

# The Future of Fashion: The Impact of COVID-19 on an Industry

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**Abstract**

Over the course of history, fashion has been a huge part of cultures all over the world. Personally, for as long as I can remember, I have used fashion as a source of inspiration and creativity. I have always been fascinated by every aspect of the industry, from runway shows to magazine production. As technology and digital media have continued to rapidly advance, many of the ways in which we as consumers see fashion have significantly changed. Moreover, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, all aspects of life as we knew it, including the fashion industry, dramatically changed. The pandemic has had a colossal impact on the way in which the industry operates, including areas such as retail, marketing, journalism, design, haute couture, and fashion shows. Specifically, fashion retail is becoming increasingly more focused on both e-commerce and sustainability, and marketing tactics, while continuing to rely heavily on technology and social media, are falling back to more traditional forms of analog in order to cater to consumers' desire for meaningful physical interactions and experiences. On the other hand, journalism is swiftly moving towards a fully digital platform as social media continues to rise. In terms of design, post-pandemic trends are all about the balance between the comfort of pandemic style and the glamour of going out again. Lastly, the luxury market is continuing to rely on e-commerce while also focusing on creating meaningful in-person experiences for their customers, and fashion shows are doubling as both live, in-person events and digital marketing spectacles. What all these different aspects of the industry have in common in the future is a reliance on technology and digital media. In this essay, I am going to describe, in detail, the way in which fashion has changed due to the pandemic and predict the future of fashion.

## **Retail**

### **Merging Digital and Physical**

Coming out of the pandemic, the two key words to describe what consumers are looking for in retail are digital and sustainable. Even before the pandemic, e-commerce was growing exponentially with the swift rise of technology. Therefore, it is no shock that e-commerce sales are predicted to continue to soar after increasing more than 32 percent in 2020 (McDowell, “Post-Pandemic Playbook: Forget Mega-Warehouses, It's All about Local”).

At the same time, according to *The Business of Fashion*, the re-opening of brick-and-mortar retail stores has led to a recovery of in-person sales that had decreased substantially at the height of the pandemic. With these stores re-opening and e-commerce expected to be the leading channel for luxury retail, it is critical for brands to rethink their stores to establish relevancy and profitability. One way, *BoF* claims, would be to merge the digital and physical worlds. This could come in the form of digital artwork, artificial intelligence or augmented reality, or virtual store platforms such as apps that can be used for customer service or booking appointments. One example of this is a collaboration between *Elle* Magazine and Burberry’s Ginza store in which they were able to create a virtual experience similar to Google Street View in which customers can walk through the store and click on specific products for more information (Mallevays).

### **Emphasis on Experience**

Another way, according to *BoF*, would be for retailers to provide special experiences in their stores that cannot be obtained online. For example, Louis Vuitton re-launched its Ginza flagship in March 2021. What makes this store unique is that it is filled to the brim with spectacular art and design, including a striking exterior resembling rippling water and monogram jellyfish suspended throughout the store’s interior. It also features a private salon for VIP customers, a

restaurant, a pop-in space that showcases seasonal animations for new arrivals, and products made exclusively for sale at the Ginza store. It goes without saying that most brands cannot afford to do all this to such an extreme, but many brands should start adapting in similar creative ways (Mallevays). Overall, it is important for retail stores to be more than just a place to shop, but to offer a more entertaining and immersive experience. *Vogue Business* claims that retailers should ideally make their stores completely different from online, making it more about the experience and having a smaller, more tailored inventory. Thus, it is important to coordinate online and in-store services and emphasize each of their strengths (Ellwood).

### **Rise of Rental and Resale**

Not only has there been a transition to an emphasis on technology to create more meaningful digital and in-person retail experiences, *Vogue Business* claims that rental and secondhand markets have become exponentially more relevant over the last couple of years. These markets promote circular business models and better environmental practices, crucial factors for many brands catering to the recent consumer interest in sustainability (McDowell, “Post-Pandemic Playbook: The Return of Rental”). Moreover, the rental market in particular caters our social media-addicted brains’ desire for constant newness (Hyland, “The Future of Fashion is an Ever-Rotating Closet”). There is an estimated shift going forward in brands creating in-house rental services within their businesses. For instance, URBN, which owns Anthropologie, Urban Outfitters, and Free People, built their own rental service, Nuuly (McDowell, “Post-Pandemic Playbook: The Return of Rental”).

However, while rental and resale are both considered key components to circular fashion, rental has been less popular than resale, particularly with regards to luxury brands (McDowell, “Don't Call It Rental: Inside the Rebrand for Fashion”). Experts predict that the secondhand

market will rise to \$64 billion by 2024. Even as other forms of shopping were hit hard by COVID-19, online secondhand shopping continues to develop steadily (Morgan). Moreover, *Vogue Business* states that resale has seen a surge in luxury investment and partnerships. For example, the luxury conglomerate Kering has invested in Vestiaire Collective, and the luxury brands Balenciaga and Simone Rocha have partnered with The RealReal. On the other hand, they claim that rental has yet to be embraced widely by luxury. In fact, the consultancy Bain & Co. predicted that, by 2030, resale would account for 20 percent of a hypothetical sustainable luxury brand's income, while rental would only account for 10 percent. Moreover, in a June report by Thredup, the consultancy Globaldata found that rental, resale, and subscription will be the most rapidly growing retail sectors in the next 10 years. Despite this, the average consumer is expected to spend 18 percent of their apparel quota on resale and less than 1 percent on rental. They also argue that rental is restricted by resale's higher participation rate, frequency, and spending. While brands can control the process; cleaning, damages, wear, and constant returns make it more complex and expensive. According to Diana Verde Nieto, co-founder of the consultancy Positive Luxury, adoption of rental will be quicker for younger generations, and renting will become more important in luxury. Moreover, Globaldata found that 19 percent of people plan to spend more money on rental in the next five years, and Gen Z is 83 percent more likely than Baby Boomers to strongly agree that apparel ownership is temporary (McDowell, "Don't Call It Rental: Inside the Rebrand for Fashion").

### Marketing

If 2020 taught us anything, it's that technology is important, but there is still an innate human need for physical interaction. It goes without saying that digital marketing strategies are going to continue to be hugely important in the fashion marketing and public relations industries.

However, traditional forms of analog marketing are not going away. According to *The Business of Fashion*, at the beginning of the pandemic, many fashion brands were forced to make large budget cuts on marketing, cutting off all spending on advertising that wasn't specifically intended to increase sales. In fact, the owner of Louis Vuitton and other luxury labels said that they had cut their marketing and selling budget by 18 percent during the pandemic. Moreover, according to the consultancy Kantar, in the first half of 2020, apparel and cosmetics companies cut advertising spending by 25 percent from 2019 (Mondalek).

With the pandemic at an end, however, many brands are now looking at new marketing strategies. For instance, *BoF* states that brands are planning to focus on strategies that positively impact both brand awareness and sales (i.e. direct mail, branded content). At the same time, brands are also planning to continue focusing on digital marketing strategies. Specifically, they are looking to place more of an emphasis on digital video as well as Google search ads. Lastly, they state that brands are planning to continue to place a huge emphasis on social media. Instagram remains a fundamental part of many fashion brands' marketing strategies, acting as a "one-stop content hub" with integrated shopping tools unparalleled to other platforms. At the same time, TikTok remains crucial to brands looking to cater to a Gen-Z audience, and Pinterest has added new features to make influencer-brands integrations more impactful and successful (Mondalek).

In addition to this emphasis on digital marketing, *Vogue Business* states that luxury brands are simultaneously beginning to focus more on traditional forms of analog marketing, such as direct mail and branded books, as in-person events open back up and consumers begin to crave meaningful physical interactions and experiences. Even during the pandemic, as fashion shows went remote, brands found new ways to connect with customers in person. Luxury brands like Chanel, Dior, Prada, and Loewe sent books or other physical items such as handmade notes or keepsakes to top spending customers. These items did a great job of building loyalty and crafting relationships with customers by giving them a sense of meaning and ownership. Now, as online spaces are overflowing with content, it is becoming increasingly difficult for brands to stand out without investing in paid marketing. Therefore, direct mail and other analog marketing techniques are becoming alternative ways for brands to attract attention. Although direct mail is expensive, and tracking is difficult, experts say it is still a worthy investment for luxury. For instance, luxury brand Mansur Gevriel introduced its first direct marketing campaign – a 32-page book featuring editorial imagery, past campaign imagery, and artwork inspired by the brand – in March of 2021. According to the brand’s chief executive, Isabelle Fevrier, analog marketing is becoming less expensive than digital, and it gives them the ability to communicate more about the brand to customers (Chitrakorn).

### Journalism

It is no question that, even before the pandemic, social media has been the future of fashion journalism, and journalism in general. According to *The Business of Fashion*, magazines are facing a disintegration of revenue, causing them to either shut down or rapidly downshift their operations. For instance, *Elle* Italy moved from a weekly to bi-weekly publication, American *Vogue* is printing fewer and fewer issues, and, in certain parts of the world, many magazines are ceasing to print altogether (i.e. *Grazia* in France, *Elle* in India, and *Harper's Bazaar* in Australia) (Williams).

Despite this dismal reality, journalistic creativity has flourished online during the pandemic. As our world is on the fast track to becoming digital-first post-pandemic, publications such as British *Vogue* are coming up with a multitude of solutions to digitize their brands. Specifically, on the *BoF Podcast*, Vanessa Kingori, British *Vogue*'s first female publisher, discusses their recent virtual events and creating their first AR filters for businesses such as Mac and Ferragamo. Kingori claims that these efforts “create new ways of connecting to consumers and fulfilling the needs of brands that are over and above just advertising” (Amed). In other words, publications are taking advantage of what the pandemic caused to come up with new and innovative ways to publish content.

Moreover, as brands attempt to revive their businesses post-COVID, they are in desperate need of media coverage, but this no longer comes in the sole form of fashion press. *BoF* states that, instead, there is the growing significance of social media platforms, whether that be influencers' or brands' own channels, as brands not only intend to keep consumers engaged, but also direct them towards making purchases from their e-commerce stores, which have been gaining more magnitude in recent years. According to fashion marketing platform

Launchmetrics' chief executive Michael Jais, "Brands are becoming media themselves." In other words, marketing content streamed directly from brands' social media channels is swiftly replacing press coverage from third party media. "Digital audiences don't care anymore who owns content or who paid for it. They just want to feel stimulated and not interrupted," says Jais. Consequently, fashion media will need to find new ways to profit off of their storytelling skills (Williams). *Grazia* claims that writers should focus on using various digital platforms to put out even more engaging stories (Rodgers). Brands will likely do a lot of partnering with fashion media to create content on their own accounts. For example, to promote Louis Vuitton's menswear show in July 2020, *GQ* China took over the brand's Weibo to cover the live-streamed show, posting celebrity endorsements, editorial shoots, and commentary throughout the day (Williams).

Although the internet and social media have been taking over the world of journalism, multiple experts have emphasized the notion that print is not fully dead. According to Kingori on the *BoF Podcast*, cover launches are still commercially beneficial. "There is no digital marketing that you could do that would be more effective," she says, "Our print magazine is our biggest marketing tool, and our social media platforms are our biggest agents" (Amed).

### **Design and Trends**

According to *Vogue Business*, coming out of the pandemic, fashion consumers are simultaneously wanting the comfort of pandemic style and the extravagance of dressing up. Therefore, post-pandemic fashion trends are all about balancing comfort and glamour. Designers and buyers are reporting a new wave of glamour as consumers prepare to dress up again, and the proof is in the Autumn Winter 2021 haute couture collections as well as on social media. While consumers are enjoying a touch of glamour and extravagance coming out of the pandemic, they don't necessarily want to give up the comfort of pandemic fashion. Therefore, designers and retailers are seeking to blend these two elements. Buyers are reporting a surge in elevated knitwear and embellishments, metallics, or cutouts, blending glamour with comfort. Bright colors and bold prints are also becoming increasingly popular (Maguire).

According to *Elle*, another trend that experts are seeing is skin-baring pieces that allow customers to "show off" their post-pandemic bodies, perhaps courtesy of their home fitness efforts during quarantine. Consumers are treating themselves to brand-new wardrobes as a way to emotionally move on from the pandemic. After many months of uncertainty and isolation, customers want the ability to feel attractive again in their clothes (Hyland, "Revenge is Sweet. Revenge Shopping is a Little More Complicated").

### **Haute Couture**

According to *The Business of Fashion*, the luxury segments have been slightly less susceptible to the blow of the pandemic than other brands – while sales of mid-priced fashion brands and discount brands were down 35 percent and 36 percent, respectively, luxury sales only shrunk to about 30 percent. Coming out of the pandemic, *BoF* claims that it is increasingly important that brands consider both long-term consequences and changes to come, and that a crucial market to consider in all of this is China. For a long time, luxury brands have relied on Chinese consumers to spend money while travelling abroad. However, in recent years, even as customers begin travelling again, local sales have become equally important. Brands can succeed in this by offering exclusive and entry-price products to appeal to China's swiftly growing middle class. Despite this, Paris-based luxury advisor Philip Guarino says, "China is best placed, but one region can't carry an entire industry." In other words, not only is it important to cultivate local shoppers in China, but it is equally important to focus on other regions' clientele, such as Europe, or rising markets in Brazil and India (Sherman).

*BoF* states that another aspect to consider is luxury consumers' growing interest in experiences over things as status symbols. Before the pandemic, luxury companies were becoming more and more hyper-focused on creating these experiences, from pop-up shops to museum exhibitions to even restaurants and hotels. However, after the pandemic hit and people could no longer participate in these activities, consumers started buying things again. They claim that it is unlikely that consumers will continue to prioritize things over experiences long-term post-pandemic. Therefore, brands must be prepared for a sudden shift back to pre-pandemic consumer trends. As mentioned earlier, e-commerce is predicted to remain strong after its swift growth over the past few years, not to mention within the luxury market. In 2019, e-commerce

made up between 10 percent and 15 percent of global luxury sales in the United States, Europe, and China. By 2020, this figure has risen by at least 50 percent across all three regions, according to the consultancy McKinsey. Moreover, single brand retailers such as Nike and Louis Vuitton also saw a rise in online sales that they partially credited to personalizing the shopping experience. Thus, *BoF* argues that fashion brands ideally must capitalize on this by making every customer's experience feel more unique and meaningful through artificial intelligence, human recommendations, and direct contact with sales representatives. At the same time, the physical retail store will be as important as ever, despite there being fewer of them, to create a unique and engaging customer experience (Sherman).

*BoF* also claims that large luxury conglomerates such as LVMH and Kering and creative independents such as Chanel and Hermès are most likely to prosper post-pandemic because they have the ability to directly manage all aspects of production and sales. At the same time, there may be an opportunity for the merging of mid-sized brands and startups that are less corporate and more family- and culture-driven (Sherman).

Lastly, *Elle* states that, along with the rest of retail consumers, luxury consumers have taken a greater interest in sustainability, therefore, retailers have had to accommodate. For instance, the luxury conglomerate LVMH has created Nona Source, an online resale platform with the goal of becoming the leading source of deadstock materials for emerging designers in Europe. The store is open to all and adds a video component to each swatch and offering items at up to 70 percent off original wholesale prices (Rougeau).

Overall, as the luxury consumer is becoming increasingly knowledgeable of and gaining higher expectations for their brands, it is important that these brands hold themselves to an equal standard.

### **Fashion Shows**

Since the rise of technology and social media, major fashion shows in the United States and Europe have become a combination of both trade events and digital marketing spectacles. However, after the cancellation of traditional, in-person fashion shows in 2020, brands have been experimenting with new, innovative ways to showcase their collections, and are considering what makes the most sense. Specifically, according to *The Business of Fashion*, they are questioning the productivity of Eurocentric fashion shows at a time when shoppers from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America collectively account for the majority of luxury sales. Specifically, according to Bain & Co., China made up 90 percent of global luxury consumption in 2019. Moreover, Chinese men drive a much larger portion of luxury sales than men further west. With this fact in mind, Louis Vuitton moved their Spring Summer 2021 menswear show to Shanghai and staged the event on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, outside the traditional fashion calendar. This was one of many of Vuitton's shows that catered to local markets with localized tactics (Kansara).

More recently, Autumn Winter 2022 fashion month was unlike any before. While many designers returned to a relatively normal schedule of in-person fashion shows, many also continued to adopt fresh, new ways of presenting their designs (Klerk). With smaller shows, strict COVID precautions, and top designers such as Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs missing from the official calendar, New York Fashion Week included a multitude of young emerging designers with new, experimental takes on the traditional runway show (Yotka). On the other hand, Paris Fashion Week returned as a fully in-person event with big names such as Chanel and Dior hosting traditional shows throughout the week. Despite this, keeping with the shift to digital

caused by the pandemic, all 45 houses had virtual livestream components to their events (Guilbault).

Ideally, fashion shows must be a combination of live, in-person shows and digital streaming events. All too often, digital-only fashion shows fall short – the success of the shows depend on the live gathering of people to convey the cultural and emotional value of the product. However, the digital amplification of these events is crucial to enhance the event to its full potential (Kansara). American *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour concurred with this statement when she met virtually with Edward Enninful and Margaret Zhang, editor-in-chiefs of British *Vogue* and *Vogue* China, respectively, for the annual *Vogue* Forces of Fashion event in July of 2021. She states, “I think as we do emerge in September, obviously the fashion show is going to be reinvented, that it will probably, I'm guessing be smaller, more intimate, but livestreamed in a way that people hadn't thought about pre-COVID, so I think it will be a hybrid way of looking at clothes, but the idea that the fashion show could be completely digital, I think nobody is thinking that anymore” (Saltzman).

## **Technology**

### **Social Media**

It is no secret that a critical part the future of the fashion industry is the rise of social media. According to *Vogue Business*, after years of preparation, the pandemic became a catalyst for social media apps such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok to swiftly advance to make shopping, from the point of discovery to checkout, a key part of their user experiences. According to eMarketer senior analyst Jasmine Enberg, this advancement was mainly to take advantage of consumer behavior during the pandemic, but she expects shopping on social media to continue. The challenge, however, will be to get customers to stay on the app to make purchases, since most of the time, while the discovery has been taking place on the app, the purchase has been taking place on the brand's e-commerce site (McDowell, "Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok: The Social Shopping Race").

A good example of this is Instagram. While many customers use Instagram Shop to discover items, they often do not purchase anything via the app. For instance, menswear brand Victor Li, which also uses Shopify, gets up to 80 percent of its traffic from Instagram, says the eponymous founder and designer, although customers generally complete purchases on its website. Despite this, Instagram has the most advanced shopping platform, with all surfaces shoppable via the checkout function and external links. Next, they must focus on curating their products and content. @Shop, an account featuring shoppable products and editorial content run by fashion writer and editor Leigh Belz Ray, is an effective push in this direction. Along with a team of former magazine editors, Ray interviews brand founders and takes images of products for the page. They specifically focus on small, independent fashion, beauty, and lifestyle brands. This type of curation helps make in-app shopping, which, for many people, can have a bad reputation

for being untrustworthy or of bad quality, more credible (McDowell, “Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok: The Social Shopping Race”).

Facebook has been growing its shopping experiences as well. Brands with a Facebook Shop can host a recurring livestream shopping series called “Live Shopping Fridays.” In this series, fashion and beauty brands can stream for 90 minutes and viewers can ask questions, view, and purchase products via the app. Sephora, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Clinique are all participating brands. eMarketer research predicts that 32 percent of Facebook users in the United States are going to use Facebook to shop in 2021 (McDowell, “Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok: The Social Shopping Race”).

Additionally, Snapchat has been building out their augmented reality capabilities to be sophisticated enough to show people how they look wearing certain designer items as well as letting them shop those items. Specifically, they have created a feature called Dynamic Shopping Lenses, which enable brands to display all their augmented reality try-on experiences on one page on their Snapchat profiles and to integrate their product catalogues in real time. Mac Cosmetics is one of the first to use the new feature (McDowell, “Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok: The Social Shopping Race”).

Lastly, TikTok is also testing in-app shopping in Europe as well as teaming up with Walmart to air some shoppable fashion and beauty livestream videos. In fact, Walmart gained seven times more views than what they predicted and grew its TikTok followers by 25 percent during the first stream in December of 2020 (McDowell, “Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok: The Social Shopping Race”).

### **3D Design**

Not only does the future of fashion consist of a rise of social media and e-commerce, but there is also multitude of other innovative technologies that will be an asset to the industry, including 3D design, augmented reality, data analytics, and NFTs. *Vogue Business* claims that 3D design is now a crucial skill in fashion supply chains. They state that, not only can 3D assets be used to create digital-only clothing, but they can also be used for design rendering, pattern making, augmented reality, and video games. Moreover, 3D design can quickly diminish the time and waste it takes to design because remote teams can quickly visualize or edit the appearance of a piece without having to ship physical samples. These same assets can also be used to sell to buyers or customers without requiring models or photoshoots. In order to incorporate this capability, *Vogue Business* states that brands are both training existing teams and hiring freelance 3D designers. For example, since establishing their Stitch Academy in 2019, all European Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger teams have been trained in 3D design. According to the company, this has added two weeks to their design calendar. For brands who cannot do in-house training, there are organizations such as The Digital Fashion Group, which educates working designers on 3D design, and Ddiggitt, which helps brands clients like Gucci, Dior, Farfetch, and Fendi create 3D assets. Despite this progress, experts say that fully converting to digital design will be difficult due to both fashion's general resistance to change, the industry's competitive secrecy, and the expensive cost of the technology. Nonetheless, they predict that 3D design knowledge will soon become a necessary skill for the industry (McDowell, "3D Design Is the Future. Brands Are Catching Up").

### **Augmented Reality**

Not only are brands predicted to leverage their use of digital and 3D design, *Forbes* claims that they are also likely to enhance their e-commerce experiences through augmented reality

assets such as virtual fit or sizing tools, virtual showrooms, and virtual stylists (Morgan). Unlike static digital imagery, augmented reality clothing will have the ability to automatically appear on a person as they move in real time, like a Snapchat filter, via any device. Experts say that realistic augmented reality clothing has been a long-term goal that brands are close to accomplishing (McDowell, “Why AR Clothing Try-on Is Nearly Here”). In fact, major retailers such as Adidas, Macy’s, and Modcloth are already adopting virtual dressing rooms and bringing the technology to the forefront (Morgan). More recently, Snapchat parent company Snap Inc. acquired Vertebrae, a company that helps European luxury brands such as Fossil create 3D versions of their products. This will allow Snapchat to further its augmented reality capabilities. Similarly, designer Clara Daguin teamed up with digital clothing marketplace DressX to create a digital version of one of her designs to wear on Instagram during Paris Couture Fashion Week 2021. For fashion brands, these examples of augmented reality could open the door to digital clothing sales and increase conversions, as well as bring them one step closer to the goal of creating augmented reality glasses (McDowell, “Why AR Clothing Try-on Is Nearly Here”). Moreover, using augmented reality to virtually try on items reassures customers of their purchases and cuts return rates by 36 percent (Morgan).

### **Data Analytics**

Experts also predict that by leveraging data on consumer trends, brands can create pieces that consumers are more likely to purchase. For example, Amazon is developing a machine learning program to automatically determine whether an item is on-trend. In a similar way, Google is testing user-driven AI fashion design that uses algorithms to design new pieces (Morgan). Not only are retailers using data to produce more popular pieces, but they are also using data to improve customer experiences. On the *BoF Podcast*, retail futurist Doug Stephens spoke to

Brittany Hicks and Jessica Couch of Fayetteville Road, a consulting firm that helps retailers understand niche markets of women of color, and Alexei Agratchev, co-founder of in-store analytics firm RetailNext, on this topic. According to the experts, retailers have access to a vast amount of information on their customers, and it is crucial that these retailers use this information to invest in tools and processes to listen and respond to their customers. Moreover, Couch says that retailers need to dig deeper to understand the more complex attributes of their customers. Specifically, she states, “what we need to measure now is how often do customers come into the store, where are they from, what communities are they a part of, how can you reach that community, and what are their sentiments about your brand and experience” (Stephens). By collecting this type of data and using it to take action, brands will be able to considerably improve their customer experience. There is a multitude of evident benefits to using data analytics in fashion. One prominent example is the fact that it helps brands produce pieces that consumers are more likely to wear, thus reducing waste and connecting them to pieces they will appreciate. Many brands, including Miu Miu and Stitch Fix, are already using this data to predict trends. Experts predict that more brands will hop on this bandwagon in the near future (Morgan).

### **NFTs**

Lastly, the digital phenomenon that is NFT has swiftly gained popularity within the fashion world. NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, are digital assets that represent real-world objects such as art, music, and videos, that are bought and sold online using cryptocurrency. *Forbes* explains them as generally one of a kind and having unique identifying codes to allow them to retain value and create a sort of digital scarcity that contrasts with most digital creations, which are generally infinite in supply (Conti). NFTs and digital fashion have become significant ways for

brands to create relevance, with many platforms allowing creators to make and sell digital fashion. (McDowell, “The 'Baby Birkin' NFT and the Legal Scrutiny on Digital Fashion”). In early 2021, early adopters of NFTs in the fashion world made some massive sales. For instance, virtual fashion brand RTFKT sold a digital jacket for over \$125,000. However, as the initial excitement of NFTs has faded, fashion brands are having more difficulty making these big sales. They argue that fashion brands that build something specific and accessible to their audiences can find breakout success, and the most successful NFT fashion “drops” are from digitally born fashion houses that don’t have brick-and-mortar storefronts or household name recognition (Tong). Nonetheless, some luxury brands are entering the market by experimenting with merging the worlds of NFTs and digital fashion with gaming. For example, Burberry introduced its first NFT through a collaboration with Blankos Block Party, a game modelled on the vinyl toy industry, in August 2021. Moreover, Louis Vuitton began awarding its first NFTs to players of their newly created game, “Louis the Game,” that same month (McDowell, “Why Games Became Luxury Fashion's NFT on-Ramp”). Although it is unclear how long the popularity and success of NFTs is going to last, brands are currently using it as a cultural moment.

### **Predicting the Future of Fashion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a swift acceleration in the rise of emphasis on digital media, technology, and sustainability in both the fashion industry and our world. Currently, fashion retail is becoming increasingly more focused on both e-commerce and sustainability through the rise of secondhand and rental markets, and I predict that this trend will continue in the post-pandemic era. In terms of marketing, I predict that digital marketing will continue to become more and more prevalent as social media becomes the primary marketing tool. On the other hand, with the increasing emphasis on sustainability that we're seeing, I don't expect the backtrack to more traditional methods of analog marketing that we're seeing at the moment to continue as heavily in the distant future. In a similar way, I predict that journalism will continue its swift move to a fully digital platform as social media continues to rise. In terms of design, I think that the trend of merging the two extremes of comfort and glamour won't last much longer than the next few years, and that trends will evolve back to being somewhere in the middle. Lastly, I predict that the luxury market, like the retail market, will continue to rely heavily on e-commerce and revert to valuing experiences over things, and that fashion shows will continue to be a combination of live, in-person events and digital marketing spectacles. Overall, I predict that the future of fashion is going to have an exponentially heavier emphasis on technology and digital media to create a more thoughtful and sustainable industry.

### Glossary

|                     |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Brick-and-mortar    | Traditional business style of serving customers in a building rather than an online business                  |
| Circular fashion    | A system where the production of an item and the end of its life are equally important                        |
| E-commerce          | Business style of serving customers via the Internet                                                          |
| Facebook            | A social media platform designed to enable users to create profiles and share information with one another    |
| Haute couture       | Exclusive, often trend-setting fashion created by leading houses or designers                                 |
| Instagram           | A photo and video sharing social media platform                                                               |
| Pinterest           | A social media platform designed to enable users to discover and save of ideas and inspiration through images |
| Shopify             | A subscription-based software that allows anyone to set up an online store and sell their products            |
| Snapchat            | A social media platform designed to enable users to share photos, videos, and messages with one another       |
| Sustainable fashion | A movement towards changing the fashion system to be more ecologically and socially friendly                  |
| The RealReal        | A fashion resale platform for users to buy and sell secondhand luxury clothing online                         |

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|                      |                                                                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thredup              | A fashion resale platform for users to buy and sell secondhand clothing online        |
| TikTok               | A video sharing social media platform                                                 |
| Vestiaire Collective | A fashion resale platform for users to buy and sell secondhand luxury clothing online |
| Weibo                | A Chinese microblogging website                                                       |

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