4 March 2021

From models strutting inside an empty museum to designers absenting themselves from the catwalk calendar, this season’s virtual fashion weeks have been re-styled with a new look many expect will endure when traditional runway shows resume.
COVID-19 restrictions forced New York, London, Milan and Paris fashion weeks to go virtual in the past year, with brands rethinking how to keep the buzz of catwalk shows online.

While many are optimistic of a return to the events usually attended by buyers, editors and celebrities, digital presentations - which have opened up fashion week to a wider audience - are likely to stay on.

“Digital first is absolutely something that we will continue to see,” British Fashion Council Chief Executive Caroline Rush told Reuters.

While streaming shows is nothing new, the pandemic has accelerated a shift in an industry that in recent years turned to social media to target younger spenders. Some labels, including Gucci and Tommy Hilfiger, sat out fashion week this season. Versace is presenting its collection after its usual showcase, Milan Fashion Week, ends.

“We will see physical runway shows from these very large brands who can afford to put on multimillion dollar entertainment events. But they may not be during the traditional fashion week and they may have audiences that are primarily made up of customers,” Lauren Sherman, chief correspondent for The Business of Fashion, said.

“There’s been a real shift in the balance of power that was already happening ... But now there’s proof of concept that if you want to ignore fashion week, it’s probably not going to hurt your bottom line.”

Foregoing the usual expensive catwalk events, most brands streamed pre-recorded videos on a fashion week platform.

On show this season were plenty of bright colours to lift moods in an industry that saw stores, factories and studios shut in the pandemic.

“A large part of fashion week outside of the shows was the community getting... together and feed(ing) off of that creativity and so, with that lacking, it’s not the same,” designer Rebecca Minkoff, one of the few to hold a live presentation in New York, said.

“But for those who are able to be creative and innovative, now is the time to figure out how you pivot and for those that do, I think there is great opportunity.”

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