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Immersive Storytelling: Personal Project

Effective Immersive Media Use in the Fashion Industry

There is no doubt that immersive media and virtual reality will soon take over the near future: whether it is in the journalism, gaming, customer service, or retail industries, there has already been many significant innovations and projects that challenge the conventions of immersive storytelling. As opposed to journalism or gaming, fashion and its relations to the virtual reality scene are not as widely known; however, though these relations are not as widely discussed, virtual reality's infiltration into the fashion industry will soon expand -if not already - like in other industries. Customers can become more engaged with products, while designers can explore their imaginations from a completely new perspective. Nonetheless, immersive media and virtual reality function more effectively as a fashion marketing technique rather than a tool for creating fashion designs.

Virtual Reality has been used as a marketing technique for quite a while, perhaps because of its effectiveness. For example, in October 2012, San Francisco's Union Square Uniqlo offered shoppers "Uniqlo's Magic Mirror:" the unique ability to imagine themselves in a range of color choices of a single silhouette without the hassle of having to remove the garment(Banks 2016,1). This "virtual dressing room" was developed by Holition in the United Kingdom in partnership with Dai Nippon Printing Company. It used the Kinect's color-changing engine and a half-mirror touch panel. The touch panel allowed users to engage in instantaneous sharing directly from the store to social media, increasing awareness and interest of the brand.

Immersive Media and Virtual Reality is also an innovative way to attract attention. According to a 2013 study by Alert Technologies, brick-and-mortar retailers that get shoppers into their dressing rooms will convert 67% of them to buyers. However, in the current day and age, more people are relying on the convenience of online shopping rather than physically going to stores. Retailers have been "forced to adapt to the times to get people to step foot inside their stores (Banks 2016, 1)." For London Fashion Week FW14, Topshop partnered with technology agency Inition to recreate a complete virtual reality world of the Topshop Fashion show which not only allowed customers to view garments off the rack without having to try it on physically, but it also became the first retail AR experience where people could see the front and the back of the clothing(Banks 2016,1). At the same time, it is a bit ironic that customers are viewing garments through virtual reality when the real garment is in store. This method of allowing customers to virtually see the details of a garment would be more groundbreaking as an online

shopping marketing technique, where customers can see the garment directly from the comfort of their homes and purchase them through VR, creating a more immersive online shopping experience.

In 2012, Converse created a mobile app called The Sampler, which allowed people to see what a Converse product would look like on their feet without actually having to try on a pair physically. All users have to do is point their phone camera at their legs, and they will receive a visual reference on how it would look (Banks 2016, 1). The app is viewed as a pioneering aspect of footwear, and many argue that this may become a cultural norm in the near future. Converse's The Sampler also predated other innovations in the footwear industry like Vans's Virtual Footwear experience in which customers could step on footprints on a mat in order to virtually "try on" a 106 Hi, Authentic or Authentic Lo Pro (Banks 2016, 1). It would be extremely innovative if this technology was used for garments, not just shoe-wear, where shoppers can point their phone camera in their full-body mirrors at home and try on garments.

Although these projects are effective in creating a virtual experience at the convince of the customer - either not having to physically try on products or go to a physical place - a real life experience of seeing and trying on products is much more effective and accurate in seeing how a product suits the customer. However, the attention the virtual reality project attracts and how it allows customers to share on social media is worthy as a marketing strategy.

Greg Jones, director of VR and AR at Google, said that "At some point, we're going to look back and think, how did we not have a digital layer on the physical world" (Arthur 2017,1). He says that the role of augmented reality is set to transform the retail industry. Apple CEO Tim Cook has also expressed that the technology is a smart way to allow customers to experience fashion shows even though they may not have been invited. People can see the garments from all the way around, not just the front.

On the other hand, immersive media also creates a pathway for a new method of designing. The Tilt Brush by Google allows creators to paint in a three-dimensional space with virtual reality. Users can create with three-dimensional brush strokes, stars, lights, snow, and even fire. I have personally experienced trying to design a dress with the tilt brush. I thought that the tool was groundbreaking because it allowed me to sketch considering the 360 degree view of my garment, whereas in conventional sketching, designers will have to create multiple sketches to show different perspectives of a garment such as the front, sides, and back. In using the tilt brush, sketching felt like 3D prototyping. I also loved using unconventional materials on my garment such as fire, lightning, and stars. However, considering the price, time, and space it takes to set up the equipment just to sketch, the tilt brush is too time-consuming and expensive to

become a conventional and efficient way of sketching. Although the unconventional materials offered through the brush creates an opportunity for creative expansion, the materials are unrealistic to be placed on a garment: fire would be a serious safety hazard. Sketches created in the Tilt Brush may be impossible to be made in real life.

A fashion designer needs to be able to sketch quickly and abundantly in order to pick and choose ideas, and VR does not allow these basic needs. Fashion designers need to be able to show and communicate their ideas to many other parties quickly; it is extremely inconvenient to set up VR equipment every time designers need to show their ideas. This is particularly the case when designers are elevating ideas from sketch, to pattern-making, and then to the actual making and sewing. The pattern-making and sewing stages constantly require the maker to quickly look back to the sketch as reference. Given the already stressful nature of their occupations, pattern-makers and sewers would not approve of having to physically set up a VR kit or put on a headset just to view the sketch.

Thus, immersive media and virtual reality is better as a tool for marketing rather than a tool for making. Virtual reality in the *making* process allows for more creativity and inspiration through unconventional materials and also allows the consideration of the sketch as a prototype; though in using VR as a creation tool, it is inconvenient, unrealistic, and slows down the process. Virtual reality in the *marketing* process allows users to experience products at the comfort of their own home, or without even physically trying on the item. When a brand uses this type of innovative technology, it will attract the attention and fascination of its consumers, leading to awareness of a brand because customers would share this entertaining experience on social media or by word of mouth. VR then creates a platform to further the retail experience and becomes an effective marketing strategy. The possibilities of augmented reality, virtual reality, and immersive media to transform the fashion industry are endless. It is only a matter of time before these technologies are integrated into people's everyday lives.

Works Cited

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