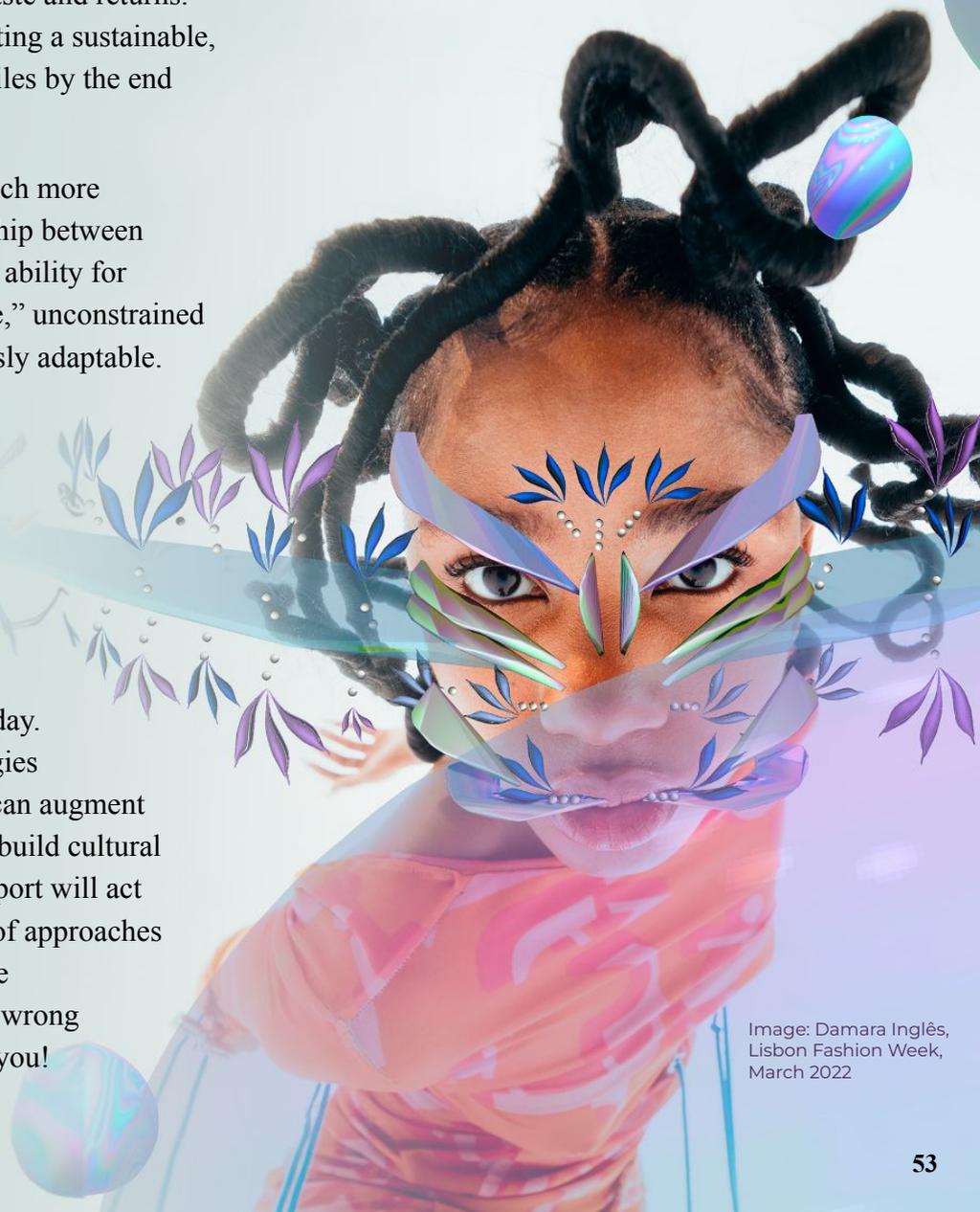


Image: Damara Inglés,  
Lisbon Fashion Week,  
March 2022

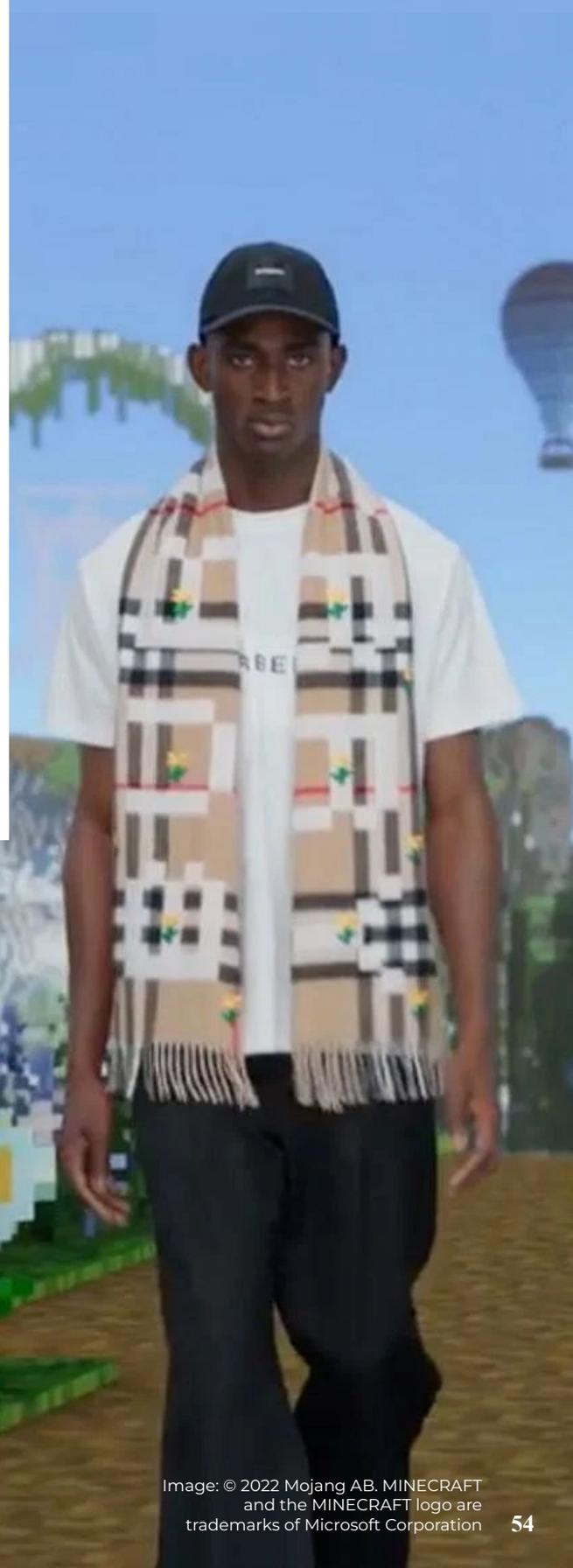
# acknowledgements

It has been truly humbling to interview such an inspiring cross section of thought leaders in this space. What a privilege to be able to learn from these individuals and support the brands of tomorrow in catching this first wave of adoption.

We would like to thank the executives, strategists, investors and designers who have generously given up their time to be interviewed for this research. For a full list of our contributors and an outline of the myriad of groundbreaking initiatives they are responsible for, please head to the last pages of the report.

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Image: Fashion Klossette developed by Sawhorse Interactive on Roblox



# glossary

**Augmented reality (AR)** | AR overlays virtual objects IRL and in real-time, enabling users to see and interact with virtual content that appears as if it is a part of their immediate surroundings.

**Browzwear** | A leading provider of 3D digital solutions for the fashion and apparel industry. The company offers a suite of software tools and technologies that enable fashion brands, retailers, and manufacturers to create virtual garments. Browzwear's flagship product is a 3D virtual prototyping software that allows designers to create accurate 3D garment representations, test fabric draping and fit, and make design iterations before producing physical samples.

**CLO3D** | A software application that specialises in 3D garment visualisation and simulation. It is used in the fashion industry for virtual prototyping, pattern making, and digital garment production. CLO3D allows designers and garment professionals to create realistic 3D virtual representations of garments, enabling them to visualise how the clothing will look and fit on virtual models. The software also offers features such as fabric simulation, pattern development, and 2D pattern drafting tools, streamlining the design and production process. CLO3D helps designers and manufacturers reduce costs, minimise physical prototyping, and accelerate the overall garment development cycle.

**Decentralisation** | The distribution of control, data, and decision-making across a network of participants, using technologies like blockchain and peer-to-peer network.

**Decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs)** | DAOs are structures that leverage blockchain technology and smart contracts to create self-governing entities. These organisations operate without a central authority, allowing members to collectively make decisions and govern the organisation's activities. DAOs enable transparent, trustless collaboration and provide a framework for decentralised decision-making and autonomous governance.

**Digital fashion** | Digital fashion concerns how we express ourselves through garments in digital worlds. Many see this activity closely intertwined with Blockchain and Web3, but there are a number of ways in which technology is driving innovation in the space including augmented reality, machine learning, 5G, gaming engines and generative artificial intelligence. We refer to this broad collective as "Frontier Technologies" throughout the report and focus on how these distinct technologies are driving innovation in the production and consumption of digital items across digital, physical and augmented environments.

**Digital wallet** | In the context of the Metaverse, a digital wallet is a tool that allows users to manage and store their digital assets and currencies. As the Metaverse is a digital and interconnected universe, users need a secure and efficient way to handle their virtual possessions, such as currencies, virtual real estate, NFTs, and other in-game or in-world items.

**Ethereum** | A decentralised blockchain platform that enables the development of smart contracts and decentralised applications without the need for intermediaries or centralised control. It operates using its native cryptocurrency called Ether (ETH). Ethereum's blockchain allows for secure and transparent transactions.

**Frontier technologies** | Frontier technologies refer to emerging technologies that push the boundaries of innovation. In the context of this report, we are referring to areas such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, virtual reality and augmented reality.

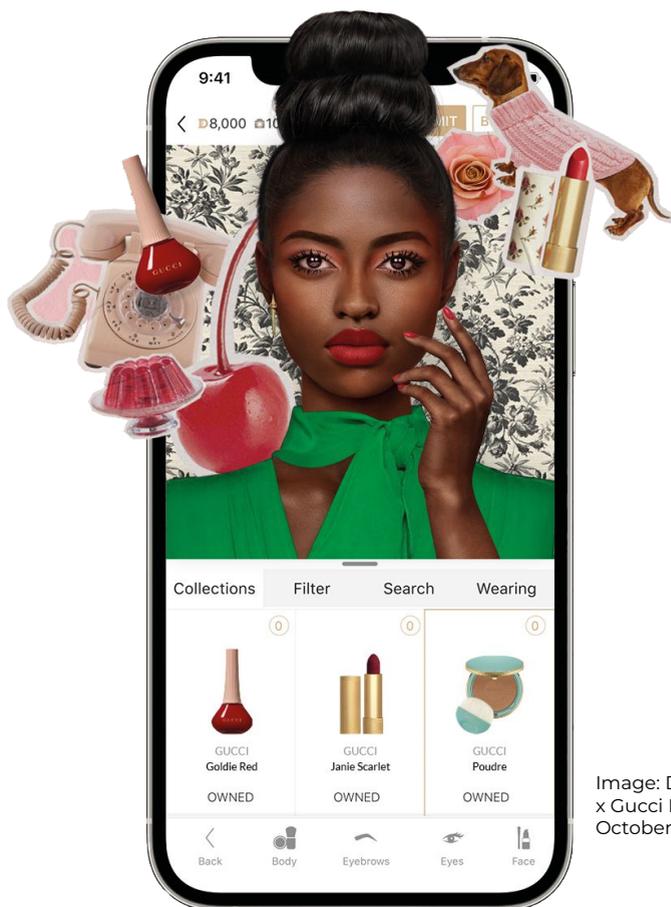


Image: DREST x Gucci Beauty, October 2021

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# glossary

**Gaming skins** | Gaming skins is a term used for digital costumes in games, and was popularised by Epic Games' Fortnite in 2017.

**Intellectual property (IP)** | Intellectual property refers to legal rights protecting creative and intellectual works, thus granting exclusive ownership and control to creators.

**IRL** | In real life.

**Machine learning** | Machine learning is a branch of AI that focuses on developing algorithms and models that enable computers and systems to learn from data and make predictions or decisions without being explicitly programmed.

**Metaverse** | The Metaverse is a virtual and shared digital space that combines elements of the physical world and virtual environments. It is an immersive online universe where people can engage with each other and digital content in real-time. In the Metaverse, users can access a variety of virtual worlds, games, simulations, and experiences through different platforms and devices. Imagine a vast and ever-evolving digital landscape where individuals can create avatars, explore 3D environments, attend events, conduct business, play games, attend virtual concerts, and participate in social interactions as if they were physically present.

**Metaverse winter** | The Metaverse winter refers to the current era of Web3's evolution, where consumer interest has waned and a pervasive cynicism has set in. This has come as a backlash to the immense Web3 hype experienced during the pandemic, and as a result of the prevailing economic situation.

**Metawashing** | A process where a brand spends more time and resources on promoting its virtual products and NFTs as sustainable rather than on minimising its environmental footprint.

**Near field communication (NFC)** | A short-range wireless technology that enables communication between devices by bringing them close together. It allows for secure exchange of data, such as accessing digital content by simply bringing devices in close proximity.

**Non-fungible token (NFT)** | NFTs refers to a unique digital asset that represents ownership or proof of authenticity for an item. This technology has gained popularity in the digital art and collectibles market, providing a new level of scarcity, ownership, and provenance.

**Phygital** | The blending of physical and digital elements or experiences. Phygital experiences often involve the use of AR and VR to augment physical spaces, products, or services. The goal is to provide an immersive, engaging and personalised experience that combines the capabilities of digital technology with the tangible and sensory aspects of the physical world.

**URL** | Uniform resource locator; a standardised address that specifies the location of a resource on the internet. In this case referring to activities that take place online.

**Virtual reality (VR)** | A technology that immerses users in computer-generated environments, providing an interactive and realistic experience.

**Web3** | Refers to the next generation of the internet that aims to revolutionise the way we interact, transact, and share information online. It represents a decentralised and user-centric vision of the web, leveraging blockchain technology, decentralised networks, and cryptocurrencies. Web3 envisions a more open, secure, and privacy-enhanced internet ecosystem where individuals have greater control over their data and digital identities.



image: Tommy Hilfiger x Decentraland, MVFW 2023

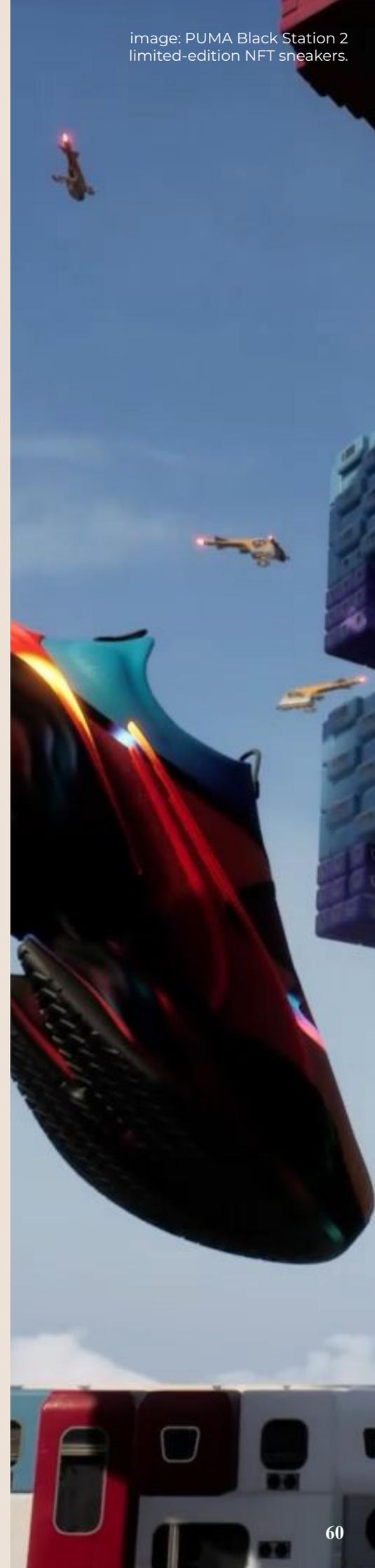
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Image: Daniella Loftus dressed in Tribute Brand's BALA Dress

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