



Fashioning a new dawn

Digital tools integrated into customer journey, with augmented reality and virtual environments becoming a major part of how luxury products are discovered, simulated, ordered and reviewed online

Luxury fashion has long relied on physical retail spaces where environment, service and material presence define value. Increasingly, however, brands such as Gucci and Balenciaga have each explored immersive technologies in different ways, reflecting broader experimentation across the luxury sector rather than a fully standardised retail model. The shift is being driven by improvements in mobile computing, 3D rendering and

camera-based tracking systems that allow products to be visualised in more realistic ways than earlier digital formats. Gucci has implemented augmented reality features within its digital platforms and social media channels, allowing users to virtually view selected products, such as sneakers and accessories, through their phone cameras. These tools enable customers to see how items appear in real time, offering a visual reference point before

purchase. While not attempting to replace physical retail, these features form part of a broader digital strategy that enhances engagement and extends brand interaction beyond the bricks and mortar boutique environment. [gucci.com](https://www.gucci.com)

Above: Brands such as Gucci are embracing technology to connect in-real-life and immersive worlds to offer a seamless luxury shopping experience to customers

Balenciaga has approached digital innovation through immersive storytelling and experimental formats, including collaborations with gaming and virtual environments. Rather than focusing primarily on transactional virtual try-on tools, the brand has explored how digital spaces can be used to present collections in non-traditional formats, reflecting a wider shift in fashion marketing toward experiential and narrative driven engagement. [balenciaga.com](https://www.balenciaga.com) >



Above: Virtual Reality headsets enable luxury shopping at home
Below: Models walk on the catwalk during Fashion Show by SLAVA

Across the wider luxury industry, augmented reality is most commonly used in product categories where visualisation adds clear value, such as footwear, eyewear and cosmetics. These applications allow customers to assess style and proportion through their own devices, although they remain limited in their ability to fully replicate physical material properties such as weight, texture or movement.

Virtual reality applications in luxury retail are still in early stages of adoption. Where they are used, they typically take the form of branded digital environments or virtual showrooms rather than fully developed shopping ecosystems. These experiences are primarily experimental and are used to explore how immersive environments might complement traditional retail rather than replace it.

A key driver of adoption is the growing expectation among digitally native consumers for immediacy and interaction. Luxury brands are responding by embedding digital touchpoints earlier in the customer journey, allowing discovery to occur through social media, mobile app and immersive content rather than solely in store environments. This shift also allows brands to maintain presence in global markets where physical retail expansion is limited or strategically selective.

The commercial interest in these technologies lies in their ability to extend engagement with consumers beyond physical store visits. They can increase interaction time with products, support global accessibility and provide brands with behavioural data on customer

preferences. At the same time, they offer a controlled environment in which new collections or limited releases can be presented digitally before wider physical distribution.

Data generated through virtual interaction is also becoming increasingly valuable. Brands can track which items are viewed, rotated, or virtually “tried on”, allowing for more precise forecasting of demand and product interest. This introduces a feedback loop between digital engagement and physical production planning, which is particularly relevant in a sector where overproduction and exclusivity management are critical.

Some luxury houses are also exploring integration with customer service systems, allowing virtual assistants or

stylists to guide clients through digital showrooms in real time. This blends human consultation with digital interfaces, reinforcing the role of service in high-end retail even in digital environments.

Despite this progress, the effectiveness of immersive retail tools depends on continued improvements in accuracy and realism. For luxury goods in particular, perception of material quality remains central to purchase decisions, meaning digital representations must closely align with physical expectations to be effective.

Rather than replacing traditional retail, immersive technologies are increasingly being positioned as an additional layer within the luxury ecosystem. The most likely future model is a hybrid one, where customers move between physical boutiques, digital previews, and online purchasing environments depending on convenience and preference. In this context, virtual luxury shopping is evolving not as a standalone channel, but as an extension of how luxury brands engage with a digitally native customer base. ■

