

## The State of Play of the Fashion Industry

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### Abstract

**As humanity travels further into the 21st century, living economic uncertainties, a COVID-19 pandemic and experiencing the fourth industrial revolution, our understanding and use of technology is becoming more of a second skin, rather than an aid for our everyday use. In the last two decades we have witnessed an accelerating invasion of technology, whether it has been in everyday use of appliances or whether it has been in our day-to-day social networking. One thing is certain, active wear and comfort clothes are the market to be in at the moment, and for the foreseeable future. But the unanswered question still remains as to how brands will carry on creating and experimenting without losing their identities, their audience, and most definitely without losing the social status their brands provide. This article examines ideas on the challenges of the contemporary relationship between designers and scientists.**

Most people rely on technology for almost everything, and wait in anticipation for the next piece of technology to excite us. In his 1954 essay ‘The Question Concerning Technology,’ Martin Heidegger argued that technology is the highest danger that we face, subjecting us to the risk of reducing our natural life in the world to the artificial and technological modes of objectification and reification. I have to wonder what he would say today. Bernard Stiegler in his 1994 book *Technics and Time, Volume 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* argued against Heidegger that human life has always been irreducibly technological, an extension of technology itself (what Stiegler called “prostheticity”). It is only natural that our clothes, which express and extend who we are, “our second skin” follows and takes a leap into the next generation of technology.

Scientists have been collaborating with fashion designers to create items of apparel that are both functional and aesthetically pleasing, creating items that will be novel, and incorporate them into our everyday life. In just a few years you will be wearing outfits with wearable electronics, and intelligent fabrics which will be able to tell you about the weather, the way you feel, your degree of health and well-being, change shapes and colour, self-clean, grow, charge your Mobile, laptop, play music, and project messages. Sportswear seems to have taken the

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lead so far. Are we ready to assume the fashion of tomorrow? There is a phrase designer use: “Fashion changes when the world needs it to change.” And the world is changing fast and needs fashion to change its old ways of thinking and come up with new solutions without huge seasonal waste piles, environmental pollution and the economic repercussions it has created. Technology has turned the fashion industry upside down, and it is probably the best time to be a fashion designer, being part of the greatest shift within fashion for decades.

How will all this technology change the future and face of fashion and luxury brands? Are we ready for high-tech clothing to take over our wardrobes? Will people become part of this technology? Or become absorbed into technology or are just the extending technology itself? Only time will reveal this as for now we can only speculate. We can see much that is happening around us, some technologies are already here, and some will arrive imminently. The next few years will be ground breaking and interesting. We live in a world of fast pace, fast production, fast and easy money, an age where everybody wants their 15 minutes of fame. This is the age of selfies, personal entitlement, and self-centeredness is just our new norm. Boredom seems to be its prevailing mood: we bore easily and we drain just as easily.

There is no denying that the internet and social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, tick tock, Twitter and many more have changed the way we shop, or more importantly re-shaped businesses marketing strategies. They have given young designers and small business a voice and the consumer an opinion. All major fashion houses and companies, small or large, have leaped on the opportunity of free advertising, or with a small amount (a fraction of the price of regular magazines), extra promotion. While living the worst recession of our generation, not every business can withstand the high costs of TV, magazines and bill boards advertising. The App platforms, are in most cases free, and work with social networking, which can help anyone starting a business today, and promote their work from the comfort of their living room. This way, the business companies build a trust and bond, with their consumers, giving them an insight into the history of the actual brand. This has helped in the abusive attitude towards the production workforce in Third World counties from major fashion brands, although it has not been eradicated. Consumers have benefited from lower product prices, and more affordable clothes because of the vast amounts of money saved by businesses who employ alternative means of advertising. Another great benefit is that every type of fashion brand has been made accessible at the click of a button, and has allowed designers to access and reach a wider spectrum of consumers. With Fashion Week cancelled across the globe designers have taken the opportunity to engage in creative social advertising

through films and videos, establishing on line publications, leading to a great deal of uncertainty over the show's future. On line shops have enjoyed a great deal of success and witnessed an increase in sales by posting daily on social media platforms. Smartphone's and the technology they provide, have also been a great influence on the fashion industry, enabling them to use apps available to reach a far wider consumer base. Apps such as Whispis, Trades, Slyce, Metail, and many other platforms have helped the fashion industry to move forward into the next generation's wardrobes. But with lock downs and movement restrictions in the wake of Covid-19 has meant fashion industries having to produce a year before the actual clothes hit the market. How will this protect the vast financial implications this has on the small companies? Is bespoke fashion the future? Only in the last few months we have seen large colossal brands declaring bankruptcy. How will the smaller brands survive? Will the constant creation of apps save the day? Will there be a need for new collections? One thing is certain, active wear and comfort clothes are the market to be in at the moment, and for the foreseeable future. But the unanswered question still remains as to how brands will carry on creating and experimenting without losing their identities, their audience, and most definitely without losing the social status their brands provide.

Scientists know that their ideas are pioneering and will definitely help to re-shape and re-define the world of fashion and the technology of tomorrow. But how these products will enter our lives and create the need to incorporate them in our everyday lives still remains to be seen. There are a lot of factors that need to be considered first, like personalities, expression and the understanding that our clothes are an extension of who we are. People, I suggest, are individuals with their own personal characters and don't need or want to be conformist. People need to know that wearing the technology and data presented to has a meaningful purpose which will improve life and well-being, while respecting privacy. People are creatures of habit in their everyday life, so scientists need to understand and predict how individuals interact with technology. They need to understand style and aesthetics, and how the consumer shops. Nobody wants to be walking around wearing a computer or wires attached to their clothes. This is why science needs to look and collaborate with designers for their creative ideas, and their understanding of style and how to incorporate technology into the world of fashion. Scientists know all too well that if their technology stands a chance in becoming part of our lives tomorrow, they need to get the technology into the fashion designers collections, and on to the catwalks of the Couture and Prêt-à-Porter shows so they can start to streamline. On the other hand, this is not a one-way deal, but rather of mutual benefit. Designers also know that if they

are to preserve and keep on breaking the boundaries of design and fashion technology is the only way to go, especially if they are to keep the future of fashion exciting. Designers have been waiting and searching for a long time to discover what will be the future evolution of fashion. With constant attacks from countries like China, in terms of price cuts and cheaper labour, they need a new path to carry on selling the dream of novelty, and avoid falling into the trap of just repeating clothes and of becoming what they fear most, just another company which produces and sells “fast fashion”!

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