

THE INTERACTION OF VIRTUAL AND REAL FASHION IN THE CULTURE OF NETWORK SOCIETY

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Abstract

In the context of rapid digitalization and the expansion of global media space, fashion is no longer limited to the material production of clothing and its traditional forms of representation. It increasingly functions as a media-dependent system in which visual images, digital platforms, influencers, cinema, and virtual environments actively shape aesthetic values and design practices. As a result, clothing should be understood not only as a physical object, but also as an element of visual communication and symbolic exchange within network society. This article examines the interaction between virtual and real fashion in contemporary culture. Particular attention is given to the transformation of fashion under the influence of digital media, the role of the digital body as a new form of visual representation, and the impact of media-generated images on the formation of fashion codes and modern clothing design. The study is based on theoretical approaches from fashion studies, media theory, and cultural analysis. According to the results of the research, fashion in network society can be interpreted as a hybrid phenomenon that combines material and digital forms of existence, while virtual visibility becomes one of the key sources for the development of contemporary design solutions.

Keywords

Virtual fashion, real fashion, network society, digital body, media culture, visual communication, fashion codes, influencers, digital media, clothing design.

Introduction

Fashion has always occupied an important place in the structure of culture, functioning not only as a system of clothing production but also as a means of expressing social values, cultural meanings, and aesthetic orientations. In contemporary conditions, however, fashion is undergoing a profound transformation due to the influence of digital technologies, network communication, and the continuous circulation of visual content. As a result, clothing can no longer be studied only as a material object. It increasingly appears

as a visual and symbolic construct integrated into the broader media environment of network society. In this context, fashion becomes part of a communication system in which images, platforms, and mediated forms of self-representation shape both personal identity and collective aesthetic norms.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the growing role of digital media in the formation of contemporary fashion processes. Social networks, cinema, digital platforms, and virtual environments have become powerful spaces where fashion images are produced, distributed, and interpreted. These spaces do not merely reflect existing styles, but actively participate in the creation of new visual codes that influence the perception of beauty, status, identity, and body image. Under such conditions, fashion gradually shifts from the sphere of exclusively physical garments into the sphere of media reality, where the visual representation of clothing may acquire equal or even greater significance than the material garment itself. This transformation requires a new theoretical approach to the study of clothing as an interdisciplinary phenomenon located at the intersection of art, media, technology, and culture.

A particularly important aspect of this process is the emergence of the digital body as a new form of visual existence in fashion culture. In the digital environment, the body is no longer perceived only as a biological or physical reality, but also as a mediated image constructed through photography, filters, avatars, virtual styling, and algorithmic visibility. Clothing in this system functions as a tool for visual coding and identity construction. At the same time, influencers, virtual characters, and media personalities play an increasingly significant role in shaping aesthetic standards and distributing fashion meanings. Consequently, the study of virtual and real fashion becomes essential for understanding how contemporary design decisions are formed and how visual images generated in media space are transformed into real clothing practices.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical understanding of fashion in network society is closely connected with the idea that contemporary culture increasingly functions through media systems, visual flows, and digital communication. In such conditions, fashion should be interpreted not only as a material practice of producing garments, but also as a symbolic and media-based phenomenon. The network form of culture transforms the traditional logic of fashion circulation: instead of being limited to institutional structures such as fashion houses, magazines, and runway presentations, fashion now exists within digital platforms where images are continuously reproduced, shared, interpreted, and recontextualized. This shift changes the very status of the fashion object. It is no longer defined exclusively by

its physical presence, but also by its visual reproducibility and communicative value within mediated environments.

Within this framework, clothing becomes part of a broader visual language. Its silhouette, color, texture, styling, and compositional presentation function as signs through which cultural meanings are transmitted. The fashion image in digital space is therefore not simply a representation of a garment, but an active carrier of symbolic value. As the dissertation demonstrates, fashion in the culture of network society must be examined as a system of visual codes that circulate through media channels and shape aesthetic norms, social meanings, and perceptions of identity. This is especially important because the digital environment accelerates the circulation of fashion meanings and increases the influence of mediated imagery on real design practices.

A significant component of this transformation is the concept of the digital body. In contemporary media culture, the body is increasingly constructed through visual technologies, platform logic, and digital representation. It appears not only as a biological reality, but also as a mediated surface shaped by fashion, photography, filters, avatars, and algorithmic visibility. In this context, clothing acts as one of the main instruments through which the body is coded and presented. The digital body becomes a site where fashion, identity, self-presentation, and media logic intersect. As a result, the visual image of the dressed body acquires cultural autonomy and begins to influence how fashion itself is imagined, produced, and consumed.

Another important aspect of the theoretical framework is the role of influencers and visual media in the production of fashion codes. In the digital era, fashion authority is no longer concentrated only in designers or traditional institutions. Social media personalities, digital creators, cinematic characters, and visual platforms actively participate in the formation and dissemination of aesthetic standards. Through repeated circulation, emotional resonance, and algorithmic amplification, certain visual formulas become recognizable and culturally effective. In this sense, fashion codes emerge not only from design innovation, but also from media repetition and audience recognition. Therefore, the interaction between virtual and real fashion should be understood as a process in which media-generated images influence material clothing design and reshape contemporary fashion language.

The Interaction of Virtual and Real Fashion

The interaction between virtual and real fashion is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary fashion culture. In the context of network society, fashion images are increasingly formed in digital environments before being

translated into real garments or styling practices. Social media, cinema, digital illustration, gaming culture, and virtual avatars create visual prototypes that circulate rapidly and acquire symbolic significance. These prototypes may later serve as references for real fashion collections, commercial products, editorial styling, or everyday dress practices. Thus, virtual fashion does not exist separately from material fashion; rather, it becomes one of the main sources through which real fashion is imagined and constructed.

One of the most important consequences of this interaction is the growing autonomy of the visual image. In traditional fashion systems, the material garment usually preceded its representation in magazines or shows. In digital culture, however, the visual image may precede the physical object and determine its future interpretation. A digitally circulated outfit, a cinematic costume, or a highly stylized social media image can generate demand, influence taste, and inspire new design solutions even before a comparable material object exists in reality. This indicates that the visual realm is no longer secondary. It functions as an active force in the production of fashion meaning and in the transformation of design strategies.

This process is particularly visible in the influence of screen culture on fashion design. Cinema and serial media generate powerful visual archetypes in which costume is inseparable from character, narrative, and atmosphere. Such images are easily translated into broader fashion culture because they already offer a complete symbolic structure rather than a single garment. The dissertation emphasizes that visual media create stable aesthetic models that later influence fashion perception and design practice. In this way, costume in media becomes not only an element of representation, but also a source of stylistic and conceptual development in real clothing design.

At the same time, social media intensify this interaction by providing a space for the rapid reproduction and reinterpretation of visual codes. Influencers and users do not merely consume fashion images; they actively participate in reshaping them, adapting them to new contexts, and redistributing them through platform logic. As a consequence, the boundary between designer, media figure, and audience becomes more fluid. Fashion meaning is co-produced through a continuous process of circulation, imitation, personalization, and digital visibility. This explains why contemporary fashion should be analyzed as a hybrid system in which virtuality and materiality constantly interact and redefine each other.

Fashion Design in the Context of Media Culture

The influence of media culture on fashion design is not limited to the borrowing of individual stylistic elements. It affects the very logic of the design process. In a media-saturated environment, designers increasingly work not only

with garments as physical forms, but also with images as carriers of atmosphere, narrative, and cultural reference. The creation of clothing becomes closely linked to the interpretation of visual material originating from digital platforms, films, online communities, and contemporary media aesthetics. This means that design practice today often begins with the analysis of visual codes and mediated identities rather than with purely material or technical concerns.

Such a condition gives particular importance to the transformation of visual images into costume design. This transformation should not be understood as direct copying. It is a process of reinterpretation in which mediated forms are adapted to the requirements of material construction, function, narrative context, and aesthetic intention. According to the dissertation, the transition from virtual image to real costume involves conceptual development, reference analysis, material selection, and constructive decision-making. In this process, the designer acts as an intermediary between media-generated imagery and physical realization. Therefore, fashion design in the culture of network society can be seen as a practice of translation from visual media language into material form.

The role of media culture is especially evident when fashion design is connected with cinematic or character-based sources. In such cases, costume is developed not only for aesthetic display, but also for representation within a specific narrative environment. Silhouette, detail, texture, and material become tools for expressing psychological depth, social status, symbolic meaning, and visual atmosphere. This confirms that contemporary clothing design increasingly operates within an expanded field where fashion intersects with cinema, digital culture, and symbolic communication. As a result, the study of fashion design today requires an interdisciplinary approach capable of addressing both material construction and mediated meaning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interaction between virtual and real fashion represents one of the central processes shaping contemporary clothing culture in the context of network society. Fashion can no longer be interpreted solely as a material system of garment production, because its meanings, values, and aesthetic directions are increasingly formed within media space. Social networks, cinema, digital platforms, and mediated visibility transform clothing into an element of symbolic communication and a participant in the production of identity, status, and cultural representation.

The study demonstrates that virtual fashion is not opposed to real fashion, but actively interacts with it by generating visual codes, aesthetic models, and mediated prototypes that later influence the creation of real garments. In this

process, the digital body, influencers, cinematic imagery, and platform-based communication play a decisive role. They contribute to the emergence of a new fashion system in which visual representation may become as significant as material realization. Consequently, contemporary fashion should be understood as a hybrid cultural phenomenon that unites physical and digital forms of existence.

Thus, the analysis of clothing in the culture of network society allows a deeper understanding of how fashion operates within the intersection of media, technology, and design. It confirms that the development of contemporary clothing design is inseparable from the influence of digital visibility and mediated cultural processes. For this reason, the study of virtual and real fashion occupies an important place within modern fashion theory and provides a relevant basis for further interdisciplinary research in design, media studies, and visual culture.

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