



Why do people consume digital virtual fashion? An explorative study to understand motivations.

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Abstract

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In the past decade, digital virtual goods (DVG) have become a significant aspect of online consumption (social media, games and virtual communities) and a vast amount of literature has assessed the values consumers perceive from such goods. However, research has neglected to assess one particular type of DVGs: fashion. Due to recent advancements in technology, the consumption of digital virtual fashion (DVF) has gained importance and more brands are selling their clothes as digital collections. The objective of this thesis was to deliver a better understanding of the underlying reasons why consumers purchase DVF. An explorative study in the form of semi-structured interviews was conducted with 5 participants.

The analysis identified four major motivational themes: self-expression, experimentation, social factors and dematerialisation of life. First, DVF serves as a vehicle for identity expression which varies in the degree of similarity to the physical identity. Second, individuals see value in experimentation, which is perceived as easier and less risky. Third, consumption intentions are influenced by social drivers. DVF can enhance social status either through traditional status symbols or novelty. Furthermore, DVF can increase status by showing off expertise in digital technology trends. Lastly, the dematerialisation of life is not a motivation itself but contributes to intensifying the previously named motivations. The findings demonstrate that specific consumer motivations are unique to DVF, which brings important implications for fashion brands and marketers that want to enter or are already present in the DVF market.

Keywords: Digital fashion, dematerialisation, digital virtual consumption, digital virtual goods, fashion NFTs, identity expression, consumer motivations

Abstrato

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Na última década, os bens virtuais digitais (DVG) tornaram-se um aspeto importante no consumo *online* (meios de comunicação social, jogos e comunidades virtuais). Contudo a academia tem negligenciado a avaliação de um segmento particular de DVG: a moda. Devido aos recentes avanços da tecnologia, o consumo de moda virtual digital (DVF) ganhou significado e mais marcas estão a vender as suas roupas como coleções digitais. O objetivo desta tese é proporcionar uma melhor compreensão das razões subjacentes à compra de DVF pelos consumidores. Foi realizado um estudo exploratório sob a forma de entrevistas semi-estruturadas com 5 participantes.

Foram identificados quatro grandes temas motivacionais: auto-expressão, experimentação, fatores sociais e desmaterialização da vida. Primeiro, o DVF serve como veículo de expressão da identidade, que varia no grau de semelhança com a identidade física. Em segundo lugar, os indivíduos vêem valor na experimentação, o que é percebido como mais fácil e menos arriscado. Em terceiro lugar, as intenções de consumo são influenciadas pelos condutores sociais. O DVF pode melhorar o estatuto social, quer através de símbolos tradicionais de estatuto, quer através da novidade. Além disso, o DVF pode aumentar o estatuto através da exibição de conhecimentos sobre as tendências da tecnologia digital. Por último, a desmaterialização da vida não é uma motivação em si, mas contribui para a intensificação das motivações anteriormente mencionadas. Os resultados demonstram que existem motivações específicas dos consumidores que são exclusivas do DVF.

Palavras-chave: moda digital, desmaterialização, consumo virtual digital, produtos virtuais digitais, NFTs de moda, motivações do consumidor

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List of Abbreviations

DVC	Digital virtual consumption
DVG	Digital virtual good
DVF	Digital virtual fashion
D&G	Dolce_&_Gabbana
H&M	H & M Hennes & Mauritz AB
MMO	Massively multiplayer online games
NFT	Non fungible token
VR	Virtual reality

1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

Digitalisation has impacted consumer behaviour significantly. Almost all aspects of life are digitalising. From books to tablets, classrooms to Zoom, neighbours to followers. Friends are made online and social platforms provide endless opportunities to find like-minded people. Children nowadays play “FIFA” instead of football. Filters on Instagram are the new makeup. Stories are told in real time via photos and videos. These examples show that the lines between the physical and digital world are increasingly dissolving, and consumers spend a tremendous amount of their time in the digital sphere. But especially recent advancements in digital technology will shape even further how consumers behave in the digital space. Non fungible tokens (NFTs) offer a new form to purchase virtual goods and many brands have reacted to this technology trend by selling digital virtual goods (DVGs) to their customers. Our lives are increasingly shifting to occur in digital space, and new virtual reality platforms, such as the Metaverse, are not only picking up on this tendency but are reinforcing it. One aspect that has gained significance in the digital space is fashion. It is often used as a vehicle to express oneself. In the virtual world the opportunity for expression can be particularly relevant, as it is a space for people to create and recreate their identity. No wonder major fashion brands have jumped on the bandwagon and are now offering clothes, accessories, and sneakers as digital virtual products. First movers included luxury fashion and sneaker brands, but mainstream brands are quickly following and have introduced virtual fashion lines. These brands are exploring collaborations with gaming and virtual reality platforms, such as Gucci x Roblox or Balenciaga x Fortnite. Moreover, in March 2022, the platform Decentraland hosted the first Metaverse Fashion Week, during which fashion brands presented their digital products. Consumers wear digital virtual fashion (DVF) through digitally edited photos, gaming avatars or augmented reality (AR). Currently digital clothing only attracts a niche market. But with commercial fashion brands, such as H&M, Zara and Mango, entering the NFT market, the gaming world gaining importance as well as the rise of the Metaverse, the mainstream consumer may soon be part of the NFT fashion realm.

Early-adopters are already spending thousands of dollars on virtual fashion goods that they will never physically receive (Thomas, 2021). This market did not exist twenty years ago, but sources indicate that the market for luxury fashion NFTs will represent 56 billion dollars by 2030, which is 10 percent of the total market (Canny, 2021; Lee, 2021). This change in

consumption behaviour represents an enormous opportunity for brands. However, to be successful, it is important to understand the values consumers see in DVF and what motivates them to spend money on goods they will only own digitally. The thesis attempts to answer this question and provides a first understanding of this very recent topic.

1.2 Research problem

Due to the novelty and recentness of consumers purchasing DVF there is a lack in research, particularly in field of consumer behaviour. Past research that examined the characteristics and values for DVGs focused mainly on functional aspects within massively multiplayer online games (MMO), such as special skins or weapons which give the user an advantage in the game (Giles et al., 2007; Hamari & Keronen, 2017). Some researchers have studied decorative or aesthetical DVGs, by examining the values consumers receive from those goods in online communities, such as Habbo Hotel (Hinz et al., 2010; Lehdonvirta et al., 2009; Mäntymäki & Salo, 2015). However, the usage possibilities for DVF are significantly broader than just being able to use it in MMOs and online communities. Thus, due to the lacking functional values and the broader use case, such as able to “wear” DVF on social media, consumer motivations to purchase DVF may differ from DVGs.

Past research that focused on understanding digital virtual consumption (DVC) of DVGs, addressed the topic from different angles including the conceptualization of DVC (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010), psychological ownership and digital possessions (Watkins et al., 2016), the extended self in the digital world (Belk, 2013), digital object attachment (Koles & Nagy, 2021), re- and dematerialisation (Mardon & Belk, 2018), liquid consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017) or social media consumption (Leban et al., 2020).

1.3 Research purpose and research question

Given the novelty of the topic and the lack of literature, this thesis will contribute to research on DVC by specifically focusing on fashion and clothing as a DVG. The aim is to explore potential consumer motivations and values that are related to the consumption of DVF. The objective is not to provide conclusive solutions but rather to gain a first understanding of the research area. The paper will draw upon literature from different digital consumption topics to form a theoretical foundation and then relate the literature findings to DVF consumption. The explorative nature of the research allows to conduct qualitative research in the form of

interviews with consumers that are engaged with DVF either through social media or gaming platforms.

The NFT fashion trend which was mentioned in the introduction currently only targets a niche audience. Thus, due to the novelty of the technology, the research will not be specifically focused on fashion NFTs but rather look at DVF in general. However, the results may serve as a base to receive a preliminary understanding of motivations to purchase DVF in the form of NFTs.

The purpose is to get a first understanding from a consumer perspective on purchasing DVF and identify the main drivers that motivate individuals to consume this specific form of DVGs. Given this, the study aims to answer the following research question: *What are consumer motivations to consume digital virtual fashion goods?*

1.4 Thesis outline

First, background information on relevant topics in the field of DVF provides a greater understanding of the relevance and context of the topic. Then existing literature is reviewed to form the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the empirical study. Section 3.1 introduces dematerialisation and liquid consumption. Next, chapter 3.2 focuses on a particular form of dematerialisation which is relevant for the study, DVC. Lastly, the literature review examines consumer motivations to purchase DVGs (however, not particularly considering fashion). Chapter 3.3 is divided into motivations related to identity formation and expression (section 3.3.1) and social drivers (section 3.3.2). Following this, chapter 4 describes the research design and scientific approach of the study. In chapter 5 the results are documented and the four main motivations that were found in the data are analysed. Chapter 6 reflects on the theoretical significance of the findings by relating it to existing literature and provides managerial implications. Furthermore, limitations and potential future research objectives will be discussed. Lastly, chapter 7 concludes by reviewing the theoretical and primary findings of this thesis to the field of consumer research on DVF.

2. Background

To better understand the relevance of DVF in the context of the research a short summary of recent trends and use cases will be exemplified. The following chapter will provide information on what DVF is, how and where consumers can use it and what NFTs are.

Digital fashion is a recent phenomenon that arose with the increasing dematerialisation of the fashion industry. DVF describes the visual representation of clothes and other fashion items that were designed digitally through specific 3D-software programs (Särmäkari, 2021). DVF offers similar goods as physical fashion, such as dresses, pants, shoes, and accessories, but the objects only exist in the digital space with no physical components.

Consumers can use DVF in various ways. For social media purposes, individuals can edit their photos through AR by tailoring the digital garment onto their photographed body (Särmäkari, 2021). Other than that, consumers can wear DVF through their avatars for example, in gaming platforms and VR communities. In particular, virtual platforms are gaining importance among consumers. They are computer-generated virtual environments that offer people the opportunity to do similar things they would do in their physical life but in a digital virtual space. Users enter these virtual worlds with an avatar whose actions and movements they can control. They use the avatar to interact with other users or brands. One particular virtual platform that has gained media attention in the past year is the “Metaverse”. The term “Metaverse” was popularized by the American technology company Meta Platforms Inc. who describe that it is “the next evolution of social connection” (Meta, 2022). It will be a computer-generated 3D space in which individuals can “socialize, learn, collaborate and play in ways that go beyond what we can imagine” (Meta, 2022). Besides Meta Platforms Inc. other companies have followed the trend and are working on creating a new digital economy where individuals can buy and sell DVGs (Ravenscraft, 2022). One existing example includes “Decentraland”, a 3D virtual world platform that serves as an interaction and marketplace for consumers. In the most idealistic version of the Metaverse, users can transfer their DVGs such as clothes or accessories from one platform to another (Ravenscraft, 2022). Thus, when referring to the purpose of the thesis, the Metaverse may present a significant opportunity and space for people to wear DVF in the future.

The rise of NFTs is another technological advancement that is important to mention. NFTs are unique digital assets that are bought and sold with cryptocurrency and are, in most cases, part of the Ethereum blockchain (Lam, 2021). NFTs, are non-fungible; thus, they cannot be interchanged with other NFTs. Compared to other DVGs they have a unique identity and ownership can be proven with a built-in authentication enabled through blockchain technology. The ability to prove ownership and authenticity makes NFTs popular in the art collecting industry. However, as indicated in the introduction, NFTs have gained significant importance in the fashion industry and many fashion brands have already incorporated NFTs into their

business model. One example that shows how a luxury brand uses the new NFT technology is the case of Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) (Thomas, 2021). In September, D&G released its first-ever NFT collection named “Collezione Genesi,” in collaboration with UNXD, a curated marketplace for digital luxury. The collection included nine DVF items, out of which five were a digital representation of a physical item and four only existed as a digital-only version. The brand sold the items for a total of 6 million US dollars. Another example is H&M launched a digital virtual showroom (Johnson, 2022). The showroom offers a place for consumers and media to interact with each other and look at the digital virtual collections.

These examples show how the virtual space offers innovative possibilities for fashion brands to be creative and attract consumers. Especially the ownership and authenticity of NFTs have important implications for consumers and brands.

3. Literature review

This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the study. Previous literature and research within the field of virtual consumption are reviewed to generate an improved understanding of the topic. The chapter first provides an overview on dematerialisation and DVC and further looks at different motivations ranging from identity-based to social motivations.

3.1 Dematerialisation

Dematerialisation describes the decline in the overall usage of materials for consumption purposes (Cleveland & Ruth, 1998). It has gained significant importance in recent years due to new technologies that facilitate the digitalization of traditionally materialistic processes and objects. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) describe it as a consumption form that utilises less material by still providing the same functional value. Dematerialisation can occur in many forms, for instance as informational products and software (such as digital music), intangible services or digital art and digital experiences (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). However, it is important to note that dematerialisation does not automatically imply that something is immaterial. According to Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), dematerialisation also describes the tendency for products to have decreased in size and weight due to technology advancements. In literature, scholars use different terms to describe this new form of consumption, ranging from “digital” and “virtual” to “immaterial” and “intangible”, which stand in contrast to “physical” and “material” (Denegri-Knott et al., 2020). Due to this dichotomy, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) have developed a new conceptualisation that differentiates consumption on a

spectrum between “liquid” and “solid”. Liquid refers to a dematerialized, ephemeral, and access-based consumption, whereas solid describes a more enduring, stable, and ownership-based consumption. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) argue that digital consumption can occur in different fragments/segments, namely digital content and digital devices. For example, Apple Music is providing digital content while the iPhone, the digital device, is necessary to access that content. Thus, consumption of digital music is both, liquid as well as solid. One form of liquid, and therefore dematerialised consumption that is particularly relevant for the purpose of this research is digital virtual consumption (DVC). In the context of this study, it describes the usage of objects (such as clothes, furniture, or weapons) in digital virtual spaces such as online communities (e.g. Habbo Hotel), online games (e.g. Word of Warcraft) or social media (e.g. editing photos). The following chapter will give a more detailed description and overview of DVC and DVGs.

3.2 Digital virtual consumption

As shown in chapter 3.1, digitalisation, including the introduction of the internet and digital communication platforms, has shaped consumer behaviour irreversibly and has not only led to dematerialisation but has also induced the rise of DVC. Especially in recent years new digital spaces in the form of social media platforms, virtual worlds and video games have appeared and are more and more integrated into people’s everyday life. Consequently, consumers are incentivised to spend real money on digital virtual goods (DVG) (Lehdonvirta, 2009b). These DVGs can go beyond the capabilities of material goods and therefore may lead to the realisation of consumption fantasies, for example drive a luxury car or have a magic wand (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010). Per definition used in this study DVGs do not exist in the physical world. They may mimic physical objects but DVGs have no physical attributes (Lehdonvirta, 2009b). This is important to note, as other literature uses a broader definition of the term DVC. For instance, Leban et al., (2020) relate DVC consumption to social media practices. The authors state that social media platforms represent an in-between space, that merges solid with liquid consumption. As an example, consumers contribute to dematerialisation by transferring their material possessions (such as clothes) to virtual representations of it via photos or other content formats that are posted on social media. However, for the purpose of this study, the term DVC refers to the usage of digitally produced liquid objects that are used in digital virtual spaces.

To examine consumer motivations to purchase DVGs, it is essential to understand the factors that have gradually influenced consumption behaviour and led to the emergence of

DVC. Lehdonvirta (2009a) argues that there are three waves that led to the rise of DVC and are led by the evolving integration of the internet into consumers everyday lives. The first wave is referred to as the “shopping-online wave” and is marked by the purchasing of conventional goods and services over the internet. It debuted in 1995 by the launch of e-commerce seller Amazon. The products are still tangible, however the customer buying journey has shifted online. This created significant advantages for the consumer ranging from increased convenience and availability to facilitated price comparisons and product selections. According to Anderson (2006) this led to a greater diversification and segmentation in individual tastes and styles, as consumers were facing greater freedom of expression in terms of their preferences, not being restrained anymore by physical shops in their neighbourhood.

The second wave is the “participatory wave” and is characterized by the expansion of social media. It includes both information goods and innovative ways of consuming traditional material possessions (Lehdonvirta, 2009a). Information goods such as books, newspaper, computer software, images music and videos are depicted in a digital format. Additionally, social media and other open-source software and web applications enabled consumers to actively engage in their consumption experience by modifying the original product (e.g., music remixes) or creating own content (e.g., videos). Literature uses the terms prosumerism, peer production and user-created content to describe consumers active participation in the production of information goods. Lehdonvirta (2009a) describes this wave as a paradigm shift as the new technologies and digital innovations significantly changed consumption behaviour.

The third wave, which is most relevant for the purpose of this research, is termed “virtual consumption wave” and began with the introduction of online multiplayer games in the form of digital virtual spaces in the early 2000s (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010). Examples of games include Second Life, where consumers live a second life with an avatar in an online virtual world, Habbo Hotel, which was particularly popular among teenagers and encouraged them to buy and trade DVGs for their avatar and rooms, World of Warcraft, a MMO which is still very popular today, invites people to purchase artifacts to aid them receive power and status in the game. During this time players began trading and purchasing virtual goods that can be used in those online games for real money.

Digital virtual goods

Before examining motivations, it is important to inspect DVGs in more detail. DVGs are created with computer software and do not exist in the physical world. They have no physical attributes, like weight, and vanish once they leave cyberspace (Leban et al., 2020). Consumers can acquire

DVGs in different ways. They may receive them for free, they may purchase them either with digital or even material currency or trade them with other users (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2010). Moreover, other than information goods, DVGs are rivalrous, meaning that they cannot be shared endlessly with other users (Fairfield, 2005). Instead, each copy of a DVG can be owned by only one user at a time, which makes them scarce. Furthermore, DVGs must have a certain persistency, meaning that they must remain available for the user for some extend of time to be considered a DVG (Fairfield, 2005). For example, an item that disappears when shutting down the digital device does not contain much value. Additionally, Farfield (2005) argues that they must be interconnected to other systems and users. DVGs can be categorized into decorative and functional based goods (Lehdonvirta, 2009b). Decorative goods relate to hedonic and social attributes and are for example avatar skins or new outfits and therefore only have a visual effect. Functional goods can be further divided into performance and functionality and are for example weapons or furniture items, that can be used to fulfil a certain function in the virtual environment. Lehdonvirta (2009b) notes that both categories can coexist at the same item, as the item may have a different purpose depending on the situation it is used in. For example, a weapon can be used to fight (functionality, performance) but also to show off (decorative). It is vital to emphasize that DVGs of the third wave are valued by consumers differently than information goods (second wave). The values consumers perceive from DVGs are more closely related to those of tangible goods in terms of their hedonic and social values that are derived from specific attributes such as scarcity (Lehdonvirta, 2009b). Moreover, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth's (2010) distinguish four functions how DVG work differently than material goods. (1) stimulation of consumer desire, (2) actualisation of consumer daydreams, (3) actualisation of consumer fantasy and (4) experimentation. How this influences value and purchase drivers for DVC will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.3.

3.3 Digital virtual consumption beyond functionality

As described in the previous chapter, the acquisition of digital virtual decorative goods brings values to consumers beyond functionality. The following literature demonstrates this. According to Lehdonvirta (2009b), purchase motivations for DVGs can be divided into three categories: functional drivers, hedonic drivers, and social drivers. Mäntymäki and Salo (2015) based their research on the theory of consumption which includes five values: functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. The authors findings support what has been previously said about social and hedonic values and add that young consumers (between the age of 13 to

18 years) are primarily motivated by decoration, fun, status, and premium memberships. Guo and Barnes (2011) discovered that both extrinsic factors, such as functionality, and intrinsic factors, such as enjoyment and personal adaptation of the avatar, motivate consumers to purchase. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2011) determined that consumers aim for self-presentation when purchasing a DVG. And Jung and Pawlowski (2014) analysed social attributes consumers assigned to DVGs and discovered that pleasure and amusements are primary motivating factors of virtual consumption. When taking these findings together, it becomes clear that consumer motivations to purchase DVGs are derived from self-related factors as well as social factors. This chapter will outline the theories and concepts behind those different motivations in a DVC context.

3.3.1 Identity formation and expression

Objects go beyond having functional value. They fulfil symbolic values and play a vital role in the expression and formation of one's identity (Belk, 1988). Belk (1988) refers to this as the "extended self," stating that people regard possessions as part of themselves. In his original paper Belk (1988) refers to (Sartre, 1943) and argues that there are three ways in which objects become part of the extended self. First, by developing control over an object. For example, a vehicle only gets incorporated into the extended self by driving it. This is important because it explains how nondurable and intangible objects such as services or events can contribute to the self (Belk, 1988). The second way that Belk (1988) identified is to create an object oneself, and the third is by knowing an object passionately. Furthermore, Belk (1988) states that there are multiple layers of self. Thus, people exist not only on an individual level but also on a collectivist one. They use objects as symbols to define for example, group, family, subculture, and nations. This is relevant for the study as it argues that clothing and accessories can create a collectivist definition of the self.

In an updated paper that complements the original research from 1988, Belk states that digital technologies have inherently changed consumer behaviour and that digital and virtual possessions play an increasing role in the formation of the extended self (Belk, 2013). The digital modifications of the extended self-occur in five dimensions: dematerialisation, reembodiment, sharing, co-construction of self, and distributed memory.

Belk (2013) states that it is possible to integrate dematerialized possessions into the extension of the self just as much as with solid goods. However, Belk (2013) also argues that there are some differences between liquid and solid possessions, particularly in the case of

informational goods, as uncertainty about ownership arises. Additionally, the decreased tangibility may lower the efficiency of integrating digital possessions into the extended self. According to (Cushing, 2013), the degree of integration depends on the age, with younger consumers being more likely to consider digital objects to belong to the extended self. Cushing (2013) also found that people desire the ability to have “bounded control” over their digital possessions. Thus, if people can manoeuvre and/or modify their digital possessions they will more likely consider the DVG to be part of their extended self.

With regards to reembodiment, the more time and effort consumers spend on customizing and playing their avatar, the more they identify with “being” it (Bischoff et al., 2019). Furthermore, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) emphasize the possibility to experiment with different alternative selves by using different decorative items and physical characteristics. Thus, the virtual space allows for a more easy and less risky self-experimentation.

When it comes to sharing, Belk (2013) argues that the way consumers share information about themselves has significantly changed. Often consumers present or introduce themselves with the status items they own. On digital photos or other media for self-presentation it is acceptable to show off. Thus, there is an inward turn in self-conscious construction of one’s autobiography (Zhao, 2005). Furthermore, Belk (2013) states that consumers do not only establish their online identities from an inward-turn perspective but also aim to display themselves outwards for everyone to see, which advances group identity and aggregate self. Information about the self is now being shared also with people that are not known in the physical life and audiences are far bigger and broader, as consumers are liberated from geographical and time constraints. Instead, new virtual environments are created that allow users to remodel their abilities and identities, which Kozinets and Kedzior (2009) refer to as “re-worlding”. Another interesting aspect, that is mentioned by Belk (2013) is the online disinhibition effect, which may arise due to a lack in face-to-face meetings and anonymity. It describes the tendency to feel safer to present one’s “true self” in the digital space. This may also lead to toxic disinhibition, when users “flame others” more often due to lack of self-disclosure.

Furthermore, Belk (2013) argues that the interaction with others in the digital space contributes to constructing the joint extended self. People who communicate in the digital space come to a shared understanding of preferences or trends within that group, meaning that one does not just form the self individually but also with the help of others. Belk (2013) refers to

this as the aggregated self. This co-constructed self is also influenced by the common behaviour of people seeking affirmation, validation, and reassurance from friends through the online space for example, through comments and likes on social media (Belk, 2013).

The last modification on the extended self is distributed memory (Belk, 2013). Digital technologies facilitate the way people document and collect information about their lives. This autobiographical documentation not only influences the individual extended self but also the aggregate self, as information is shared and thus remembered by other people via for example photos, events, and timelines on social media. However, the possibility to select certain memories and information to be shared with others contributes to the formation of a consistent narrative, that follows a story line based on the identity people want to be perceived as. People may see the extended self as an aggregation of those collected memories. Additionally, the digital space enables users to store a larger amount of digital assets and therefore there is a decreased incentive to dispose those virtual possessions (Belk, 2013).

To summarize, in his updated paper on the extended self, Belk (2013) argues that digital possessions fulfil a significant function in the development of one's identity. Instead of fulfilling physiological or functional needs, DVC relates to self-actualization, by using DVGs as symbols to communicate and express a imagine either through an avatar or other virtual communities (Mäntymäki & Salo, 2015). Thus, consumer frequently convert digital commodities into possessions that have a personal meaning (Denegri-Knott et al., 2012) . For example, Denegri-Knott et al. (2012) found that users of “The Sims” (a life simulation video game) who recently purchased a new house afterwards spent a much time and effort to customize the space and make it “theirs”.

Belk (2013) states that this is especially true for younger consumers that were “born digital”. Bischoff et al. (2019) state that GenZ consumers (born between 1997 – 2012) show a deeper integration with the digital world to the point that they form the same level of psychological attachment to a DVG as to a physical good. The researchers expect that for future generations the line between “digital” and “physical” possessions will further diminish with the growing integration of digital technologies (Bischoff et al., 2019).

3.3.1 Social meaning

Previously, “solid” goods such as luxury watches and automobiles and other distinctly visible and apparent objects that represented one's status were used to gain distinction from others

(Denegri-Knott et al., 2020). This is often referred to as “conspicuous consumption”, a term developed by Veblen (1899, as cited in Hinz et al., 2010) which defines the concept of purchasing luxury goods and services to publicly display income and wealth to acquire or maintain social status. Similarly, the term “status consumption” describes the practice of not only increasing the own ego but to desiring recognition and distinction from one’s surroundings (Eastman et al., 1999). Eastman et al., (1999) state that status is a form of power that is constructed from other people’s respect, consideration, and envy. It is an individual’s relative position within society, and it can differ depending on the reference group (Siepmann et al., 2022). Products that have a higher price than their functional counterpart and convey status are often referred to as status symbols (Eastman et al., 1999). But with the emergence and increased importance of DVGs, can the theory of status consumption be transferred to DVC?

DVC bring social value as it is centered around social networks and online communities such as MMOs or virtual worlds, and consumers increasingly act out their social communication and relations in digital spaces. This leads to the suspicion that social norms and structures may also form motivations to purchase DVGs. Literature supports this assumption by stating that the feeling of being in a shared space is a fundamental base for purchase intentions (Animesh et al., 2011). Besides individualistic identity-based values, consumers also perceive a social value from acquiring DVGs (Lehdonvirta, 2009b). (Lehdonvirta et al. (2009) found that in the case of Habbo Hotel (an online community), players describe each other using expressions such as “stylish” or “fashionable,” which relate to others’ visual appearances and virtual possessions. Lehdonvirta (2009b) states that what is considered “stylish” within the community changes and is influenced by common understandings rather than objective aesthetic or qualitative reasons. Mäntymäki and Salo (2015) describe social value as the benefit from a DVG obtained from the positive association with a specific social group, which tends to increase a person’s social well-being. The researchers argue that DVC is a social behaviour through which “symbolic meanings, social codes, relationships, consumer identity, and ego” are constructed and motives for purchasing a certain DVG depend on the desired perception by others (Mäntymäki & Salo, 2015). Additionally, the authors argue that the type of virtual possessions a user owns aid in determining one’s “social circle” within the virtual community.

Status consumption in the online space

Furthermore, (Lehdonvirta, 2009b) notes that online platforms have the ability to generate a traditional status system by assigning economic value to certain symbolic DVGs. The author gives an example from the multi-player online game “Ultima Online”, in which a large number

of users have purchased a certain DVG that had a moderate visual look and no performance or functional values. However, players paid a large amount of money for this specific DVG. Lehdonvirta (2009b) found that the reason for that is the extreme rarity of the item within the game. It was originally only developed as a decorative item, but once users noticed the scarcity of the object, they started to perceive it as a status symbol, which they would display at an important spot in their virtual house.

Moreover, in their study Mäntymäki and Salo (2015) found status to be one of the primary value drivers for teenagers to spend real money in the digital world. Mäntymäki and Salo (2015) used Habbo Hotel (an online community) as the base for their study and observed that users purchased a premium membership primarily to increase their status and acquire approval from other players. Having a premium membership is interpreted by the users as a code to differentiate ordinary from premium users and therefore relates to the status function in DVC. Additionally, the researchers found that users purchase the premium membership to gain more friends, as this membership allows them to include a larger number of players to be included in their “friends list”. Interestingly, most users do not use their real names or reveal their identity in the game. The status gained within the game is not transferred to the physical world and therefore serves as a sufficient motivation to purchase DVGs. Another study by Hinz et al. (2010) further supports the argument that status consumption occurs in the digital virtual space. Similar as other authors, they used Habbo Hotel as their data collection platform. In their study they discovered that users who purchase rare and expensive objects on average have 2.5 times more friends than other users with the same qualities. They conclude that conspicuous consumption of DVGs improves the social position within the virtual community.

Another angle from which this topic can be regarded from is sharing status symbols on social media. Through photos and videos consumers can share their status goods and luxury possessions to a worldwide audience (Siepmann et al., 2022). Kemper et al. (2022) state that gaining a sense of superiority and a higher status are primary motivations for consumers to share their luxury possessions on social media. Additionally, studies have shown that in postmodern society, consumers favour intangible luxuries such as experiences opposed to solid and tangible luxury goods (Siepmann et al., 2022). Consumers use such luxury experiences as status symbols on social media to get around the problem that traditionally experiences are less visible than material possessions. However, Kemper et al. (2022) argue that tangible items, such as a luxury watch, are easier to identify as status symbols and therefore provide higher degrees of social comparison. The researchers found that consumers tend to share luxury items more

regularly when the purchase is material, but only if the consumer has a high entitlement level, meaning that he feels he is entitled to have privileged treatment. The findings above demonstrate that literature focuses either on the social media portrayal of material possessions or intangible experiences but lacks research on the usage and display of DVGs on social media. As explained in chapter 2, DVGs in particular DVF is not only used in online gaming and virtual communities but is increasingly edited onto photographs on social media.

In summary, the literature shows that consumers are motivated to spend money on DVGs because they represent status symbols within the virtual space. By displaying their status DVG to others they acquire perceived superiority and a higher status. The examples show that status DVC can occur in MMOs and online communities such as Habbo Hotel as well as in the social media realm.

Another interesting aspect about social motivations to purchase DVGs is that digital spaces provide more opportunities for social comparison (Bischoff et al., 2019). Social comparison theory implies that people seek to evaluate themselves and their status by comparing themselves to others to reduce their own uncertainties (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison can either be upward, by comparing oneself to someone who is perceived better or downward by comparing to someone with inferior characteristics (Vogel et al., 2014). By displaying status, DVGs consumers can become an upward comparison target to other users, which may enhance their self-esteem and evaluation. Bischoff et al., (2019) argue that online communities, opposed to the physical world, stimulate more open social comparison and less restrained negative comments (Bischoff et al., 2019). People tend to give more honest feedback in the online space, which encourages individuals to improve their self-image by presenting their ideal self instead of their actual self.

Other than receiving a higher status and recognition from others through luxury and expensive DVGs, consumers may also receive those benefits through the consumption of highly novel goods, that distinguish them from other individuals (Coskuner-Balli & Sandikci, 2014). Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci (2014) state that novelty seeking creates social distinction. They argue that newness is not derived from the product's tangible attributes but rather from its social meaning. Bardhi et al. (2020) note that there is a shift in luxury consumption behaviour from desiring exclusivity and inaccessibility of an object towards newness. The authors give fashion as an example, whereas the social meaning of newness resides in the uniqueness and originality of the design, implying that it is something novel, that the consumer has not yet seen before. (Bardhi et al., 2020) refer to this new form of luxury consumption as "liquid luxury". Liquid

luxury is rooted in the digital transformation which incentivizes people to value speed, flexibility and knowledge (Denegri-Knott et al., 2020). As a result, the liquification of luxury is more concerned with speed and novelty than with exclusivity (Bardhi et al., 2020). Furthermore, Bardhi et al., (2020) note that liquid luxury is encoded in an inconspicuous consumption style. They state that traditional status symbols such as luxury cars or do not transfer the same status anymore. Instead, they use the term “inconspicuous consumption” to describes how some consumer groups see value in products that have more subtle status markers which are only recognized by specific people with a high cultural capital. Furthermore, it is stated that consumers display status through knowledge and culture. The authors note that this is particular true for a group of consumers they refer to as “tech professionals”, where status is converted through knowledge, creativity and self-improvements.

4. Methodology

This chapter will describe the methodological approach chosen for the research that aims to explore consumer motivations to purchase DVF. Since the purpose of the research is to get a better understanding from a consumer perspective on owning virtual fashion goods, an explorative research design was chosen. The qualitative approach, in the form of in-depth interviews, includes a significant smaller sample size than a quantitative research approach but therefore aims to encourage respondents to answer in more detail and explain their thoughts and motivations to provide a deeper understanding of the research subject. The explorative nature of the research indicates that this research follows an interpretivist epistemology. In interpretivism consumers are considered as a sensemaking instrument and as the primary subject of analysis by concentrating on micro level signs such as meanings, identity, symbolism, and rituals (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Interpretivism is often applied within in consumer behaviour studies that focus on possession and ownership and therefore represents a suitable research philosophy for the purpose of the study.

4.1 Data collection method

The qualitative data collection method of the study consists of five in-depth, one-to-one interviews following a semi-structured interview guide.

Sampling

Respondents were chosen, following a purposive sampling method, which is not based on a probability sample but on characteristics of the population in relation to the study aim. The

necessary characteristics were divided into two categories. The first category includes respondents that regularly engage in MMOs and have a customized avatar within the game. The second category required participants to have a Bitmoji which is a customizable avatar on the social media platform Snapchat. Furthermore, participants from both categories should have a general interest in fashion. In total five interviews were held before data saturation was achieved. At that point, no new and additional ideas were given in the participants answers. Table 1 describes the profiles of the participants that took part in the interview.

Table 1: List of participants

	Name	Age	Sex	Nationality	Occupation	Avatar	Date
1	Participant 1	26	M	German	Business Student	Bitmoji	07/04/22
2	Participant 2	24	M	Mexican	Business Student	Gamer (Warzone, Fortnite)	08/04/22
3	Participant 3	25	F	German	Logistic manager	Bitmoji	10/04/22
4	Participant 4	12	F	German	High School Student	Gamer (Roblox, Fortnite)	22/04/22
5	Participant 5	21	M	French	Language student	Gamer (Guild Wars 2, Grepolis, Clash royale)	23/04/22

Interview guide and interview conduction

A semi-structured interview guide was developed with the objective to link the questions to the theory gained from the reviewed literature while keeping the questions and conversation open to discover new ideas. The interview guide was divided into four parts. The first part consists of a warm-up and introduction of the avatar. The second part addresses questions related to the participants self-identity online and offline, followed by a third section on status consumption. The last part was designed to be more specific and covers questions about fashion related NFTs. Only participants that were familiar with the concept of NFTs were included in this part. The questions were designed in an open-ended manner, giving the respondent enough room to express their thoughts. The interviewer was allowed to make changes to the order of the questions, answer questions, make clarifications, add, or erase questions according to the context and flow of the conversation, and adjust the language, therefore allowing to better explore individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Berg, 2009). This was particularly relevant in the case of participant 4, as the respondent’s age demanded the use of German as the interview language and also the usage of easier words and additional clarifications.

Before the interview conduction, respondents were asked to fill out and sign a consent form that explained the consent claim, information, use and confidential requirements that are needed to follow ethical principles in research. Since one of the respondents was underaged, the parents were included in the interview preparation and were asked to sign the consent form (NSPCC, 2022). To better follow participants' non-verbal indicators and evaluate the validity of answers, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, either in person or via video call. The duration of each interview varied based on the participant's extent of explanations of the answers. Nonetheless, the average length of interviews was between 30 to 45 minutes. Additionally, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. One of the interviews was held in German and was first transcribed in its original version and then translated into English by the researcher.

4.2 Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed following an inductive coding approach by identifying themes and ideas that emerge from the content. During the preliminary analysis, the transcripts were read, and initial themes and patterns were identified. In the next step, the researcher assigned codes and subcodes to the different themes. The reading and coding approach was repeated several times, and each time, codes were reorganized, grouped, and eliminated until a satisfactory point of analysis was reached. A list of the final coding categories and quotes can be found in the result section of this thesis. The coding categories were then conceptualized into different themes and connected to theories and insights found in the literature.

5. Results

The objective is to explore consumers' motivations to purchase DVF goods and understand the different values and benefits they receive from it. The inductive analysis revealed that the data can be divided into four main themes representing motivations to acquire digital virtual fashion: self-expression, experimentation, social factors, and dematerialisation of life. Table 2 demonstrates how the main themes were further divided into sub-categories to structure and conceptualize the data better. It is important to note that some of the motivations are correlated from a theoretical point of view, for example, self-expression and experimentation, however, they will be analysed individually for the purpose of this study. The following chapter will provide an analytical overview of the four motivations found.

Table 2: Overview of themes associated with DVF consumption motivations

Theme	Subtheme	Explanation
1 Self-expression		Use DVF as vehicle to express identity.
	Realistic	DVF is similar to physical life clothes. The aim is to have a digital identity that is authentic and very close to the real and physical self.
	Ideal	DVF reflects the desired and ideal self, by e.g. wearing higher-end brands. The aim is to have a digital identity that is close to the real and physical self but in an idealised way.
	Different	DVF and style is different from physical one. The online identity is not related to physical identity. Often more than one online identity is present.
2 Experimentation		DVF allows respondents to experiment with their identity and different styles.
	Identity-experimentation	DVF provides the ability to experiment more easily with self-identity.
	Try-out and test	Try-out clothes before physically purchasing them or test outfit combinations.
	Change style frequently	Less effort and cost to change style/clothes more frequently. Contributes to sustainable consumption.
3 Social factors		DVF consumption is influenced by the perception of and interaction with others.
	Status symbols	DVF as status items to enhance social position and engaging in social comparison.
	Expertise and knowledge	Consumption of DVF to show expertise and knowledge about novelties and technology trends.
4 Dematerialisation of life		Life, in particular, the interaction with others occurs to an increasing extent digitally and virtually, which will in the future serve as a base to engage in DVF consumption.
	Communication with friends	Use avatar to engage in more genuine communication with friends.
	Confirmation/affirmation	Receive an increased amount of confirmation and affirmation from friends and unknown individuals in the digital space.

To begin with, it is interesting to note that the respondents were involved with the topic of DVF to different extents. In all cases, the participants that play MMOs have purchased DVGs in the form of skins or accessories for real money before, while the Snapchat users mainly use virtual fashion to dress their Bitmoji. However, they have not spent money on it. Thus, the respondent's attitudes and behaviour towards DVF differ in terms of experience, which allows the analysis to draw from various perspectives.

5.1 Self-expression

All respondents frequently mentioned motivations related to self-expression. The motivations to express themselves either directly relate to DVF or indirectly by describing the representation of their avatar. The theme self-expression is further divided into three subthemes; realistic, ideal, and different, which vary in the degree to which they reflect the representation of the real and physical self. It was found however, that participants can have various forms of self-expression which they interchangeably use, depending on the platform or game. One of the aspects that is mutual among all three categories is that participants know that their presentation of the self leads others to have certain perceptions about them. Therefore, they purposively create an identity through which they want to express themselves in the digital space, whether this is a realistic, ideal, or a different representation of the real self. The following quotation illustrates this awareness.

I guess it's just nice to have people see you in a certain style. I think with every person that we see like friends or even strangers, we see them in a style and we already kind of can have a feeling of how they might be like or what they're interested in. And it's just interesting to see how people can be perceived by others on their style. (Participant 3)

The first subcategory “realistic” refers to participants mentioning a digital representation of the self that is very close to the real and physical self. All participants, despite of being a gamer or Bitmoji user, mentioned this category at some point. The “realness” either refers to the participant’s virtual avatar, or to the fashion worn by that avatar. Participants thereby placed a high importance on portraying themselves in an authentic and real way. The following quotation show this.

I would purchase kind of a fashion item because at the end, also in the metaverse I would like something that I think needs to be realistic and authentic. And if I have an item that is exactly representing and reflecting myself, I would probably be up for spending some sort of money on it. (Participant 1)

This includes only acquiring DVF that they would also buy in the physical world or that they own already. Therefore, the virtual fashion must reflect one’s real-life style in terms of preferences and taste.

If only I could be wearing the clothes I live in when I was playing, it would be wonderful, you know. (Participant 5)

There is a game called Fortnite. I was very surprised because they are selling like kind of skins of Balenciaga, and I really don't like that brand. I don't like it. So, if I have the option to buy something like that, I wouldn't wear it because I generally don't like it. Because in real life I would never buy it, so I would never buy it online. (Participant 2)

Moving on to the next subcategory “ideal”, it can be stated that it is still a representation of the self that is in terms of appearance and style, closely related to the participant's physical identity. However, it represents a modified and idealized version of the physical identity. Interestingly, informants differ in the degree of ideal they are aiming to achieve. While some participants, strive for an unachievable look (for example, something they could not afford in real life), others choose virtual fashion items they could and would purchase in physical life but have not yet found in the store. The following quotations demonstrate how respondents purchase virtual fashion that they desire but cannot afford in real life.

I think it would be fun to have higher luxury brands in the Bitmoji categories. Because it's not something that I can buy. (Participant 3)

Maybe sometimes I would go for designer things that are like the same kind of object, but a little more prestigious, a little more expensive. So, if I could choose between the Zara jacket but there's also kind of a jacket of Dior or whatever ... I'll probably choose the one, where I think the brand is cooler, but I couldn't afford it in real life. (Participant 2)

On the other hand, other respondents were more motivated to purchase DVF that they could afford in real life but have not yet purchased, as they are still looking for the ideal fit, colour, or brand.

And then she's (the avatar) wearing these pants that I'm actually looking for in real life now. So, in real life, how I would want to look. And I just chose the colours and clothes that I would like. (Participant 4)

So, for like Bitmoji I can also select items that I don't have in my closet but I would like to have maybe or would like to buy and didn't buy it yet. So, for the example when I changed my Bitmoji I selected this white shirt and like a grey hoodie above it, which is like a nice style. But for example, in like my closet, there isn't a perfect grey hoodie. (Participant 1)

In terms of displaying fashion on social media, respondents mentioned that they do pay attention to what they are wearing in the pictures and videos they post. They indicate that it does not have to be different clothes than they would normally wear in physical life, but it should be a favourite or ideal outfit that is, “cool” or as one respondent called it, “social media appropriate”. Additionally, one response revealed that the outfit should represent the aesthetics of the picture, such as the background and activity. The following quotations convey both these aspects related to their ideal outfit choices on social media.

I think about the aesthetic of the picture. And of course, one part of it is the style that I have. So, I wouldn't select a picture where I'm not dressed appropriately for Instagram or where I would say I don't look good. I think if I look at most of the pictures on my Instagram, I have a nice outfit, in my opinion. (Participant 1)

And that also implies that I'm dressed nicely. So, I wouldn't post a picture in which I think my outfit isn't looking good. I would definitely, even if it's like sometimes unconsciously, always

review what I'm wearing. And even not just that the outfit is nice but also that it fits nicely right in this picture. Like imagine, there's a wrinkle on a shirt. Then I wouldn't post it. Or even edit it or choose a different picture. (Participant 3)

Furthermore, it is interesting to note, that the ideal representation does not necessarily need to be related to the avatar's physical characteristics, but it could also be an ideal representation of one's lifestyle. For example, one respondent dressed her Bitmoji in beach clothes because that is her ideal lifestyle. She wishes to spend more time as her "free time me", thus working less and being a more relaxed and happier version of herself.

Maybe more kind of like more the personality that is not working right now. Maybe more like my free time me. So that I would like to represent like, me being at a beach in a cool outfit, like having fun. I also I think I'm showing like the peace sign with my Bitmoji and so yeah, just a happy version of me that's relaxed. (Participant 3)

The last subcategory "different" refers to respondents describing to have a different identity or dress differently than in their physical life. This "different" identity does not necessarily need to be an ideal version. For example, one respondent created an avatar which represents a version of himself that is eighty years old (Participant 5). Thus, it still represents "him" but in an identity that is less associated with his current physical identity. In some cases, the difference is related to specific features that are possible in DVC but would not be physically possible in real life. One respondent for example mentioned dressing his avatar in magical outfits.

I love the bloomie thing though. With gleams or fire or these kind of things, which seem magic. (Participant 5)

I sometimes don't necessarily want the character to look like me. I'm just more like, oh, he has a magical weapon or a helmet that looks cool. And I think it is nice to be able to wear special things that I obviously couldn't in real life. (Participant 2)

In other cases, the motivation to dress differently in the virtual space comes from not having the confidence to wear certain fashion items in the physical world and to play with the ability to have a different identity online.

It would be interesting to play with different styles that you're not super confident with wearing on the streets. And just like having a different personality of yours online. (Participant 3)

In sum, informants use DVF to express an identity they want to undertake. This identity is either the same as the physical identity (realistic), an ideal version of that (ideal), or a different identity that is less connected to the physical one. The different self-expression categories can coexist, and respondents might express themselves differently depending on the platform or even within the game.

5.2 Experimentation

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that DVC of fashion goods offers consumers a playground for experimentation. The analysis revealed that there are different motivations to engage in experimentation. The first motivation relates to the previous theme of “self-expression” and the ability to experiment more easily with one’s identity in the digital space.

One day I like to be that kind of person in the game and the other I will be someone else. I don't know it really depends and it's fun to experiment with my look. In the real world I don't really do that but in the game it's kind of easy to change. (Participant 5)

Other respondents do not see it as an experimentation with their virtual identity but rather as a way to virtually try-out a new piece of clothing before purchasing it physically in the future. Similarly, another respondent wants to be creative and experiment with different outfit combinations as a way to evaluate if the pieces work together and if style suits her. The following quotations convey both these aspects.

I want to buy an item and I don't have it yet, so I maybe try it digitally first to somehow maybe even see how it looks. (Participant 1)

It would be fun to kind of try out different styles on this technology and see how I would look like or how I would like to wear them, like test what kind of outfits I could create with that. (Participant 3)

Finally, some respondents placed importance on the possibility to change one’s existing clothes more often. One respondent mentioned that she checks every day for new clothes and accessories that are available in the online game she plays. She is “fascinated by what’s out there in terms of clothes” (Participant 4) and therefore likes to change her skins and outfits as often as possible. Another respondent described that the process of customizing his avatar was an ongoing process, that required him to continuously purchase new items to stay up-to-date with others.

I was constantly personalizing it. It was never finished. One week I decide to buy a new item for my for my character and so I went to the shop and I bought for example a new kind of hair or maybe a new arm or a new sword. (Participant 5)

One respondent within this theme connected DVF to a more sustainable consumption method as it allows her to “experiment with my style, but it’s not creating any damage to the world” (Participant 3). She reveals that her style preferences change quickly and therefore sees digital virtual fashion as a way to decrease fast-fashion consumption in the physical world.

It's not contributing to fast fashion and maybe being interested in one piece in one moment but in the next day, I wouldn't like to wear it anymore. I think it would be really cool and also, yeah, sustainable to have an online closet that you can kind of play around with. (Participant 3)

In sum, respondents see DVF as a possibility to experiment with their identity, to test different styles and to change the own style more often without contributing to an increased materialistic consumption and fast-fashion in the physical world.

5.3 Social factors

Social motivations represent the third main theme that was identified in the analysis. As section 5.1 already indicated, respondents' motivations to purchase DVF are not only present on an individual level but are influenced by how others perceive and interact with them. The analysis shows that respondents are influenced by both; friends as well as people they do not know. Additionally, it becomes clear that particularly the 12-year-old participant frequently mentioned social drivers in her answers by either being influenced by other people or by wanting to shape other's perceptions about herself.

Respondents frequently gave a responses that suggest that DVC is a vehicle to raise their status and attain appreciation and respect from others by showing off or publicly displaying their purchases. One respondent even mentioned that he is currently not interested in purchasing fashion related to NFTs because there is no platform yet (that he likes) where he can publicly display his virtual NFT possessions. This shows that digital fashion items represent status symbols. The following quotations further demonstrates how status consumption is expressed in the data.

I just walk on the map and show my new stuff to the other players...they send me a message and tell me that it is good... It is exactly the same feeling as when you bought a Ferrari and you are pleased to show it to the other people. (Participant 5)

So many people always look at my skins. Every now and then some people copy me with the colours, for example, and I just love it. (Participant 4)

One respondent stated that people frequently copy her outfits and compliment her in the online game, which gives her a reassured feeling of being fashionable. She explains that she particularly feels good when people, that dislike her, copy her skins. This downward social comparison shows that virtual fashion goods, such as skins, enhance her self-esteem. On the other hand, the same respondent stated that she also copies other people's style, for example from people she sees on social media and thus she also engages in upward social comparison. She then transfers the styles from social media to her avatar in the online game.

I always see it on TikTok, you can always swipe around and then you see people with nice stuff. And I always think to myself, "Wow, that's nice, I'd like that too" ... And I check if I can find something similar in Roblox. (Participant 4)

Another motivation that is related to social factors is that DVF is used by one respondent as a tool to collaborate with her friends by creating partner looks. Thus, they enhance their status by advancing their group identity. This is demonstrated in the following quotation.

And then we would do the partner look and then we would play together... Well, we don't do exactly the same thing. So, I have blond hair and then maybe she buys brown hair. So the same hair in a ponytail but only in brown. Or same outfits but in other colours. And we just do that because it's kind of cool. (Participant 4)

Furthermore, the results show that it is not necessarily the cost of the DVG that determines if it is considered a status symbol but also the novelty of the good. Instead, status is achieved by purchasing new items.

I would go into WhatsApp and write "look at my skin" or something and then I would say, "I bought something new" and show it to my friends. (Participant 4)

In addition, respondents like to show off their knowledge and expertise about trends and novelty goods to others. By purchasing fashion NFTs and showing them publicly, for example on social media, they enhance their status and show that they are an early adopter and thus differentiate themselves from others that are not as involved with digital technology trends. However, not all respondents consider themselves as early adopters. Instead, they mention that they like to be informed about trends in fashion or technology but do not necessarily follow them yet. The following quotes demonstrate how participants seek knowledge about trends and novelties to enhance their status. The second quotation shows that owning an NFT and showing it others, he receives positive feelings as he gets associated with being part of a specific social group that "knows what's going on" (Participant 1) and is ahead in terms of digital trends.

I think I'm an early adopter somehow on those things, like I want to be before the wave. I want to also be able to speak about topics that are coming or will come... So this probably makes me somehow stick out also from my friends. (Participant 1)

I would like to have an NFT as a profile picture on Twitter. Because I think it's funny that people realize, okay, this person is somehow in that space, and he knows what's going on. (Participant 1)

Consequently, rather than only upgrading one's status through expensive or unique DVG's, the informants used DVC in different ways to adjust their social position. Particularly the novelty factor in terms of both, purchasing novel goods as well as being informed about them, plays role in the consumption of DVF goods. Furthermore, respondents collaborate with each other and seek group identity to enhance their social position. These social factors generally enhance respondents' self-esteem and make them feel better about themselves. The experience of positive emotions serve as a motivation to purchase more DVF goods.

5.3 Dematerialisation of life

The last theme that is identified, “dematerialisation of life”, was not explicitly mentioned by respondents as a motivation to purchase DVF. Instead, it demonstrates the general movement towards a dematerialized life. Without explicitly asking about it, respondents frequently mentioned activities of their life that increasingly occur virtually. In particular, activities that include interaction with others (beyond social media and gaming). Thus, this result section does not represent a current motivation to purchase DVF but rather a preliminary stage that may serve as a base for further motivations, which will arise due to a life that is increasingly happening virtually. The dematerialisation that were mentioned by respondents mainly includes communication with friends as well as confirmation and affirmation.

One respondent shared his experience of using MMOs not to actually play the game but rather as tool to interact with his long-distance friends. In contrast to using traditional video chat applications, he feels that interacting through video games feels more realistic and dynamic, which provides him comfort. Thus, he is shifting part of his regular life to a virtual space and not only uses his avatar to play the game but to really engage in activities that would normally occur in the physical space.

I think it's like a different form of socializing because literally like sometimes in the game we don't care about the high score or how we're playing we're just there to chat... I think it is very comfortable to just talk sometimes. (Participant 2)

Similarly, another respondent regards her avatar as a more genuine form to interact and keep up with friends that she does not see often. She uses her avatar to create personalized stickers that express emotion to interact with her friend's avatar's to collaboratively. This is a more realistic form of emotional expression as the avatar resembles her physical identity, also in terms of clothing.

If you have friends that you don't see so often, it is nice to I don't know have that sort of interaction with them. And if you have a Bitmoji, that is kind of more like you. It's fun to share with your friends. Like interact on that sense. (Participant 3)

Some responses also revealed that informants seek affirmation and confirmation, for example on their fashion choices, increasingly digitally. In the digital space affirmation is obtained from both, friends and unknown people. It occurs through social media reactions such as likes and positive comments or direct messages on gaming platforms. Confirmation, often actively asked for, mainly happens on direct messenger applications, such as WhatsApp and is often provided through friends.

But yeah, I guess it's also nice to receive feedback. From like, not so close friends, like from people on the internet. (Participant 3)

When I bought something, also in the game, I take photos or screenshots and send them to my friends on WhatsApp before. Then it is usually fine. (Participant 4)

In the two cases below, respondents experience positive feelings from positive comments and feedback, as it enhances their self-esteem and confidence in their fashion style.

I think the effort they (friends) make, when I post something, people have told me like “oh, like, you know, it’s pretty cool” They like how I dress... So yeah, I feel good about myself, I think. (Participant 2)

But sometimes it's just nice to receive positive feedback. I think its similar also for the pictures I post. Sometimes my friends comment something positive about my outfit. And I don't know but that kind of gives me confidence. (Participant 3)

Respondents create a shared understanding of trends by increasingly interacting with others in the digital space. They collaboratively agree on certain styles and looks and therefore obtain similar preferences. In sum, it is to state that informants increasingly interact with others online. Regular activities such as hanging out with friends are moved to the online space, where they often receive a greater amount of affirmation than in the physical world.

To summarize, the four main themes identified in the result section demonstrate that the main drivers to consume DVF are, to a great extent, found in individuals' self-expression and social motivations. The results also highlight that virtual fashion goods serve as vehicles for identity and status expression. Furthermore, it was found that interaction with others occurs to a growing extent digitally or even virtually. This leads to the expectation that the social parts of life are increasingly dematerializing.

6. Discussion

The objective of the research was to explore the rather contemporary topic of DVF from a consumption perspective. The study aimed at answering the question of what the underlying motivations to consume DVF goods are. Four main areas of value were identified, which constitute the base to form motivations to purchase DVF. First, consumers are motivated to use DVF as it provides a way to express their identity. It was found that identity expression varies in the degree of similarity to the physical identity: realistic, ideal, and different. The three forms of self-expression are not mutually exclusive as one consumer can have several identities for different platforms or even within one platform (for example, by having several skins to choose from in an MMO). Second, individuals see value in the possibility of experimentation, which

is easier and less risky for DVF in comparison to physical clothing. Third, since DVF is mainly displayed in digital social environments (such as social media, and online games), consumption intentions are influenced by social drivers. DVF can enhance social status either through traditional status symbols (expensive and luxurious DVF) or novelty. Furthermore, DVF can increase status though showing off expertise about trends in digital technology. The last aspect relates to the research question on a more macro-level, as the dematerialisation of life is not a motivation itself but contributes to the intensification of the previously named motivations. If more aspects of life happen virtually, people will be increasingly motivated to purchase DVF as the line between their physical and virtual lives dissolves.

The results show that motivations to consume DVF are in many aspects similar to the motivations to purchase fashion and clothes in the physical world. However, there are some major motivational differences which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. The first and main difference is that DVF does not fulfill the primary functional value of physical clothes which is to protect from environmental influences such as heat or cold. Thus, the findings support previous literature on the fact that non-functional values such as hedonic, social (Lehdonvirta et al., 2009; Mäntymäki & Salo, 2015) and self-presentation (Kim et al., 2012) represent more significant motivations in DVC.

Furthermore, when comparing to Belk (2013) it becomes clear, that consumers regard DVF as an extension of the self. The results showed that informants do not only reembody themselves in their avatar but also use the specific virtual clothing pieces as a representation of their identity. However, this identity is not always created individually. Through interactions with others, consumers co-create their aggregate extended self (Belk, 2013). The example of one respondent creating a “partner-look” with her friend, by wearing the same outfits in an online game, supports what Lehdonvirta (2009b) found on developing a shared understanding of trends and preferences. Interestingly, respondents mentioned that they receive feedback not only from their friends but also from strangers, which shows that social interactions, in the form of affirmation and confirmation, happen on a larger scale online (source). This leads to suspect that social drivers that serve as a motivation to consume DVF might be even more important in the digital space than in the physical one. With increasing dematerialisation of social interactions (as found in motivation 4), the importance of social factors when purchasing DVF may increase even more in the future.

Another aspect that is particularly unique about DVF consumption and which relates to previous literature on DVGs is the expanded possibility for self-expression beyond the

physically possible. As Denegri-Knott and Molesworth's (2010) stated, DVC allows consumers to actualize their fantasies and experiment with themselves. By allowing consumers to wear fashion with features that are not possible in the physical world, people can wear their fantasies and bring them closer to their (virtual) realities. As the findings showed, this can be of significant value for some consumers, as it enables them to dress in a way they could never in the physical world.

Another difference in motivations between physical and virtual clothing which was found in the study is that DVF is seen as a way to consume more sustainable. As Coskuner-Balli and Sandikci (2014) have shown, individuals have the desire to purchase new things regularly to enhance their self-esteem, which is also something that was found in the study. By purchasing DVF consumers may receive a similar positive feeling but without the consumption of physical material. However, as learned earlier DVF has not the same functional values as physical clothing and instead relies on identity based and social value drivers. This is similar to luxury fashion, which also relies heavily on non-functional value drivers. However, DVF goes even further than luxury brands as it offers zero functional values in the physical world. Thus, DVF may never be a functional substitute for physical clothing, but it could encourage a more sustainable consumption with regards to creating content for social media (as explained in section 2 of this paper). This is significant as individuals increasingly share their status possessions on social media to improve their social standing (Kemper et al., 2022). Thus, DFC may offer them a way improve their status by not contributing to material overconsumption.

Furthermore, the results relate to what (Bardhi et al., 2020) stated on the concept of "liquid luxury" which describes the shift in consumer behaviour towards preferring new symbolic codes such speed, novelty and knowledge to convey status. In section 5 it was found that consumers want to change their look more frequently and that they strive to have knowledge on contemporary topics related to technological advancements and fashion trends. DVF fulfils both these aspects. First, it novel and it is fast to acquire and change by allowing the user to access the item without the physical procurement. Second, by acquiring DVF consumers show that they are part of a specific social group that is ahead of others in terms of their knowledge and expertise about the DVF trend.

Managerial implications

The identified motivations bring significant implications for businesses and fashion brands as they provide interesting insights into the values consumers perceive in purchasing DVF. It is to

note that the following managerial implications only represent a glance of potential implications which are suggested by the research due to space limitations.

Dematerialisation of life: Our lives are increasingly dematerializing, and consumers will want to dress the digital versions of themselves appropriately. This can be their avatar in a virtual world, a picture of themselves on social media or even putting on a virtual suit during a work call. If brands want to be where the consumer is, they need to adopt to the shift in consumer behaviour and provide their clothing in a digital virtual format. As an example, this can be done either by providing clothing collections that are available only as a digital version. Or by providing the same item digitally and physically. This would enable consumers to use the fashion item in both worlds and would provide an opportunity to first try on the product digitally before committing to the physical version.

Self-expression: Depending on their positioning, brands should consider providing realistic DVF collections or more avant-garde-looking ones with features that are not physically possible and that fulfil consumer fantasies.

Experimentation: In terms of Marketing brands should be aware of the value consumers see in experimentation. For example, they could offer short-term leasing sales models, in which consumers can rent DVF pieces for their avatars or social media posts.

Social drivers: If brands want to be relevant in the digital space, they need to be perceived as digital and technology driven. Thus, consumers are incentivised to purchase DVF from that specific brand to be part of a social group that is ahead with digital knowledge.

Limitations and Future Considerations

First, due to the qualitative nature of the research topic the sample size of the study was relatively small. Thus, the author is aware that the data acquired in the study cannot be generalized. Data saturation was reached after five interviews, as no new themes and insights were mentioned by the respondents. The topic of DVF is a very current and novel topic, thus the aim of the study was to explore potential consumer motivations and gain a first understanding of the research area and not to provide conclusive solutions.

Second, the same person was responsible for the entire research process including prior literature review, design of the interview guide, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The researcher is aware that the analysis and interpretations is of subjective nature and might have been influenced by previous findings that were identified in the literature review.

Furthermore, it is to note that the perspective from which the topic of DVF was examined considers mainly consumers that used DVF to dress their avatar in social media and gaming. However, none of the respondents had bought DVF goods from known fashion brands for money. Thus, in some cases, respondents were predicting their potential behaviour if they did purchase DVF from such brands. Future research could study early-adaptors that have bought DVF, for example in the form of NFTs, from brands. However, at the current time, these people only make up a small niche group.

Next, age differences among the respondents were only limitedly considered, as the aim of the study was not designed to analyse generational differences in consumption motivations to purchase DVF. Future research might focus more on GenZ consumers or native-borns as they are more integrated with the digital world (Bischoff et al., 2019).

Finally, the results suggest that motivations relating to sustainability may play a role in consumers' intentions to purchase DVF. However, due to space constraints, the sustainability-related aspects were not the focus of the study and would require further theoretical assessment. Future research could examine the relationship between DVF and sustainability as an inconspicuous consumption method.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to deliver a better understanding of the underlying reasons why consumers purchase DVF by aiming to answer the following research question “What are consumer motivations to consume digital virtual fashion goods?”. The literature review on digital virtual consumption revealed that functional values are less relevant for DVGs and instead transmit self-identity and social values to consumers. Through qualitative research, in the form of five in-depth interviews, it was found that similar values are relevant for the specific case of DVF. Four major motivational themes to consume DVF were identified in the analysis: self-expression, experimentation, social factors, and dematerialisation of life. First, DVF serves as a vehicle for consumers to express their identity. Identity expression motivations vary in the degree of similarity to the physical identity. They can be “realistic”, thus similar to the clothes worn in physical life, “ideal” which is an idealized version of the first, or “different,” which means that the DVF worn is not related to the physical identity. Consumers can follow different strategies to express themselves by adopting approaches. The second motivation relates to values received from experimentation with DVF. Consumers see value in being able to experiment with their identity, in the ability to try on different clothing virtually before

physically purchasing it and in being able to change one's style of clothing more often. The third motivation relates to social values as the digital virtual space encourages social interaction among consumers. Consumers use DVF to increase their social standing. Consumers receive an enhanced self-esteem from this status consumption, which motivates them to purchase DVF. Interestingly, DVF increases consumers' social position either through traditional status symbols or by showing off expertise about trends in digital technology. The latter relates to aspects related to "liquid luxury" and "inconspicuous consumption" (Bardhi et al., 2020). Consumers increasingly value acceleration, immediacy, and flexibility. DVF can offer a solution to these new values, as its technology enables consumers to acquire and change the DVF quickly. Lastly, it was found that more and more social activities in life are dematerializing. Consumers' lives are shifting to the digital virtual space, which will eventually build the base for further consumption motivations for DVF to arise.

The findings show that there are specific consumer motivations that are unique to DVF. DVF allows consumers to follow their fashion fantasies and use digital garments to express themselves beyond the physically possible. It also allows them to experiment with their identity in a less risky way compared to the physical world. Consumers also see sustainability values in DVF as it allows them to virtually try on and test clothes before physically purchasing them and lets them continuously change their style without contributing to materialistic overconsumption. This shows that consumers perceive values in DVF that are nonexistent in physical fashion, which brings significant implications for fashion brands and marketers that want to enter or are already present in the DVF market. It might present challenges to traditional brands as they will need to reconsider many factors that influence the fashion design process. However, it will also offer opportunities for brands and designers to expand their creativity beyond the physical realizable and offer consumers a new way to express and actualize their fantasies and dreams.

The thesis has contributed to an increased understanding of why consumers purchase DVF and what motivates them to own fashion goods they will never receive physically. In addition, the findings contribute to the existing literature by applying theories and concepts related to DVC to fashion, a topic that is prospecting to gain increased relevance, beyond social media or gaming, in the upcoming years.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Guide

Appendix B – Coding Tables

Appendix C – Interview Transcripts

Appendix D – Participant consent forms

Appendix A – Interview guide

Intro: Thank you for your participation in my research about digital fashion. Please give your honest opinion in your answer. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as descriptive as possible. As already signed in the consent form, all personal information used in this survey will remain private and confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the research topic. To ease the transcription the interview will be audio recorded.

I. Warm-up and introduction avatar

1. Tell me more about yourself.
2. Which Social Media channels and online games do you use?
3. How regularly do you use them and how do you engage?
4. Tell me about your digital avatar, how does he/she look like?
5. Which platforms do you use the avatar on? And do you use it to communicate with other users?
6. Now tell me about how you created your avatar.
7. How much time did you approximately spend on the creation?
8. Why did you create this avatar ?

II. Identity

9. Describe your favourite fashion item (non-digital).
 - a. Why is it your favourite?
 - b. Would you say it represents yourself? Why?
10. Now imagine you are dressing your avatar or a digital photo of you for social media, how would you dress her/him?
11. What were the characteristics that made you decide for that digital fashion item?
12. When comparing your digital fashion item to the physical one you described earlier. What are the differences? Which one represents yourself more? Why?
13. Would you say your digital identity (in terms of fashion on SM or avatars) is different to your physical identity? Why?

III. Status

14. When you purchase a new physical fashion item, how do you present your new purchase and to whom?
15. You mentioned before you use the following social media platform xx. When posting a picture of yourself on one of those platforms, do you think about what you are wearing?
16. Back to your avatar: have you ever dressed your avatar in real-life brands?
 - a. If not, would you ever consider dressing your avatar in real-life brands?
 - b. Why?
17. Have you ever spent money on a virtual accessory item? Why?
18. Do you follow trends and new consumption methods? Why?

IV. Conclusion: NFT specific questions

19. Have you heard about fashion brands selling clothes and accessories as NFTs?
20. How would you feel if you received an exclusive digital fashion NFT from your favourite brand?
21. How would you use that NFT?

Appendix B - Coding table

Theme: Self Expression

Subtheme	Quotation	Name
Realistic	I think one of the reasons is that on Snapchat, you can send pictures, but you also want to for example, if somebody adds you on Snapchat or if they just click on your profile, it should somehow look like yourself.	Philip
Realistic	So it still should be kind of realistic and authentic because at the end I don't want to be perceived as somebody that I'm not. So that's important.	Philip
Realistic	But at the end it should look the same and shouldn't be somebody that I'm not.	Philip
Realistic	Because it's more realistic. It's just it's not there's no filter there's no kind of layer of dreams and wishes. It's just a more realistic way of myself.	Philip
Realistic	I'm not trying to fake anything on social media. I don't use social media to be liked by people more than I am. I just try to have an aesthetic kind of reflection of myself and that people have that impression of myself.	Philip
Realistic	There is a game called Fortnite. I was very surprised because they are selling like kind of skins of Balenciaga and I really don't like that brand. I don't like it. So if I have the option to buy something like that I wouldn't wear it because I generally don't like it. Because in real life I would never buy it, so I would never buy it online	Hector
Realistic	I guess it's just nice to have people see you in a certain style. I think with every person that we see like friends or even strangers. We see them in a style and we already kind of can have a feeling of how they might be like or what they're interested in. And it's just interesting to see how people can be perceived by others on their style. And so, this is also what I kind of tried to do with my own style like just have them reflect on my personality.	Participant 3
Realistic	I think how I am viewed on Instagram is how I am in real life. At least that's what I'm trying to bring across. On Instagram. I'm trying to be the real me.	Participant 3
Realistic	Well, with Snapchat it's just that the characters are somehow a bit better, a bit more realistic, not much but a bit. And in this game, Robloxs, they are just like Lego, I don't know.	Ivana
Realistic	Yes, absolutely. You can see it. And yes, I love it. I am like my Avatar. I want to spend money on my clothes.	Théo
Realistic	If only I could be wearing the clothes I live in, when I was playing it would be wonderful, you know.	Théo
Realistic	So, you have a kind of projection of yourself when you're in this kind of game. And you want to have a character similar to you.	Théo
Ideal	Maybe sometimes I would go for designer things that are like the same kind of object, but a little more prestigious, a little more expensive. So, if I could, for example, choose between the Zara jacket but there's also kind of a jacket of Dior or whatever which isn't like super out of the box and looks cool. I'll probably choose the one, where I think the brand is cooler, but I couldn't afford it in real life.	Philip
Ideal	So I have like in a digital world so for like Bitmoji I can also select items that I don't have in my closet but I would like to have maybe or would like to buy and didn't buy it yet. So for the example what I did when I changed my Bitmoji I selected like this white shirt and like a hoodie above it, which is like a nice style because as I said like it's a nice mix. But for example in like my closet, there isn't a perfect gray hoodie that I could put over a white shirt. So there's some differences because I want to buy an item and I don't have it yet so I maybe put it on there to somehow maybe somehow even see how it looks.	Philip
Ideal	Social media is about showing things that are the nice parts of your life. So you won't post an Instagram picture of you doing your coffee at home you probably gonna do it when you're outside and drinking like this nice cappuccino. So it's of course a selection of nice moments of your real life that's happening on social media, but at the end, I'm not trying to fake anything on social media. I don't use social media to be liked by people more than I am.	Philip

Ideal	I think about the aesthetic of the picture. And of course, one part of it is the style that I have. So, I wouldn't select a picture where I'm not dressed appropriately for Instagram or where I would say I don't look good. I think if I look at most of the pictures on my Instagram, I have a nice outfit, in my opinion.	Philip
Ideal	I think I was kind of aiming towards creating an Bitmoji that kind of represents me but also, I would say it may be a more ideal version of myself that I would like to have displayed on Snapchat. So yeah, I think when I created the Bitmoji I wanted really to have like a cool representation of myself.	Participant 3
Ideal	Maybe more kind of like more the personality that is not working right now. Maybe more like my free time me. So that I would like to represent like, me being at a beach in a cool outfit, like having fun. I also I think I'm showing like the peace sign with my Bitmoji and so yeah, just a happy version of me that's relaxed.	Participant 3
Ideal	I think it would be fun to have higher luxury brands in the Bitmoji categories. Because it's not something that I can buy.	Participant 3
Ideal	And like more expensive clothes I guess I don't really have a reason that you just kind of it's not that I desire to buy like more luxury items, but since I don't own anything, it would be nice to just see how it would look like.	Participant 3
Ideal	Of course Instagram is always a happier version of yourself, at least for myself, like I don't want to share any sad moments on Instagram. So it's definitely only to have a side of my life or happy personality.	Participant 3
Ideal	And that also implies that I'm dressed nicely. So, I wouldn't post a picture in which I think my outfit isn't looking good. So yeah, I would definitely, even if it's like sometimes unconsciously, always review what I'm wearing and even not just that the outfit is nice but also that it fits nicely right in this picture. Like imagine, there's that a wrinkle on a shirt then I wouldn't post it. Or even edit it or choose a different picture.	Participant 3
Ideal	Maybe because I would have cooler clothes to post some pictures with.	Participant 3
Ideal	I would buy a Happy Face. That costs like 1,000 Roblox or something like that. And I would get a lot of accessories and what they all wear nowadays, which is really expensive.	Ivana
Ideal	And then she's wearing these pants that I'm actually looking for in real life now. So in real life, how I would want to look. And I just chose the colours and clothes that I would like.	Ivana
Ideal	And maybe sometimes these are things that I can't afford or can't buy in real life.	Ivana
Ideal	Because I prefer the aesthetic of this time. So I am so pleased to enter this new universe that presents kind of an idealized version of the actual world.	Théo
Different	I sometimes don't necessarily want the character to look like me. I'm just more like, oh, he has a magical weapon or a helmet that looks cool. And I think it is nice to be able to wear special things that I obviously couldn't in real life.	Hector
Different	I think if everyone has a Bitmoji, it would be kind of fun to see how someone like recreates themselves and yeah, in a different character. To kind of see how everyone wants to display themselves or maybe how they perceive themselves.	Participant 3
Different	It would be interesting to play with different styles that you're not super confident with wearing on the streets. And just like having a different personality of yours online.	Participant 3
Different	I just find it more nice the other avatar that does not represent myself.	Ivana
Different	Yes. So I personalized it, in some ways, with so much attention. He looks like an old man.	Théo
Different	It was an older version of me.	Théo
Different	I love the bloomie thing though. With gleams or fire or these kind of things, which seem magic.	Théo
Different	So, the things you cannot afford in real life you pay for it on video games. You try to do things you can't do in real life in video games.	Théo

Theme: Experimentation

Subtheme	Quotation	Name
Identity Experimentation	One day I like to be that kind of person in the game and the other I will be someone else. I don't know it really depends and it's fun to experiment with my look. In the real world I don't really do that but in the game it's kind of easy to change.	Théo
Identity Experimentation	I don't know would be just nice to see how I look. And like more expensive clothes I guess I don't really have a reason that you just kind of it's not that I desire to buy like more luxury items, but since I don't own anything, it would be nice to just see how it would look like.	Participant 3
Identity Experimentation	Maybe play with different styles that you're not super confident with wearing on the streets. And just like having a different personality of yours online would be interesting.	Participant 3
Try-out	So, it would be fun to kind of try out different styles on this technology and see how I would look like or how I would like to wear them, like test what kind of outfits I could create with that.	Participant 3
Try-out	Because I also always want to reevaluate if the trend suits my style and my personality, and it kind of also takes on again on my argument that I'm trying to make more sustainable consumption choices.	Participant 3
Try-out	You can always try it on and then I always decide if it's nice or if it's not so nice or if it's worth it or not.	Ivana
Try-out	So when look to buy something new, I always try it on first.	Ivana
Try-out	I would say the difference is that I can select and try things more easily... So, there's some differences because I want to buy an item and I don't have it yet, so I maybe try it digitally first to somehow maybe even see how it looks.	Philip
Change frequent	But kind of in the way that for me buying something I want to last for a long time, I want to make a lot of great use out of it. And having something online would allow to kind of experiment with my style, but it's not creating any damage to the world.	Participant 3
Change frequent	I am always a person who wants to try something new.	Ivana
Change frequent	But yeah, I think it would be just fun to like play around with trends and then you wouldn't like not like your clothes anymore after like one season so it will be a great option to reduce waste.	Participant 3
Change frequent	And in Roblox there are always new styles. There are also new jackets now. They sell jackets now and shoes and jogging trousers. Here and there I want to do something new.	Ivana
Change frequent	It's not contributing to fast fashion and maybe being interested in one piece in one moment but in the next day, I wouldn't like to wear it anymore. I think it would be really cool and also, yeah, sustainable to have an online closet that you can kind of play around with.	Participant 3 [^]
Change frequent	Well, then I feel new again. Well, not new. But when you have new things, I always feel like I'm getting rid of my old clothes and that's a nice feeling. I don't know, and then I go to school, sometimes I say something about my new clothes. I went shopping and I bought something new.	Ivana
Change frequent	I often make myself a new skin, because I'm always fascinated by what's out there in terms of clothes and stuff, so I often change the colours and outfits. I almost check every day what clothes or accessories are new. (Ivana)	Ivana
Change frequent	I was constantly personalizing it. It was never finished. One week I decide to buy a new item for my for my character and so I went to the shop and I bought for example a new kind of hair or maybe a new arm or a new sword.	Théo

Theme: Social factors

Subtheme	Quotation	Name
Status symbol	No, it's like, let's say that one day I wear an outfit that I'm really proud of and I'm like "Oh, well I will take a cool picture today that I could post it"	Hector
Status symbol	And yeah, I would love to have a Bitmoji actually also on Instagram. Because I feel like on Snapchat, I don't interact with so many people. Essentially, I have friends that are really close but most of them are on Instagram. It would be cool to like display the technology to a wider range of people.	Participant 3
Status symbol	So many people always look at my skins. Every now and then some people copy me with the colours, for example, and I just love it, it's quite normal. It's always fun for me.	Ivana
Status symbol	Im just a bit angry, but then I feel good somehow because like I know what the others like. Or that I'm good in creating an outfit and so on.	Ivana
Status symbol	I got a lot of compliments. Or I want to say that if you don't like someone and they know it and they copy you, then it just gives me a feeling that I know what I'm doing or what clothes are needed now.	Ivana
Status symbol	Or for example, if it's like the weekend and you're going out with great weather, and you know that you're going to be around of people and like you somehow want to present your style. (physcial)	Philip
Status symbol	Yes, but I did when playing video games and I think back then my spending behavior was in a way it was very important for me also how I get perceived in the digital world.	Philip
Status symbol	Because at the end people want to be perceived in a certain way in the digital world. I think I'm kind of a person on the side where I probably would spend money on it.	Philip
Status symbol	I think that there is no value for me in kind of owning an NFT so far, because there is no platform where you can kind of show it.	Philip
Status symbol	Because I wanted to show that I was good player kind of you know in this kind of game there is this desire of constantly being able of showing that you are good player that you have all this stuff in the game.	Théo
Status symbol	To show it to the community.	Théo
Status symbol	I just walk on the map and show my new stuff to the other players...they (other players) send me a message and tell me that it is good... It is exactly the same feeling as when you bought a Ferrari and you are pleased to show it to the other people.	Théo
Up social comparison	I always see it on TikTok, you can always swipe around and then you see people with nice stuff. And I always think to myself, "Wow, that's nice, I'd like that too". And then a lot of people copy them and make dance videos or just videos. And then I want that too. And I check if I can find something similar in Roblox.	Ivana
Up Social comparison	Yes, sometimes, but most of them are already like 16 years old or so, so I always change it a bit and make it just a bit like I wear it. I always save the outfit ideas, because when I'm older or something, then I always look at them again and copy them.	Ivana
Novelty and knowledge	And this also comes from technology like maybe if you have the newest smartphone or if you were aware of the newest feature anywhere. Maybe you thought you could be perceived as like cooler or people would like you more I don't know...So I inform myself but I don't always follow them.	Participant 3
Novelty and knowledge	It's just that it's getting boring, wearing the old shoes, isn't it?	Ivana
Novelty and knowledge	I am always a person who wants to try something new.	Ivana
Novelty and knowledge	I would go into WhatsApp and write "look at my skin" or something and then I would say, "I bought something new" and show it to my friends.	Ivana
Novelty and knowledge	Like I mean I work in venture capital which is all about thinking about where the world is going.	Philip
Novelty and knowledge	Naturally, I'm attracted by things that are new and innovative. And I always want to understand kind of where the world is going, I think also on a macro level, but then on a micro level I will also probably be where is the fashion world going. Who are the big	Philip

designers, what are they thinking about? So I think it's just like my my natural way of dealing with the world and things around me. But also, I think I want to be able to be the trend as well somehow to a certain extent. So if there is a new color, I get influenced by and I really want to have a piece like that but it's not something that I wouldn't say it's the first reason.

Novelty and knowledge	Yeah, I think I'm an early adopter somehow on those things like I want to be before the wave. I want to also be able to speak about topics that are coming or will come.	Philip
Novelty and knowledge	I would say they will perceive me as that for example, technology wise, where are companies going? But also on certain trends, because I would say I am not the person who spends most time of his life on kind of understanding fashion trends, but I'm definitely above average. So this probably makes me somehow stick out also from my friends.	Philip
Novelty and knowledge	And I'm personally also interested in anything that is kind of up and coming and I think that my media intake and the people that are following Instagram are helping me to kind of keep up with the trends.	Philip
Novelty and knowledge	So I'm interested in NFTs and I'm interested in technology behind it. I don't see the value yet of owning an NF T of like a Nike or an Adidas like I know that there is use case still to come but like I would say I'm open and curious about it and I want to understand where things are going.	Philip
Novelty and knowledge	For example, I would like to have an NFT as a profile picture on Twitter. Because I think it's funny that people realize, okay, this person is somehow in that space, and he knows what's going on.	Philip

Theme: Dematerialisation of life

Subtheme	Quotation	Name
Interaction	Usually, well, the way I play this online with my actual friends that they don't live necessarily in Monterey. With some that I know from Monterey, but also friends from around Mexico from Mexico City, Los Cabos Cancun or also, from different parts of the United States.	Hector
Interaction	And also the interaction that you can make is that you through the platform, not necessarily or even through the game, you're able to chat just by using a headset. So you're able to actually talk with people. You can also write but it is not efficient, like you have to do a lot of clicking.	Hector
Interaction	But I think most of the time I do it to socialize like with those friends I told you that don't live where I live. I think that it's like, I don't know, I'm doing nothing and then a friend texts me and asks me if I want to play. I'm like yeah, and we put the headset and then we start talking.	Hector
Interaction	I think it's like a different form of socializing because literally like I'm talking sometimes even the game like we don't care about the high score or how we're playing we're just like there to chat. Like if it was like a GoogleMeet or Zoom. And yeah, I think it is very comfortable to just talk sometime.	Hector
Interaction	Like, I feel like if I were to do with those friends I haven't seen in a while a FaceTime call or Zoom, like we can talk for a couple of hours but then it gets boring. I think if you're playing the game, then "Oh, someone's following me" or "Hey, like this is going on", "Oh I lost, what about you?" "I am moving here". I think the game is more dynamic, but we don't necessarily talk about the game all the time. When we're like let's say waiting on the lobby they call it like when you're waiting before the game.	Hector
Interaction	And even like, especially if you have friends that you don't see so often, it is nice to I don't know have that sort of interaction with them. And if you have a Bitmoji, that is kind of more like you. It's fun to share with your friends. Like interact on that sense.	Participant 3
Affirmation	I think that's a good reaction because I think the effort they (friends) make, when i post something, people have told me like "oh, like, you know, it's pretty cool". Not necessarily like super opulent and show off, but they like how I dress. So like, "Oh, thank you, I appreciate it." So yeah, I feel good about myself, I think.	Hector

Confirmation	I don't know it's nice to show nice clothes. Also, sometimes your friends give you feedback on them and the feedback that you received from your friend's feedback that you value the most, at least for me, so I like to show that to friends first. Definitely.	Isa
Confirmation	It's just like you. For me at least I like to have positive confirmation reassurance. Like my style and yeah, having my friends perceive it in a way that I want them to perceive me. So I guess it's just like reassurance for something that you might already be aware of. But sometimes it's just nice to receive positive feedback. So it's okay to just ask your friends for their opinion.	Isa
Affirmation	But sometimes it's just nice to receive positive feedback. I think its similar also for the pictures I post. Sometimes my friends comment something positive about my outfit. And I don't know but that kind of gives me confidence.	
Affirmation	But yeah, I guess it's also nice to receive feedback. From like, not so close friends, like from people on the internet.	Ivana
Affirmation	And yes, they always say that it is cool and yes.	Ivana
Confirmation	When I bought something, also in the game, I take photos or screenshots and send them to my friends on WhatsApp before. Then it is usually fine	Ivana

Appendix C – Interview Transcripts

This is the example for the transcript of 1 participant, all transcripts can be found here:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q9MSfeslXFpepPIAsVimej_hy8CxOJGy?usp=sharing

1. Participant 1 (25), German

Jana: Good. Participant 1, I'm gonna check if it's working. Yes. Okay. Thank you for your participation in my research. So I just want you to know, please always give your honest opinion about each of the questions that I'm asking you and there are no right and wrong answers. I'm really only interested in what you truly feel what you truly think about these questions, and please be as descriptive as possible when giving your answer. Try to not just answer with a yes or no, but really try to explain what you mean by your answer. And of course, all the personal information used in this, in this interview will be will remain private and confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research, as I told you already before, and as you're already signed this interview will also be recorded. And, yes, for easier transcription. So we're gonna start up with some warm up questions. And yeah, first of all, please tell me just a little bit about yourself, where you are, where you're from, what your hobbies are, etc. Yeah.

Participant 1: Right. Understood. I am. My name is Participant 1. I'm 25 years old. Originally, I'm from the south of Germany from Stuttgart. And I'm currently studying in my master's degree management on exchange at Bocconi University in Milan, Italy. My hobbies are, I would say sports, going to the gym, playing handball, if I can, meeting up with friends and enjoying great restaurants.

Jana: sounds nice. And do you regularly use social media? And if so, which social media channels do you mainly use?

Participant 1: Yes, I regularly use it. I use it daily. I use different apps. Most of my time spent on social media I would say is on Instagram. Followed by TikTok and Snapchat. Facebook, I don't use it too often, just sometimes to check in if I miss some things and of course WhatsApp as well. And I also use Twitter but more for kind of professional reasons to get news and so on.

Jana: Okay, I see. And do you also play online games?

Participant 1: Not really, no, I used to play kind of X box when I was younger, and also online, but now I don't have the time anymore to play online games.

Jana: Okay, I see. And you mentioned before that you use Instagram, Snapchat Tiktok the most. And if you could just describe to me how regularly you use these three channels

Participant 1: Snapchat and Instagram I use them daily. Meaning that I do connect with my friends on Snapchat daily so I send pictures and receive pictures more than once a day. And Instagram is something I probably have the most screen time on. And I would say I use it several times a day during the day to just check my feed and see if I have any messages or any friends of mine posted something. For TikTok that's more something when I have more free time and yeah, so something that I do more on the weekends, I guess. And if so, I would say once or twice a day but for a shorter time, I would say.

Jana: okay, I see and you already told me in the prescreening questions that you have a Bitmoji. Could you please tell me a little bit about this Bitmoji. How does it look like?

Participant 1: Yeah, I have a Bitmoji on Snapchat because it somehow represents myself on Snapchat or the platform. So it looks kind of similar to myself in terms of the style and hairstyle in my face. And like my characteristics. I think it reflects my fashion style in terms of the brands that I wear and the style that I have, you know so how I would dress up daily in

regular life. I would also say that, like it maybe somehow represents that and also kind of my facial characteristics. It's also my hairstyle and my facial hair and so on that is looking somehow similar to myself, I think.

Jana: Interesting. And how would you describe the style.

Participant 1: I would say it's a mix between smart casual and streetstyle. So something that you could wear either to kind of hang out with your friends but also into the nice place and you won't really stick out too much in a bad way.

Jana: Maybe you can remember the time that you created your Bitmoji and also the last time that you maybe changed something about it if you could tell me a little bit more about that.

Participant 1: I'm not sure when I created it probably when I set up my snapchat account I think that's when I did it when it was available back then. So that's probably a few years ago. I think over the years I would say I change it not too often but I changed it so every time I changed my style or changed my hairstyle. So when my human characteristics changed I also changed my Bitmoji. The last time was just the other day, actually. So not too long ago and yeah, I think I dressed up a little warmer, like a little colder. So more like adopt to the to the climate and to my current style in the place where I'm living.

Jana: And if you think back about the time when you change the outfit, how much time did you approximately spend for that and what was the process of picking out new items?

Participant 1: Yeah, I think has been between five to ten minutes because not too much of my style changed. Regarding what I changed I think I put another kind of shirt on a different color because I wear a white shirt more often than I did before and I have a more like casual shirts. I think I changed the brand so I changed it from off white which I probably liked two years ago or one year ago more than I do today. So I changed that to Nike because it seemed more casual, but I definitely went for the brands because I think they have nicer styles than the non branded fits. And I changed my sneakers because I discovered that Nike has also a Nike Blazer there and I think that the Nike Blazer's are nice and I selected this one. And lastly, I think I changed kind of my facial characteristics a little bit like my hairstyle. I think I changed because now I have longer hair than I did before. But that was probably the main changes.

Jana: So basically, the brands that you chose also reflect your preferences at that point of time when you choose it.

Participant 1: Yeah indeed. That was one of the reasons I didn't really feel the brand OffWhite anymore. I didn't I didn't feel like it kind represents myself anymore. So I went for Nike because it's something that I still wear I like and so the brand that I have in my closet, it's also the one I would pick there.

Jana: And why did you create this Bitmoji in the first place?

Participant 1: Yeah, I think one of the reasons is that on Snapchat, you can send pictures, but you also want to for example, if somebody adds you on Snapchat or if they just click on your profile, it should somehow look like yourself. And I would say me personally I kind of Yeah, I kind of worry about things like in terms of social media how I am being received. So it's rather something that is not like super important, but I care about it. So this was the reason I created. I just want to test something that reflects and represents me also in a digital world.

Jana: Okay, interesting. So now we're gonna switch a little bit back to the physical world for a couple of questions. So can you describe to me your favorite fashion item that you currently have?

Participant 1: Favorite fashion item is probably my shoes because I'm a sneaker person. Yeah, I guess those are my favorites at the moment. It's a fashion item I liked most because I bought them new they look fresh, it super kind of easy to wear. With like a street style outfit, but also with something more or casual or more going our or more classic, chic direction I would say. Yeah, besides that, I think I have like this jacket for the spring of Massimo Dutti,

which has like I don't know. It has like a color I like. And it's blue like a dark blue, navy blue. So it's really easy to combine and it kind of goes with a hoodie but you can also wear it with a white classic shirt and it looks great on both. It's super easy and works as well with sneakers. So those are my favorite fashion pieces right now.

Jana: And in what way do these pieces represent yourself, do they?

Participant 1: I would say they do because I'm a I would say I'm a sporty guy. And I'm kind of an outgoing person. But also I'm kind of I would say a lot with like people that are in professional life. So like I meet up with people at university I have business meetings and so it represents me as a mix between a young person that is motivated and rather fun and outgoing but it also is kind of reflecting the professional clean and and straightforward kind of more senior person. So I think the fashion items kind of they reflect the mixture of my personality that I have in my lifestyle.

Jana: And so now imagine you are dressing your Bitmoji or you are dressing like a digital photo for yourself on social media what would be your ideal outfit? Would it be similar to your favorite physical fashion items? Like you could choose anything.

Participant 1: I think it would be similar for sure. So it still should be kind of realistic and authentic because at the end I don't want to be perceived as somebody that I'm not. So that's important. Maybe sometimes I would go for designer things that are like the same, the same kind of object, but a little more prestigious, a little more expensive. So if I could, for example, if I could choose between the Zara jacket but there's also kind of a jacket of I don't know Dior or whatever which isn't like super out of kind of the box and looks super over the top. I'll probably take the one that I where I think the brand is cooler, but I couldn't afford it in real life or I would not like to afford it. But at the end it should look the same and shouldn't be somebody that I'm not.

Jana: Okay, so I think we already answered the next question a little bit. You're already mentioned a but maybe we can go a little bit deeper into this. So when comparing your digital fashion style to your real physical style that you described in the first question like What are the differences exactly and which one would you say represents yourself more and why?

Participant 1: I would say differences is that I can select and try things more easily. So I have like in a digital world so for like Bitmoji I can also select items that I don't have in my closet but I would like to have maybe or would like to buy and didn't buy it yet. So for the example what I did when I changed my Bitmoji I selected like this white shirt and like a hoodie above it, which is like a nice style because as I said like it's a nice mix. But for example in like my closet, there isn't a perfect gray hoodie that I could put over a white shirt. So there's some differences because I want to buy an item and I don't have it yet so I maybe try it digitally first to somehow maybe even see how it looks. What was the second part of the question?

Jana: Which one do you think represents yourself more?

Participant 1: Myself in the real world. Because it's more realistic. It's just it's not there's no filter there's no kind of layer of dreams and wishes. It's just a more realistic way of myself.

Jana: Okay. And now not looking particularly at fashion just your digital identity that you build up through your Instagram, your Snapchat, everything that you're using and like your normal physical real identity. Would you say that, like broadly observed are those very different and why or why not?

Participant 1: I wouldn't say they are not different because at the end, I'm showing my life on social media the way it is, of course. And I think there's this like this kind of domain I think that's the baseline. Social media is about showing things that are the nice parts of your life. So you won't post an Instagram picture of you doing your coffee at home you probably gonna do it when you're outside and drinking like this nice cappuccino. So it's of course a selection of nice moments of your real life that's happening on social media, but at the end,

I'm not trying to fake anything on social media. I don't use social media to be liked by people more than I am. I just try to have an aesthetic kind of reflection of myself and that people have that impression of myself. But it should be same. It shouldn't be too big of a difference.

Jana: And when you purchase a new physical fashion item like a brand or luxury item that you were describing earlier, like a new sneaker or jacket like when you first purchased it how do you like present it and to whom the first time.

Participant 1: The first time probably to the people that are closest to me or the people that I think would care about like the same thing. So closest to me would be family, friends, roommates, girlfriend, so kind of I mean, those are the people that are closest to me. So I could be like hey, look I just came back from shopping and bought this new pair of tennis shoes or whatever. And then for example, very specific item and I know that a friend of mine that maybe is not super close, and I know that he likes the same brand, the same fashion item the same model. I would also probably show it to him or even ask him for a question for a selection.

Jana: Maybe you can describe a little bit the occasion when you would maybe wear something new and exciting for the first time like what kind of event.

Participant 1: I would show it when I'm out with friends for example for a dinner so where you know that you won't destroy them by wearing it the first time for example in the case of the sneakers. I think kind of chill night with friends where you know you're not going to party is a nice occasion to wear new sneakers. Or for example, if it's like the weekend and you're going out with great weather, and you know that you're going to be around of people and like you somehow want to present your style. I think this is an occasion where I would wear as well. Or for like shorter moments outside of the house. I'm thinking about grabbing the coffee around the corner and going for a coffee walk, which is not a special moment but it's kind of a short moment, so you don't take the glimpse of that new item for like the next I don't know half day you know.

Jana: And do you feel like you would wear it more in a social occasion and you might want to like show it to other people rather than having the feeling about it yourself?

Participant 1: I think for me, it's about feeling. Feeling it for yourself more than showing it to other people. Maybe this was different when I was a little younger. But now I'm just wearing things for the right moment where I think it works the best or it feels the best, which is probably naturally a moment where you are with the people that you like the most. And that goes hand in hand that they probably will also compliment you but I think for me, I will personally probably rank it for myself rather than for impressing other people.

Jana: Okay. And you mentioned before you mainly using Instagram to post on your feed or to post like more permanent pictures of yourself. And when you do that when you post like a picture where you're on do you think about what you're wearing on the picture?

Participant 1: I think about the aesthetic of the picture. And there of course it's like one part of it is the style that I have. So I wouldn't select a picture where I'm not dressed appropriately for Instagram or where I would say I don't look good. You know, I think if I look at most of the pictures on Instagram, I have a nice outfit, in my opinion. So I would think that's one of the reasons I consider. But overall for me it's more important that the whole kind of picture aesthetics are working hand in hand. And I like the picture itself. So I would say I would give it like, if there's a few dimensions, I would probably say it's like 25% of relevancy, the other 25 is myself, the next 25 is kind of the aesthetic of the picture and then the rest is kind of what's on the picture the background or whatever I think those are thinking quickly you know, those are the probably the things that I consider and weigh them to say.

Jana: Okay, I see. And you mentioned earlier already that you've you're dressed your Bitmoji in brands like OffWhite and Nike. Why do you prefer dressing them in known brands in comparison to like no name brands?

Participant 1: I think I just liked the style better. It's not particularly about the brand because my regular day to day style is not really focused on showing brands. I think I really care about having looks and good looks. I think for this particular reason I just like the way they style it the most. But of course, I think I'm also kind of attracted by brands. I would say I perceive somehow also some sort of brand value with it. But I'm also aware that I don't impress anyone by wearing a Bitmoji brand.

Jana: Okay, and have you ever spent money on like a digital accessory item or anything that yeah, you can use to dress your digital version of yourself.

Participant 1: Yes, but I did when playing video games and I think back then my spending behavior was in a way it was very important for me also how I get perceived in the digital world. And I think this trend is also coming more and more with like thinking about web 3.0 and like people moving into the digital space and I think there's also upside potential on that. Because at the end people want to be perceived in a certain way in the digital world. I think I'm kind of a person on the side where I probably would spend money on it. But I think I'm one of tiny percentages on that part of the world that would spend money on things like that for the moment.

Jana: And do you remember what you bought when you bought this digital item for your for your video game?

Participant 1: Yeah, I think it was somehow like skins that I used for like a shooter game. I think I spent money on skins for weapons if I'm not mistaking, or kind of covers for your avatar, you know, there was like this emblem and like this background where which was behind your nametag or whatever it was those sorts of things. And I think I'm not sure if I ever spent money on kind of wearing things like fashion or dressing things. But I would need to think about it if I really spent money on fashion in the digital world already.

Jana: Okay, and would you consider yourself someone who follows trends like technology trends and fashion trends, consumption?

Participant 1: Yes, I do. For sure. Like I mean I work in venture capital which is all about thinking about where the world is going. On the fashion side, I do follow especially like certain brands that are popular. I not anymore as intense but I follow kind of the main fashion trends in terms of what's happening in street style, what colors, what brands are in, I think those are topics that I think about and then especially colors, I think I have a good feeling on that. And I'm personally also interested in anything that is kind of up and coming and I think that my media intake and the people that are following Instagram are helping me to kind of keep up with the trends.

Jana: And so you said that you're interested in anything new and up to date. Why do you think you're interested in that?

Participant 1: I think I'm a curious mind. And naturally, I'm attracted by things that are new and innovative. And I always want to understand kind of where the world is going, I think also on a macro level, but then on a micro level I will also probably be where is the fashion world going. Who are the big designers, what are they thinking about? So I think it's just like my my natural way of dealing with the world and things around me. But also, I think I want to be able to be the trend as well somehow to a certain extent. So if there is a new color, I get influenced by and I really want to have a piece like that but it's not something that I wouldn't say it's the first reason.

Jana: okay. But you also want to kind of show like you're going with a trend you're up to date also with technology topics and be unique before the crowd gets there a little bit.

Participant 1: Yeah, I think I'm an early adopter somehow on those things like I want to be before the wave. I want to also be able to speak about topics that are coming or will come. So yeah, I would totally agree in that statement.

Jana: Would you say that your friends perceive you as that as well?

Participant 1: I would say so. Yes. For a few topics. I would say they will perceive me as that for example, technology wise, where are companies going? But also on certain trends, because I would say I am not the person who spends most time of his life on kind of understanding fashion trends, but I'm definitely above average. So this probably makes me somehow stick out also from my friends.

Jana: Okay, and now, we are actually going to be a bit more specific. Have you heard about fashion brands that are selling their clothes or accessories as NFTs. I'm sure you have heard about NFT's before but have you heard about this trend that the fashion industry is also going in this direction?

Participant 1: Yes, for sure. Like I know about Nike and Adidas investing a lot of money in NFT's probably one of like those were the brands that were super public about it in the very early stages. I would need to think about other brands that I know that go into that space.

Jana: But like leaving the brands aside like how do you feel about this? Is this something that could excite you?

Participant 1: So I'm interested in NFTs and I'm interested in technology behind it. I don't see the value yet of owning an NF T of like a Nike or an Adidas like I know that there is use case still to come but like I would say I'm open and curious about it and I want to understand where things are going. But for the same reason I'm not like super invested into it. Like I don't I don't see the need of me owning an NFT right now. Of a specific brand or anything like that. It's more like to understand the process behind it.

Jana: Okay, so it's really more about the novelty of the technology ?

Participant 1: Yep.

Jana: Okay. And how would you feel though, if you actually received one of these exclusive digital fashion, NFT's from your favorite brand?

Participant 1: Yeah, like I totally understand kind of the ownership thought also in the digital world. And being able to prove that ownership somehow and that it's kind of the, you own, this one piece that only you have, and I think I would like to have an item like that. But again, there needs to be some sort of value behind it for me either as an investment or as kind of a way to express that I own that NFT. For example, I would like to have an NFT as a profile picture on Twitter. Because I think it's funny that people realize, okay, this person is somehow in that space, and he knows what's going on. But as long as I don't have kind of value, any perceived value, then I wouldn't feel like that I guess it would be like this one. moment where I think nice, nice to have. But then after that, I think the kind of hype or like the feeling about it will go down really fast.

Jana: So for you the main issue is also the missing like platform at the moment to be able to really like to present your NFT?

Participant 1: Yes, I agree. I think that there is no value for me in kind of owning an NFT so far, because there is no platform where you can kind of show it or use it in a certain way. And also, I mean, for me, there needs to be kind of the investment aspect of owning NFT or the way of kind of being able to show it transparently. Because if you compare kind of fashion item, you want to either wear it or you want to kind of see it, but yeah, there is no use case for me to have like this fashion item but yet because I don't I'm not kind of on a platform or in any kind of digital use case world where I could wear it. Yeah.

Jana: Okay, and if we look a little bit further into the future with the metaverse arising, could you imagine purchasing such virtual fashion items and the future and why?

Participant 1: Yes, I would. I would purchase kind of a fashion item because at the end, also in the metaverse I would like something that I think needs to be realistic and authentic. And if I have kind of an item that exactly is representing and reflecting myself I would probably be up for spending some sort of money on it.

Jana: Okay. Interesting. So I think we have come to the end of this interview. Thank you very much for the time that you gave me and I'm going to stop the recording no

Appendix D – Participant consent forms

#1

Jana Paffenholz
ESCP Business School
79 Av. de la République
75011 Paris
Tel: 01621687996

Interview consent form

ESCP Business School



I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jana Paffenholz (jana.paffenholz@edu.escp.eu) M-Sc. researcher from ESCP Business school, as part of her Master Thesis project on “Explorative research on consumer motivations to purchase digital virtual fashion”.

I understand that:

	Yes	No
1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I will not be paid for my participation and I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have the right to decline to answer any question. Until the moment of publication I can always withdraw my participation in this research without providing any reasons.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The interview will be recorded (audio-taped). The recordings will only be used by the researcher(s) to re-listen and transcribe the interview. The recording can be stopped at any moment upon my request.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The project is designed to gather information for academic purposes and the above-mentioned project only.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The researcher will not identify me by name in any publication using information obtained from this study, and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Data collected for this study become property of ESCP Business School, and will not be shared with external parties. Personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as [e.g. my name or where I live], will not be shared beyond the study team.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Data (transcripts and recordings) will be stored with care and no longer than is necessary for the research.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I can request to see data collected on me at any time.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant

Philip Schröpel

Name participant

Handwritten signature of Philip Schröpel in black ink.

Signature

Milan, 07.04.2022

Date and location

Researcher

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

Jana Paffenholz

Name researcher

Handwritten signature of Jana Paffenholz in black ink.

Signature

Paris, 07.04.2022

Date and location

Interview consent form

ESCP Business School



I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jana Paffenholz (jana.paffenholz@edu.escp.eu) M-Sc. researcher from ESCP Business school, as part of her Master Thesis project on "Explorative research on consumer motivations to purchase digital virtual fashion".

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9. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant

Héctor Alejandro
Castillo González

Paris, 08.04.2022

Name participant

Signature

Date and location

Researcher

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

Jana Paffenholz

Paris, 08.04.2022

Name researcher

Signature

Date and location

Jana Paffenholz
 ESCP Business School
 79 Av. de la République
 75011 Paris
 Tel: 01621687996

Interview consent form

ESCP Business School



I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jana Paffenholz (jana.paffenholz@edu.escp.eu) M-Sc. researcher from ESCP Business school, as part of her Master Thesis project on "Explorative research on consumer motivations to purchase digital virtual fashion".

I understand that:

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1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I will not be paid for my participation and I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant

 Name participant

 Signature

 Date and location

Researcher

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

 Name researcher

Jana Paffenholz
 Signature

 Date and location

Jana Paffenholz
 ESCP Business School
 79 Av. de la République
 75011 Paris
 Tel: 01621687996

Parent/Guardian consent for participants under 18 years of age

ESCP Business School



I understand, that my child participates in a research project conducted by Jana Paffenholz (jana.paffenholz@edu.escp.eu) M.Sc. researcher from ESCP Business school, as part of her Master Thesis project on "Explorative research on consumer motivations to purchase virtual fashion".

I understand that:

	Yes	No
1. My child's participation in this project is voluntary. He/she will not be paid for the participation and may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My child has the right to decline to answer any question. Until the moment of publication he/she can always withdraw the participation in this research without providing any reasons.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The interview will be recorded (audio-taped). The recordings will only be used by the researcher(s) to re-listen and transcribe the interview. The recording can be stopped at any moment upon request.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The project is designed to gather information for academic purposes and the above-mentioned project only.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The researcher will not identify my child by name in any publication using information obtained from this study, the participants confidentiality in this study will remain secure.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Data collected for this study becomes property of ESCP Business School, and will not be shared with external parties. Personal information collected about my child that can identify he/her, such as [e.g. my name or adress], will not be shared beyond the study team.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Data (transcripts and recordings) will be stored with care and no longer than is necessary for the research.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I, as a parent or my child can request to see data collected on me at any time.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Jana Paffenholz
ESCP Business School
79 Av. de la République
75011 Paris
Tel: 01621687996

Participant

I acknowledge that I understand my child's rights as a research participant as outlined above.

Andreas Schröder  Roding
22.04.2022

Print parent/guardian name Signature Date and location

Researcher

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

Jana Paffenholz  Paris, 22.04.2022

Signature Date and location

Jana Paffenholz
 ESCP Business School
 79 Av. de la République
 75011 Paris
 Tel: 01621687996

Interview consent form

ESCP Business School



I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jana Paffenholz (jana.paffenholz@edu.escp.eu) M-Sc. researcher from ESCP Business school, as part of her Master Thesis project on "Explorative research on consumer motivations to purchase digital virtual fashion".

I understand that:

	Yes	No
1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I will not be paid for my participation and I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have the right to decline to answer any question. Until the moment of publication I can always withdraw my participation in this research without providing any reasons.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8. I can request to see data collected on me at any time.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant

Théo Broussas

Name participant

Signature

Paris, 24.04.2022

Date and location

Researcher

I did my best to ensure that the participant understands to what he/ she is freely consenting, I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions and I confirm that the participant has given consent freely.

Jana Paffenholz

Name researcher

Signature

Paris, 24.04.2022

Date and location