Virtual Fashion: Confronting the Once-worn Garment

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#OOTD: One hashtag with more than 338 million public tags on Instagram plagues sustainability. Outfit of the Day represents social media's worst fashion habit: Buying fast fashion, wearing it once, and discarding it. When an outfit is worn for a photograph on a social media post, it functions as digital self-expression. If this is its only purpose, does it need to physically exist at all? Digital fashion—3D outfits worn via augmented reality or modeled over a still image—shifts this behavior, replacing the single-use garment with a virtual garment. For the camera the user wears any physical garment already in their wardrobe, then 'wears' an on-trend and affordable virtual garment modeled over their image. Thus, the once-worn garment is never produced. The psychological gratifications behind Outfit of the Day are strong enough that participants engage for several posts a week despite "knowing it's bad." If the attraction of once-worn fast fashion is instant gratification, identity formation, and attention garnering, digital fashion can achieve the same with no environmental impact involved in its design, production, or shipping. If digital fashion replaces these habits, sustainable clothing behaviors find space in the physical world: Reduced trend turnover, slower and more calculated manufacturing by brands, more thoughtful curation of a wardrobe of basic physical garments based on actual seasonality. The design, marketing, and sale of virtual objects open the floodgates for many novel considerations for the future of the fashion industry. Major publicity surrounding existing digital fashion brands demonstrates public interest and simultaneous hurdles in consumer understanding of the value of digital goods. Virtual fashion's uptake by major fashion brands alongside a physical equivalent, or as a subscription access, could allow for slower manufacturing and more calculated stock. Digital media offer a new frontier of fashion and textile design which is user-generated, responsive, collaborative, democratized, and doesn't need to obey physics. This allows fashion individuality in a world currently dominated by mass production. Radical in its implications and still in infancy phases, digital fashion is poised to disrupt devastating fashion consumption habits amongst young social media users by replacing the once-worn garment.