

# Weaving The Digital Thread: Legitimizing Digital Garments in A World in Environmental Decay

Salma Tallaa, De Montfort University<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Digital garments, computer-generated images of clothing worn and shared online or through virtual reality platforms challenge conventional notions of utility and legitimacy of fashion. Unlike physical garments, digital clothing lacks utilitarian value, prompting questions about consumer needs and acceptance. Yet, as the fashion sector confronts environmental concerns caused by its global, resource-intensive practices and dependence on high levels of consumption, the emergence of Web 3 technology offers a potential solution through the commercialization of digital clothes. This paper examines the emergence of digital fashion within the framework of the process of innovation legitimation (PIL), exploring their socio-technical imaginary dimensions and envisioned sustainable implications.

Drawing on a theoretical framework combining Suchman's (1995) concept of legitimation with Thyroff et al.'s (2017) Process of Innovation Legitimation (PIL), this study employs Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Foucault's theory of power, and Goffman's frame analysis to unravel the complex interplay of human and non-human actors shaping the legitimation process of digital fashion. Through a multifaceted data collection approach encompassing scholarly articles, industry reports, interviews, and social media content, this research delves into the narratives constructed by key stakeholders within the digital fashion domain. By analysing the language and discourses employed by these actors, the study elucidates the strategies used to legitimize digital garments, particularly emphasizing their claimed sustainability benefits in mitigating the environmental impact of traditional fashion production.

The findings shed light on the ideological framing of digital fashion within the context of Web 3.0 sociotechnical imaginaries and its implications for the fashion industry's sustainability discourse. Additionally, the study unveils power dynamics inherent in the network of stakeholders involved in legitimizing digital fashion, providing insights into how these actors negotiate their roles and construct meaning within the discourse. Ultimately, this research bridges theoretical frameworks and practical insights, offering valuable perspectives on the evolving landscape of digital fashion within the broader context of sustainability and innovation.

**Keywords:** Digital fashion, Innovation legitimation, Sustainability, Sociotechnical Imaginary