

Virtual Life: Fashion, Expression, and Identity in the Digital World

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Abstract : During social distancing, fashion and self-expression have been pushed further into virtual environments. In VR spaces, identities can be curated easily, untethered from the necessities of life and work. Personal styles reach a wider audience and follow new rules. Digital platforms leave some, but not all, 'real world' clothing constraints behind. Virtual aesthetics are set by the user and the software. Gen Z is a native user, applying face filters on Instagram and Snapchat and styling outfits and skins in apps like Gacha Life, Roblox, and Fortnite. These games cultivate space for community and personal style. Loosely tied to human forms, each app has physical aesthetics, with clear vernacular dress defining it. There are ecosystems of makers, consumers, and critics. Designer-modelers create original assets, brands, and luxury items. Fashion and beauty are ephemeral but always reflect the idealization of form and self. Online communities have already established new beauty ideals that impact live fashion trends. Fashion houses develop AR filters, gaming hairstyles challenge real-world colorists, and musicians perform virtual concerts in their avatar forms. In these times, social media and gaming communities promote the expression of public identity. The online dress is no longer tied to 'real' bodies or cloth. In virtual worlds, there are still tribes, status symbols, gender identities, and roles, but free of fabric, form, and static social structure, there is room for fantastic invention.

Keywords : virtual reality, fashion, Gen Z, social media, gaming

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