

## From Social Media to Metaverse: Evaluation of Meta Avatars Store in the Context of Avatars, Self-Presentation and Luxury Brand

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### Abstract

Meta Corporation announced in June 2022 that it was launching the Meta Avatars Store for users who want to adorn their avatars with luxury brands such as Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne, as well as a selection of free outfits available. In this context, the store's function is to allow users to shop for their avatars in social media and Metaverse environments. In this context, the research focuses on discussing the relationship between avatars, self-presentation, and luxury brands through the example of the Meta Avatars Store. The purpose of the research, which examines the Meta Avatars Store with the case study method, is to examine the relationship between self-presentation and the elements highlighted to direct the users to luxury consumption in the promotional activities of this virtual store. According to the research findings, it is seen that making purchases for their avatars is meaningful to find their "authentic self" and "the best version of themselves" and being "unique" to make the relationships of the users more meaningful with their friends, family, or business partners.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Metaverse, Avatar, Self-Presentation, Luxury Brand

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## Sosyal Medyadan Metaverse'e: Avatarlar, Benlik Sunumu ve Lüks Marka Bağlamında Meta Avatar Mağazası Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

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Öz

Meta Şirketi, Haziran 2022'de avatarlarını Balenciaga, Prada ve Thom Browne lüks markalarıyla ve mevcut ücretsiz kıyafet seçenekleriyle süslemek isteyen kullanıcılar için Meta Avatar Mağazası'nı başlattığını duyurmuştur. Bu bağlamda mağaza, kullanıcıların avatarları için sosyal medya ve Metaverse ortamlarında alışveriş yapabilmelerine olanak sağlama işlevine sahiptir. Bu çerçevede araştırma, avatarlar, benlik sunumu ve lüks markalar arasındaki ilişkiyi Meta Avatar Mağazası örneği üzerinden tartışmaya odaklanmaktadır. Meta Avatar Mağazası'nı durum çalışması yöntemiyle inceleyen araştırmanın amacı, sanal mağazanın tanıtım faaliyetlerinde kullanıcıları lüks tüketime yönlendirmek üzere öne çıkarılan unsurlar ile kullanıcıların benlik sunumları arasındaki ilişkiyi irdelemektir. Araştırma bulgularına göre, kullanıcıların arkadaşları, aileleri ya da iş ortakları ile olan ilişkilerinde "otantik benlik" oluşturmak, "kendilerinin en iyi versiyonları"nı sunmak ve "benzersiz" olmak gibi motivasyonlar kapsamında avatarları için alışveriş yapmalarının anlamlı kılındığı görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Medya, Metaverse, Avatar, Benlik Sunumu, Lüks Marka

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## 1. Introduction

Social media, which has entered our lives with the development of Web 2.0 technologies, has significantly impacted the transformation of individuals' socialization and communication with its constantly evolving structure and features. The content forms and interactive features offered by social media platforms play a significant role in shaping the users' behaviors according to self-expression.

The systems, devices and the Internet infrastructure that have developed with the opportunities offered by technology have also transformed digital communication environments. In this context, with the Web 3.0 era, it has become possible to talk about a more personalized virtual world that utilizes artificial intelligence technologies (Ghosh, Chakraborty & Law, 2018). The concept of the Metaverse, which has been frequently used in the digital video game world in the previous periods, has started to draw attention in terms of the role it will play in the future of the Internet, with Meta company directing its investments in this field. In this framework, the Metaverse has become a term used to express the new version of the Internet. It is expected that the Metaverse, which offers users the opportunity to exist in the three-dimensional virtual world with their avatars, will transform social media and many areas such as e-commerce, professional life, education, communication, digital video games, culture-arts, and sports. In the context of these developments, it was noteworthy that Meta Company announced on June 17, 2022, the launch of the Meta Avatars Store, where the products of Balenciaga, Prada, and, Thom Browne luxury brands would be offered to users for their avatars (Geczy & Karaminas, 2019). This has attracted attention in terms of directing users to purchase luxury brand products for their avatars.

This research aims to examine Meta Avatars Store promotional activities using the case study method and to discuss the relationship between avatars, self-presentation, and luxury brands in the virtual world. In this context, the research examines the transformation of the digital environment from social media to the Metaverse, avatar-self-presentation, and luxury brands in the virtual world. In the literature review, studies on "avatar, social media and the Metaverse," "self-presentation, social media and the Metaverse," and "luxury brand, social media, and the Metaverse" are revealed.

## 2. From Social Media to Metaverse

Since the Internet entered the lives of users, it has started to attract great attention as a universal and free information source. In the 2000s, Web 2.0 technologies, which gave users the chance to be content creators, changed the Internet

structure significantly. The most important element of this change has been the emergence of social media platforms that provide a participatory environment. Web 2.0 technologies and social media have shown their effects in many different areas from everyday life practices to economic structure. In this context, it is no longer possible to think of a communication environment without social media platforms (Boullier, D. 2019, pp. 79-80).

Social media can be defined as online applications whose ideological and technological foundations are based on Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). It can be said that social media has changed the circulation of information, content, and news all over the world and between societies over time (Mayfield, 2008).

Social media can be defined as digital environments where individuals interact and give users the chance to express themselves. Over time, social media has begun to have an impact on the social and professional order (Güçdemir, 2017, pp. 14-15). In this regard, with the developing technology, the structure of social media platforms has started to change day by day. With the advancement of devices and the Internet infrastructures, social media platforms, where visual content is dominant, have started to gain importance.

According to the developments in communication technologies and the expectations and needs of the users, the necessity of a communication environment that combines the physical world with the virtual world and carries everyday life activities to the online environment has emerged (Hsu, 2021). With the development of Web 3.0 technologies, leading technology companies have become motivated to build a world beyond the real world (Kim, 2021, p.141). In such a period, on October 28, 2021, Facebook Company announced that it had rebranded and taken the name Meta and started to focus on the Metaverse investments rather than defining itself as just a social media company (Meta, 2021). Metaverse, which enables multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects, and people, can be defined as a structure that connects physical life and the virtual world (Mystakidis, 2022, p. 487). In this context, it can be predicted that the Metaverse, which can be described as an immersive 3D world in which individuals will find a place with their avatars, will change the dynamics of individuals' self-presentations in the virtual environment.

### **3. Avatars and Self-Presentation**

The concept of self, conceptualized for the first time by William James (1963) in the historical process, represents the emotional, cognitive, and physical cha-

characteristics of individuals and expresses the attitudes they acquire towards other individuals in social life (Leary & June, 2003, pp. 101-102). Individuals, who are social beings, exist in the society they live in, and they have the motivation to present themselves to others around them. Self-presentation is essential for individuals to form an impression about themselves to establish and maintain relationships with others. In this context, Goffman, who associates life with the theater stage, argues that individuals present their idealized selves through performing various roles in everyday life (Goffman, 2016, pp. 29-33).

Goffman examines the individuals' roles performed in their social and professional life practices in two dimensions: desired and exhibited roles. He names the other individuals that the individual encounters in everyday life as the audience, and also divides the life scene into two: the front stage and the backstage. Accordingly, it is emphasized that individuals tend to hide unsuitable attitudes for the self-presentations they want to present in social life. In other words, it explains individuals' realization of an idealized self-presentation in social life with Dramaturgy Theory (Kavut, 2018, p. 3).

Today, everyday life self-presentation practices are undergoing a significant transformation through personal avatars created in virtual worlds. It can be said that the concept of the Metaverse was first introduced in the science fiction novel *Snow Crash* written by Stephenson in 1992 (Feathersone & Borrows, 1995). Networked virtual worlds stand out with the ability of individuals to express themselves on these systems with digital characters called avatars (Holzwarth, Janiszewski, & Neumann, 2006). In this context, virtual universes can redesign the concept of beauty, idealized life dynamics, and social acceptance norms, frequently discussed with the influence of popular culture from the past to the present through digital presentations of users called avatars. Thus, in virtual universes, there is a world where individuals can have the appearance they want and manage their abilities, professional life standards, and physical characteristics. In other words, they can freely realize their self-presentation with their anonymous identities. Lasch explains this situation as an action motivated by the desire of individuals to reflect their reality and ideals in their world, as a result of their narcissistic tendencies, to liberate their bodies (Robins, 1999, p. 92).

Avatars, defined as the virtual characters that represent the individual in the virtual world, are seen as essential self-presentation tools as they are accepted as a reflection of the user's body, thoughts, and existence in the physical world (Bélisle & Bodur, 2010; Castronova, 2004; Yee & Bailenson, 2007). In the Metaverse, avatars are accepted as an essential part of the individual's self. In this context,

the avatars of the users, which reflect themselves in the virtual universe, appear as an idealized reflection of their selves, where the user is entirely in control (Belk, 2014).

#### **4. Luxury Brands in the Virtual World**

The concept of the brand, which has entered our lives with modernism, expresses the indicators that enable products to differentiate from similar products through terms, names, symbols, or signs. Today, the brand represents the communication between the producer and the consumer beyond symbols, names, or signs. In this context, Kotler (2000, p. 404), while defining the brand concept, emphasizes six titles for the meaning of the brand: the quality of the brand, the benefits of the brand, the values of the brand, the brand culture, the brand personality, and the consumer. In other words, a brand can be explained as a label developed to inform about a product, service, or object and to create a connotation in the intended direction (Tosun, 2020, p. 3).

In this framework, brands must explain themselves to the consumer, convey the promises and features that distinguish them from their competitors, stand out in the market and maintain their existence by protecting them (Aaker & Keller, 1990, p. 54). In other words, it can be said that the new social dynamics that emerged in the light of developments in information, communication, and production technologies have also changed consumer needs, expectations, and consumption patterns (Bauman, 2006, p. 92; Featherstone, 2013, pp. 41-42). The importance of consumption in meeting social, psychological, and physiological needs has enabled cultural and social values to be a part of consumption by finding a material value (Warde, 1991, p. 304). Etymologically, the concept of luxury, which derives from the Latin word "Luxus," is explained as "showing off, pomp, overconsumption, spending more than necessary" (TDK, 2022). While the concept of luxury used to have negative meanings in the historical process, the discovery of new continents in the 17th century led to the development of positive perceptions such as rare, limited, and exclusive. The technological transformations experienced by the 19th century led to the development of the luxury product/service category for products and brands. The emergence of luxury products motivated individuals to reach these products in social life (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012, p. 139).

Quick and easy Internet access to products and services has also made consumption a fast practice. In other words, the continuation of the production wheel has led to the emergence of new needs and the need for several versions of the

same product (Ghosh & Varshney, 2013, p. 147). New needs emerging within the scope of supply and demand made it necessary for the production wheel to work non-stop. Continuous production has necessitated continuous consumption, and some new concepts, such as luxury consumption, new luxury, accessible luxury, and democratizing luxury, have emerged in the context of luxury brands (Blevis et. al., 2007; Batat, 2019; Atkinson & Kang, 2021). In this context, considering developments in information and telecommunication technologies, modernism has left its place to postmodernism, where the existing dynamics in the social structure have been demolished and re-established. By destroying the mass structure of social life, postmodernism has led to the renaming of the independent individual, open to change, as a subject, with a Foucaultian approach (Güngör, 2020). The democratization of luxury, which means that luxury products and services are accessible to everyone (Aksu & Ercan, 2014; Raggiotto et. al., 2015; Yazıcı, 2018; Berry, 2022), has developed a new consumption practice in which experience and emotional needs come before physical needs. The experience element in this direction has revealed the need for brands to cooperate with digital platforms and technologies (Heine & Berghaus, 2014, pp. 225-226).

To reach the consumer within the framework of the possibilities offered by technology, new communication platforms, and communication forms, digitalized brand communication stands out with its communication and promotion activities through social media platforms (Weinberg, 2009, p. 3). Digital brand communication, updated in visual, textual, and audio forms within the framework of the prominent social media platforms, has also been integrated with new contexts built on artificial intelligence and virtual reality (Bala & Verma, 2018, pp. 321-322). In this context, new communication technologies, virtual worlds, and digital applications are essential for brands to reach consumers, interact, survive against intense competition between brands in the market, and increase the redistributed market share in the digital world (Hollensen, Kotler & Opresnik, 2022). Virtual worlds, which stand out, especially in transportation equality, enable luxury brand marketers to reach more users by expanding their niche audience. In other words, it has led to the massification of luxury through virtual worlds and digital technologies (Maden, 2014, p. 46). In this context, luxury brands exist in traditional media through prestige, attractiveness, and product features. In virtual worlds, luxury brands define their existence from the consumer's perspective through experience, emotional promises, and symbolic features (Telli, Aydın & Şen, 2021, pp. 35-36).

### 5. Literature Review

In the context of the Metaverse and social media, a literature review was conducted for studies examining the subjects of avatars, self-presentation, and luxury brands. In this context, it was found meaningful to classify the studies in the literature into three categories: studies on avatars, social media, and the Metaverse; Studies on Self-Presentation, Social Media, and the Metaverse; Studies on the Luxury Brand, Social Media, and the Metaverse.

Researcher and Year of Research	Research Title	Subject of Research	Methodology	Results
Nicholas Mero-la & Jorge Pe, 2009	The Effects of Avatar Appearance in Virtual Worlds	In the research, it has been tried to reveal how the physical designs of avatars can affect users and interaction partners.	Review Article	While the importance of avatars is emphasized within the scope of virtual worlds in the research, it is seen that the categories of knowledge, harmony, and cooperation come to the fore to achieve a successful interaction within the framework of the physical characteristics of avatars.
Andreas M. Kaplan & Michael Haenlein, 2009	The Fairy-land of Second Life: Virtual Social Worlds and How To Use Them	The research focuses on the role, importance, and future of avatars, virtual characters that individuals create to represent themselves in the Metaverse in commercial and social life.	Review Article	The research offers insights into the Metaverse. In this context, the importance of avatars representing individuals in the Metaverse offers insights into their future place.



<p>Catarina Carneiro de Sousa, 2013</p>	<p>Meta_ Body: A Project on Shared Avatar Creation</p>	<p>In the study, the Meta_ Body project, which is realized in the Metaverse and the art exhibition, is examined at the same time. In this context, the project focuses on the creation of virtual corporeality and the processes of creating, sharing, and transforming avatars.</p>	<p>Case Study</p>	<p>The research emphasizes that individuals' avatar reflections in the Metaverse need a creative approach, unlike the patterns presented to them within the framework of elements such as skin, fabric, and hair design. According to the research, although individuals tend to embody avatars, reality-based indicators stand out in their avatars.</p>
<p>Kristine N. Nowak &amp; Jesse Fox, 2018</p>	<p>Avatars and Computer-Mediated Communication: A Review of The Definitions, Uses, and Effects of Digital Representations</p>	<p>The research aims to define in depth the concept of avatars and to determine how categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity related to digital representations are reflected in the social categorization of avatars.</p>	<p>Review Article</p>	<p>According to the research, the definitions made within the scope of the concept of avatar were compiled, and the restrictions that were expected to come to the fore within the scope of digital representations of individuals were determined.</p>

<p>Mehmet Emin Kahraman, 2022</p>	<p>Widespread Virtual Life with Blockchain, Deepfake, Avatar, Cryptocurrency, NFT and Metaverse</p>	<p>The research examined the development of virtual worlds and the reflections of the global power technology companies' initiatives on the Metaverse on social life.</p>	<p>Review Article</p>	<p>While discussing the reflections of individuals on psychology by detailing the new concepts that stand out with the Metaverse, it was concluded that environmental problems such as energy use and resource consumption emerged with technological developments.</p>
<p>Ceyda Ilgaz Büyükbaykal &amp; Zuhale Sönmez, 2022</p>	<p>The Relationship Between Metaverse and Social Life</p>	<p>The research examines the relationship between the Metaverse and social life and makes inferences about the future of the Metaverse.</p>	<p>Review Article</p>	<p>The research associates the rapid adoption of the Metaverse with the Covid-19 Pandemic and the quarantine process that entered our lives. According to the research, it can be said that the place of the Metaverse in social life is related to the feelings and thoughts of the users about this subject.</p>
<p>Jun Wang, Kailin Yao, Jiebing Liang, Lu Tan &amp; Zhenguo Gao, 2022</p>	<p>From Selfie to Avatar: How Social Media Affects Self-Image Cognition and Optimization?</p>	<p>The study examined how self-presentation and personal image construction in the Metaverse affected users' behaviors in the context of social media use.</p>	<p>Survey Method</p>	<p>According to the research findings, it is seen that the Metaverse increases social anxiety in young participants. In this context, it stands out that young participants tend to consider the virtual world more important than the physical world.</p>

**Table 1.** Studies on Avatars, Social Media, and the Metaverse

Researcher and Year of Research	Research Title	Subject of Research	Methodology	Results
Gül Dilek Türk, Serkan Bayrakçı & Elif Akçay, 2022	Metaverse and Self-Presentation	In the study, the subjects of Metaverse and self-presentation are explained through the consumption culture relationship of the concepts of the semantic Web, virtual and augmented reality, mixed reality, and NFT.	Case Study	In the study, Metaverse, accepted as the future of social media and mobile communication technologies, comes to the fore with the concepts of NFT, and virtual/augmented reality, providing the emergence of a new market, especially for luxury brands. It is emphasized that it gains importance for brands, especially within the scope of luxury consumption.
Gül Dilek Türk & Abdülhakim Bahadır Darı, 2022	The Socialization Process of the Individual in the Metaverse	The study examined a socialization process in which users create their status, socioeconomic class, identities, and images through their avatars in the Metaverse.	Case Study	Research findings show that the Metaverse offers an experience close to the perception of reality in the physical world, allowing individuals to transition more quickly to identity, role, and socialization.
Michael Saker & Jordan Frith, 2022	Contiguous identities: The virtual self in the supposed Metaverse-proposed Metaverse	The study examines the effect of users' Metaverse on identity presentation.	Case Study	The research critically examined the facilitating promises of the Metaverse in social life, which came to the fore with Meta company, within the framework of the life form that the Metaverse offers in parallel with physical life.

<p>Yong Andy Jeon, 2022</p>	<p>Reading Social Media Marketing Messages as Simulated Self Within a Metaverse: An Analysis of Gaze and Social Media Engagement Behaviors Within a Metaverse Platform</p>	<p>In the study, the different temporal distances of virtual environments in the context of the Metaverse are examined in the context of the interaction between the simulated self and the participants' authentic selves.</p>	<p>Eye-Tracking</p>	<p>According to the research findings, it is seen that the farther the distance between the virtual and selves in the virtual world, the shorter the attention span of the participants. In this context, the research findings show that the simultaneous self-presentations of individuals in the Metaverse are related to their selves, and the differences are minimal within the scope of the sustainability of individuals' existence in the Metaverse.</p>
<p>Philipp Sykownik, Divine Maloney, Guo Freeman &amp; Maic Masuch, 2022</p>	<p>Something Personal from the Metaverse: Goals, Topics, and Contextual Factors of Self-Disclosure in Commercial Social VR</p>	<p>The research examines how users present themselves in the Metaverse, which information they present about themselves, their motivation and opinions in this context, and the factors affecting this situation.</p>	<p>Survey Method</p>	<p>According to the research findings, Metaverse users' individual self-disclosure decisions may change with the complex interactions of different contextual factors, such as privacy and anonymity in the virtual environment. In this context, the research also highlights the necessity of addressing user concerns in Metaverse design today and in the future and creating safe spaces, especially for privacy and confidentiality.</p>

**Table 2.** Studies on Self-Presentation, Social Media and the Metaverse

Researcher and Year of Research	Research Title	Subject of Research	Methodology	Results
Svend Hollensen, Philip Kotler, Marc Oliver Opresnik, 2021	Metaverse – The New Marketing Universe	In the research, the relationship between the Metaverse and digital marketing has been detailed, and how luxury brands use augmented reality applications that stand out in this context has been explained.	Review Article	In the research, the Metaverse is defined as a digital technology that increases the functionality of products and services for brands. It is emphasized that significantly augmented reality applications, together with the Metaverse, will be critical in the luxury brand experience so that the consumer can experience the product and service beforehand, interact, attract attention and talk.
Gözde Sula Averbek & Ceyda Aysuna Türkyılmaz, 2021	The Future of Brands in the Virtual Universe: The New Internet World Metaverse and Brand Applications	In the study, the Metaverse was detailed from a broad perspective. The last part of the study examined the Metaverse applications of luxury clothing companies.	Review Article	In the research, it was emphasized that the future applications of luxury clothing brands in the Metaverse within the scope of partnerships with the Metaverse would provide a significant advantage against the competitive environment in the market.

<p>Lik-Hang Lee, Tristan Braud, Pengyuan Zhou, Lin Wang, Dianlei Xu, Zijun Lin, Abhishek Kumar, Carlos Bermejo &amp; Pan Hui, 2021</p>	<p>All One Needs to Know about Metaverse: A Complete Survey on Technological Singularity, Virtual Ecosystem, and Research Agenda</p>	<p>This research it is aimed to present a comprehensive perspective on the Metaverse ecosystem.</p>	<p>Survey Method</p>	<p>Within the scope of the research, the Metaverse is examined within the framework of augmented reality, human-computer interaction, artificial intelligence, blockchain, Internet of things, cloud systems, robotics, and the future of mobile communication technologies, and suggestions are offered on avatar formation, which is an integral part of the Metaverse ecosystem.</p>
<p>Burcu Abanozolu &amp; Nursen Geyik Değeri, 2022</p>	<p>Application Examples from Luxury Fashion Brands in the Metaverse Universe</p>	<p>In the research, the fashion brands in the Metaverse and the activities of the brands in this context are examined.</p>	<p>Review Article</p>	<p>The research emphasizes that luxury fashion brands stand out in the Metaverse. In addition, it is stated in the research that the Metaverse will be integrated with the natural world, and this will cause luxury brands to strengthen their Metaverse investments and activities.</p>

<p>Annamma Joy, Ying Zhu, Camilo Peña &amp; Myriam Brouard, 2022</p>	<p>Digital Future of Luxury Brands: Metaverse, Digital Fashion, and Non-Fungible Tokens</p>	<p>The research explores how emerging technologies in the context of the Metaverse affect the fashion industry.</p>	<p>Review Article</p>	<p>The research highlights that along with the Metaverse; brands are involved in the game and digital fashion world. According to the research, luxury brands carry out studies on the Metaverse to enable consumers to interact, based on Kozinets' (2021, p. 8) study of the Brand Desire Spiral.</p>
<p>Jinkyung Lee BA &amp; Ki Han Kwon, 2022</p>	<p>Novel Pathway Regarding Good Cosmetics Brands by NFT in the Metaverse World.</p>	<p>The research examines within the scope of sustainable consumption (good consumption), the marketing practices of luxury cosmetics brands using NFT in the Metaverse, and marketing communication in the Metaverse.</p>	<p>Case Study</p>	<p>Within the scope of the research findings, it was concluded that NFT productions in the Metaverse are the future of marketing strategies of luxury cosmetics brands. In addition, in the article, the Metaverse is associated with good consumption.</p>

<p>Maria Vittoria Brienza, 2022</p>	<p>Technological Evolution in The Luxury and Fashion Industry: Focus on The Metaverse and NFT.</p>	<p>While the research deals with the development of the fashion industry in the context of digitalization, which the Covid-19 Pandemic has strengthened, it is aimed to reveal the changes that can be experienced in the fashion industry with Metaverse.</p>	<p>Content Analysis</p>	<p>Research results show that NFT productions are the basis of the fashion industry's development and adoption of the Metaverse. In this context, it stands out that luxury fashion brands prefer NFT technology within the framework of factors such as brand image, consumer satisfaction, and non-copying of productions.</p>
<p>Yousra Bousba &amp; Vikas Arya, 2022</p>	<p>Let's Connect in Metaverse. Brand's New Destination To Increase Consumers' affective Brand Engagement &amp; Their Satisfaction and Advocacy.</p>	<p>The research aims to determine how consumers' experience of luxury brands in the virtual world through the Metaverse influences brand preferences.</p>	<p>Survey Method</p>	<p>According to the research findings, if brands use gamification-based marketing activities in the Metaverse, consumers' emotional brand loyalty and virtual brand experiences can be increased.</p>



Emma Kirjavainen, 2022	The Future of Luxury Fashion Brands Through NFTs	For both the fashion industry and luxury brands, the research by examining the NFT productions in the Metaverse, the concept of luxury fashion transformed by technology, new consumer behaviors, and consumer needs have been tried to be determined.	Case Study	The findings obtained in the research examining NFT and luxury brands within the framework of the Metaverse were categorized under four headings. Within the framework of these titles, it is seen that the Metaverse is explained by the categories of uniqueness and rarity, cultural expression, a combination of virtual experience and physical environment, and brand communities in terms of luxury brands.
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**Table 3.** Studies on the Luxury Brand, Social Media, and the Metaverse

## 6. Purpose and Scope of the Research

This research aims to evaluate the relationship between avatars, which we can express as virtual characters of users, self-presentation, and luxury brands through the example of Meta Avatars Store. In this context, the research aims to reveal the elements that are highlighted in the promotional activities of the Meta Avatars Store to persuade users to buy digital goods so that their avatars reflect themselves more.

In this framework, the starting questions of the research are as follows:

- What elements are the highlights in the avatar, self-presentation, and luxury brand relationship in Meta Avatars Store promotional activities?
- What elements lead users to luxury consumption for their avatars in Meta Avatars Store promotional activities?

## 7. Method and Sampling of the Study

Case study, one of the qualitative research methods frequently used in the field of social sciences, refers to a methodology that covers the detailed examination of the system to obtain information about the subject (Chmiliar, 2010). A case

study is the researcher's observation, reports, and interviews, and it can also be explained as an approach examined in depth through documents (Creswell, 2007, pp. 183). In this context, the case study can be explained as a research method that focuses on the "how" and "why" questions through the determined sample and data collection tools related to the subject under study and by describing the findings obtained here in a profitable way (Yin, 1984; Davey, 1991; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

In this context, the findings obtained using the case study method within the scope of the research are examined with the descriptive analysis method. Meta Avatars Store promotional activities constitute the sample of the research. The fact that Meta Avatars Store is a recently promoted area and allows users to purchase digital goods for their avatars and use them on social media platforms, messenger, or Metaverse reveals the remarkable original aspect of the sample. Today, the technological developments in the field of the Metaverse and the increase in the investments of technology companies in this field are remarkable. In this respect, it is essential and meaningful to examine the approach of Meta Company, which has a huge user base through its platforms. The limited number of studies on the avatar store in the literature reveals the importance of the research investigating this current example.

## **8. Results and Discussion**

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg made the announcement of Meta Avatars Store by joining Instagram Live on June 17, 2022, via Instagram's vice-president of fashion partnerships Eva Chen's Instagram account. Zuckerberg and Chen described this Instagram live as a "live avatar fashion show". It is noteworthy that at the beginning of Instagram live, Zuckerberg stated that he was excited to attend as this will probably be the only fashion show he will attend. Throughout Instagram live, it is seen that Chen shares images of Zuckerberg's avatar wearing digital clothes from the brands Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne.

On June 18, 2022, Mark Zuckerberg and Eva Chen re-announced the launch of the Avatars Store, allowing users to buy digital clothes to style their avatars to be used on Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger in their joint posts on their Instagram accounts. The Instagram post, in which the Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne brands are tagged, emphasizes that digital goods will be an essential way for users to express themselves in the Metaverse and a significant driver of the creative economy. It has also been stated that new brands will be added to these brands shortly.



**Figure 1.** Instagram Live Source: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/Ce6yFgbptyM/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>, (Date of Access: 02.09.2022).

In the announcement titled “Introducing the Meta Avatars Store” published on the official website of Meta Company on June 20, 2022, the following two statements are highlighted (Meta, 2022):

“This week, we are rolling out the Meta Avatars Store to offer you more ways to customize your avatar.”

“We are launching the store with digital outfits to purchase from Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne, along with our existing free outfit options.”

### **8.1. Meta Avatars Store in the Context of Self-Presentation**

In the Meta Avatars Store announcement published on the official website of Meta Company, the motivation for individuals customizing their avatars to be “unique” is revealed with the following statement:

“And today, we’re introducing the Meta Avatars Store, which will let you customize your avatar even further and be uniquely you.”

In the same announcement, while emphasizing that users’ avatars reflect their personalities, it is emphasized that reflecting the fashion sense plays a vital role in individuals’ ability to express themselves correctly:

“Your avatar is a digital expression of your personality (or personalities). It can convey how much of an extrovert or introvert you are, your sense of humor, and even your fashion. It lets you be your authentic self, which can help you connect more meaningfully with your friends, family, coworkers, or anyone else you meet on the road to the Metaverse.”

In the announcement, which also emphasizes the efforts of individuals to present a good version of themselves in their self-presentations in virtual environments, it is noteworthy that individuals are guided to realize the best version of themselves with outfits and accessories in Avatars Store. In this context, the idea that the physical appearance of the virtual character is essential, even in a non-physical world, is conveyed to individuals. Moreover, it is mentioned not only the use of luxury brand products but also the opportunity to enjoy the free clothes and accessories that this virtual store offers:

“We want to enable everyone to present the best version of themselves, which is why we’ve made it possible to customize your avatar with a wide variety of free outfits and accessories. Feel like giving yourself blue hair today, trying out new makeup, or sporting a suit for a professional look? No problem - you can customize your avatar anytime you want to suit your mood. In fact, with more than a quintillion combinations of free avatar options already available, your choices will almost certainly be uniquely yours.”

Seeing his avatar in Prada outfits during Instagram Live, Mark Zuckerberg stated that wearing Prada from head to toe is related to confidence and said, “I think in the Metaverse I may just have that confidence.” However, Zuckerberg also says, “I’m not sure that I’m cool enough to wear that” when he sees his avatar in a Balenciaga outfit. This statement can be evaluated as the use of luxury brands can be associated with making individuals confident or relaxed. In addition, Zuckerberg comments on his avatar wearing a Thom Browne suit, emphasizing that outfits that might be uncomfortable to wear in real life can be worn comfortably in the Metaverse:

“In the Metaverse even if you wear formal stuff it is just as comfortable as anything else.”

In this context, it is focused on how the Metaverse can enable individuals to wear the clothes they want in real life. In this way, it is emphasized that the Metaverse can help everyone become whom they dream of.



**Figure 2.** Avatars in Luxury Brand's Outfit

Source: <https://about.fb.com/news/2022/06/introducing-the-meta-avatars-store/>,  
(Date of Access: 02.09.2022).

It is noteworthy that Chen evaluates fashion products as an element that will help individuals better express themselves in the Metaverse:

"I'm really excited about people being able to express themselves in the Metaverse through fashion. Fashion is ultimately a form of art and self-expression."

In addition, it is seen that Zuckerberg emphasizes that individuals express themselves through what they wear and their fashion.

## 8.2. Meta Avatars Store and Luxury Brands

It is noteworthy that the Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne brands offered for sale in Meta Avatars Store are defined as "world's leading brands," "world's most iconic fashion brands" both in the announcement on the website and during the Instagram Live.

During Instagram Live, Chen defines these three brands as "really hard to get in real life" and these products, intended to be acquired as a status element in real life but are not possible for everyone to reach, can be reached in the Metaverse.

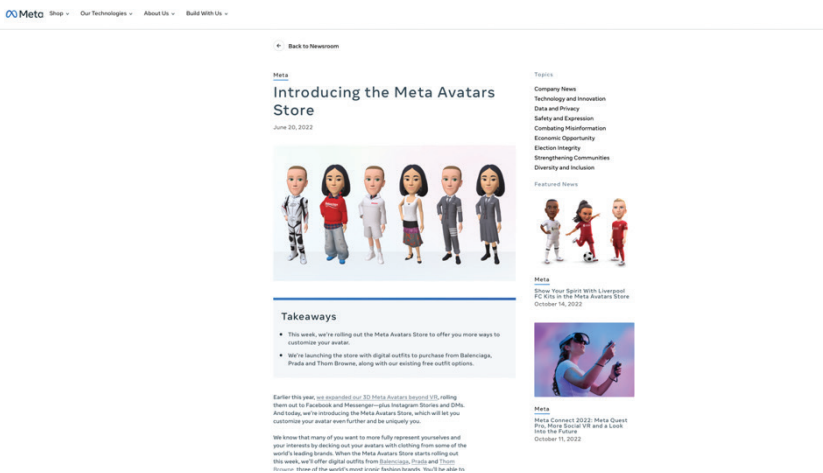
It is also noteworthy that Chen expressed that she found it very exciting to wear luxury brand outfits:

"(...) in the Metaverse being able to wear Balenciaga, Prada, and Thom Browne, I think it's gonna be so exciting and I can't wait to see (...)"

In this context, while Zuckerberg defines the luxury brands that Meta collaborates with as "best of the best designers," he strengthens the emphasis on luxury.

He states that he dreams of making luxury and “high quality” products “accessible to everyone” in the future. On the other hand, it is stated that many different styles of clothing can be accessed free of charge for the avatars of individuals in the Metaverse. In addition, Chen’s question “Who does not want to wear a classic Tom Browne suit?” draws attention as a comment that motivates individuals to use luxury brands by thinking that wearing a luxury brand is something anyone could wish for.

Zuckerberg says that the purpose of the company’s actions regarding the Metaverse is for individuals to express themselves and establish connections. As a result, it is emphasized that the digital goods that individuals will buy for their avatars can be a tool that allows them to reflect themselves better and to be “unique.” In addition, it can be said that luxury brand products, which are difficult to reach in real life, are accessible in the Metaverse, and luxury brand products are associated with pleasure.



**Figure 3.** Meta Avatars Store Announcement on Meta Company’s Official Website  
Source: <https://about.fb.com/news/2022/06/introducing-the-meta-avatars-store/>,  
(Date of Access: 02.09.2022).

## 9. Conclusion

Developing technology determines the direction of investments of technology companies and, accordingly, the features and possibilities of digital environments offered to users. Looking at the latest developments, it seems that the Metaverse ecosystem, which combines the physical and virtual worlds and allows individuals to exist in a three-dimensional virtual world with their avatars,

is becoming increasingly important. Especially following the rebranding of the Facebook company by taking the name Meta company in October 2021, technology companies increasingly turned their investments into the Metaverse. In this context, it can be said that this area has started attracting more users' attention. Moreover, on June 17, 2022, the Meta Avatars Store was announced with an Instagram Live realized by the Instagram vice-president of Fashion Partnerships Eva Chen with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg. This event is remarkable in that it reveals some elements of the Metaverse's future, which is expected to play an essential role in the future of social media. It starts with the first three brands agreeing to this virtual store, which allows users to buy digital clothes for their avatars: the world-famous, iconic luxury brands Balenciaga, Prada, and, Thom Browne.

Metaverse, which is not a new concept, appears for the first time in the video game world. The view that the Metaverse ecosystem will cause a significant break in the future of the Internet world, with the Facebook company taking the name Meta and subsequent significant investments in this field, has emerged. Today, especially with the Covid-19 Pandemic, digitalization has developed faster, and its importance has increased. Therefore, the studies to be carried out on Metaverse, which is rapidly coming to the fore in social and professional life, will be beneficial for the studies to be done in this field in the academic context. Furthermore, professionally, this research will likely be necessary for brands preparing to take their place in the Metaverse. In the Metaverse ecosystem, users exist in a digital world through their avatars that represent them. In this context, elements such as commerce, consumption, and culture in the physical world also exist in the Metaverse ecosystem through virtual reality.

In this context, within the scope of the research, it is aimed to examine the relationship between avatars, self-presentation, and luxury brands through the example of Meta Avatars Store. In this framework, the statements of Meta Company and Meta Company CEO Mark Zuckerberg's speech in their promotional activities are examined. The research findings show that having digital goods for avatars is associated with users' self-expressions in Meta brand discourse. In promotional activities, it emphasizes that these innovations offered by Meta Company aim to serve people to express themselves better and establish connections. According to this discourse, with the Meta Avatars Store, individuals can access in the Metaverse the hard-to-buy goods in everyday life. In this context, it has emphasized that digital goods that individuals will buy for their avatars can be tools that allow them to reflect themselves better and be "unique." This study on the Metaverse aims to form a basis for further studies in revealing the place of

avatars in the future of the Metaverse and the role that luxury brands can play in online self-presentation. In the future, it seems meaningful to expand this study with a study examining the opinions of users who have experienced the services offered in the Metaverse.

#### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı**

Makale yazarları herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

#### **Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyan Özeti**

Yazarlar makaleye %50 (1.Yazar) ve %50 (2.Yazar) oranında katkı sağlamış olduklarını beyan ederler.

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