

Header- Gucci's Gamble with the Metaverse

Sub Header- Amongst other luxury brands jumping into the digital space of augmented reality, Gucci plans to take a leap of faith into redefining the limits of fashion.

In Gucci's Garden lays a bed of violet lilies, large burgundy and crimson red roses, Sikamour trees and manicured hedges; a forest straight out of Alice and Wonderland. It is magical. Placed throughout the garden sit intricate patterned couches bringing forth historic Gucci vibes of some of the most recognizable campaigns and artistic pattern work of creative director Alessandro Michele. It all seems so life-like, except, it's not. Welcome to the metaverse, an augmented reality where your reality can be anything you desire, where self-expression can flourish and bloom. But can it be sustainable?

On May 17th, Gucci launched its digital collaboration with leading gaming platform, Roblox. A two week in game event of the recreation of Gucci's live installation of Gucci's Garden located Florence, Italy. The live installation was built at the historic Palazzo della Mercanzia which housed the Gucci Museo. The newly designed space features a Michelin Star restaurant, one of kind Gucci original pieces, and the Gucci Garden which hosts a series of fascinating themed rooms playing homage to Gucci history.



GUCCI GARDEN

encourages users to invest in their personal avatars by purchasing clothing to enhance their personality and self expression with pure freedom.

As an early adopter into the tech world and newly hyped experiences born into the metaverse, Gucci was not afraid to step foot into this newly explored world. Gucci Garden in Roblox welcomed 19 million users as mannequin avatars, gender neutral, into a world of Gucci inspired heritage. Swiftly moving through the custom created vignettes, Gucci Garden designed a series of theme inspired rooms to explore, similar to those IRL rooms in Florence. Users could zig-zag through a Tokyo-Tribe themed maze, and even take a cool dip in the party pool recreating the Gucci Cruise collection of 2020. As the avatars move through each space they would take on part of the usual elements they pass through, designing a well colored Gucci inspired mannequin by the end of the experience.

Real vs. Reality

Founded in 2004, Roblox has now quickly become a focal point of disruption in the tech industry. It offers virtual experiences, games, but digital spaces that can make even real life seem dull, and the digital space, more alluring. Roblox

Gucci has been at the helm of self-expression as it believes people should be who and what they want to be, free of judgment. They also have never been afraid of outsiders perception. They continue to be innovators in the fashion world, and now, the metaverse.

“The philosophy of the group when it comes to innovation — rather than wait and see, which is often the posture of luxury houses — is to test and learn”. Kering Chairman Francois-Henri Pinault

Gucci finds excitement in what endless possibilities lie ahead in an augmented world where anything is possible, and the ideas are limitless. Regardless of some speculation on if the metaverse has any future potential. Roblox has evolved into a place to connect with friends, make new ones, and attend digital events, just as you would do in real life. But you have the power to build your own persona as luxury brands such as Gucci, create digital clothing to purchase and wear to enhance your overall in-game experience. Roblox has over 3.4 billion gamers worldwide, with 27 percent between the ages of 21-30 according to a report from WARC in July 2020. The demographic at the helm of the gaming industry is ages 17- 24 years old. Combined, these demographics top priority is caring about their self-identity and the ability to express themselves.

“Working with a partner like Gucci that wants to enable people to express themselves seemed like a perfect fit,” Christina Wootton Vice President of Roblox Partnerships

Fashion overlaps these concerns and desires of the digital space users. Fashion has always been seen as a form of self-expression, and now more people are considering and testing the lifestyle of an avatar who can wear a one of a kind Gucci sweater and feel a sense of confidence amongst their friends in this fantasy of a world. Gen Z being the top demographic that splurges on fashion as their form of self-expression and is willing to pay for a product regardless of it is only a digital version.

Luxury's Big Leap

Gucci is spear heading the initiative for encouraging luxury to jump into this augmented world feet first. As their belief of “nothing to fear” pushes forward, a multitude of other luxury brands are curious and eager to explore. Ralph Lauren designed their own custom space in Roblox called Ralph Laurens Winter Escape which you can enjoy snow activities with friends, shop The Polo Shop for custom apparel, drink a RL branded cup of hot chocolate and so much more. Sound better than real life yet? Or does this just sound cheesy?

Balenciaga is another luxury brand who collaborated with gaming platform, Fornite. Released back on September 21, 2021, Balenciaga created a series of Balenciaga pop up shops that would be visible in certain cities and realms of the gamers experience. Avatars could meet up with friends and shop the Balenciaga Fit Sets, change outfits with Changing Booths, and share their fashion and personal style with their digital community.

What could be labeled as the most exclusive and high profile event put on through the metaverse was their first ever Fashion Week. Luxury brands such as Dundas, Dolce and Gabbana, and Etro all were participants in this Decentraland event. Decentraland is a digital real estate platform that buys digital land through blockchain for others to build their space and

cyber cities upon. The group hosted the inaugural Fashion Week on their own land complete with installations, shops, and private brand experiences. But not everything always functions perfectly. The show went on but not without some glitching and delays. Thanks to good old technology. It is still evolving. Brands such as Etro showcased and sold never before seen collections as a pre-consumer test of the product. Now could that help our initiative with sustainability?



GUCCI METAVERSE IN ROBLOX

What Does The Future Hold

Research and Analysts group McKinsey and Company issued a report for The State of Fashion 2022 on the future of the Metaverse and how fashion can adapt a metaverse mindset. Fashion continues to evolve to consumers shopping habits and as Gen Z, a tech-savvy generation, spend an average of 8 hours a day online, it's only the inevitable that fashion will shift to a digital experience.

“There are more and more ‘second worlds’ where you can express yourself,” says Gucci chief marketing officer Robert Triefus. “[But] there is probably an underestimation of the value being attached to individuals who want to express themselves in

a virtual world with a virtual product, [through] a virtual persona.” - McKinsey & Company

Is digital fashion a natural extension to apply social media filters on platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat? Augmented reality has been evolving for years, but the gaming industry has made its mark with the opportunities that brands have with the broad audience it encounters.

Gucci believes there is maximum and long term potential in the future of the metaverse. So much so that they hired a whole in-house technology staff to handle the progression of their involvement in the digital space.

Although the metaverse revenue potential is still unclear, Gucci reportedly saw revenue growth of \$11.1 billion in 2021, which is a clear jump from \$10.9 billion in 2019. Insinuating, they are doing something right. Gucci has the luxury of not needing to generate revenue at this time, but rather explore the opportunities, understand the platforms, and engage with the community to be relevant and authentic. With hopes the money follows after awareness and credibility is established.

“I often tell my colleagues that we are at the beginning of an extraordinary journey driven by creativity and innovation.” - Bizzarri

While Gucci has no plans of stopping their involvement in the metaverse, other luxury brands continue to make a more conservative approach to the digital space. Gucci prides itself on the evolution of the brand, and feels the power to innovation is keeping up with the zeitgeist. It is no surprise they were one of the first to enter the metaverse, but the big question still remains, will it be worth it? We will just have to take Bizzarri's word for it.

“‘The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams’ — this is one of my favourite quotes from Eleanor Roosevelt. And this cannot be truer than in the metaverse.” - Bizzarri

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