



Stylistic systematisation of characters as a tool for visual narrative identity formation in fashion communication

Anna Seleznova*

PhD in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor
Khmelnitsky National University
290016, 11 Instytutska Str., Khmelnytsky, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8238-5340>

Tetiana Nadopta

PhD in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor
Khmelnitskyi National University
290016, 11 Instytutska Str., Khmelnytsky, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9338-7827>

Oksana Mykhailovska

PhD in Technical Sciences, Associate Professor
Khmelnitsky National University
290016, 11 Instytutska Str., Khmelnytsky, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5025-6571>

Abstract. The character increasingly functions not as a secondary identity element but as an autonomous aesthetic system shaping stylistic codes and compositional logic. However, research lacks an integrated model that explains its impact on fashion design processes. The purpose of this study was to develop a multi-level stylistic systematisation of characters and to define their influence on compositional modelling in digital contexts. The methodological basis consisted of a combination of systemic structural analysis, semiotic approach, comparative typology, elements of morphological analysis of form, and modelling of conceptual structures. A theoretical model was proposed in which the character was interpreted as a multi-layered structure ensuring visual integrity. The model included three interrelated levels. The technological level defined morphology and modes of embodiment, from static graphics to interactive digital formats. The semiotic level identified archetypal foundations and cultural prototypes, including both historical figures and digital avatars. The functional level determined the character's communicative role as a symbolic representative, expert mediator, or stylistic dominant within brand strategy. The study substantiated the transformation of the character from a passive sign into an autonomous aesthetic mediator between digital environments and physical fashion design. It demonstrated that spatial and temporal characters generate new approaches to composition, silhouette, and form dynamics, influencing contemporary fashion trends. The findings can be applied in fashion design practice, brand strategy development, digital collection creation, and design education

Keywords: multilevel analytical model; brand semiotics; digital embodiment; symbol morphology; archetypal structures; hybrid visual environment; brand communication strategies

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of contemporary culture has radically shifted the interaction mechanisms between fashion brands and consumers. At the centre of this communication is the virtual character, conveying brand

values through complex visual codes. Consequently, character design has evolved from mere entertainment into an intellectual tool for strategic branding. Systematisation of these design methods is essential to ensure brand identity within a phygital reality where the

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*Corresponding author



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boundary between physical objects and digital projections is increasingly blurred. In this context, G. Bonales-Daimiel & B. Moreno-Albarracín (2025) analysed avatars as carriers of digital identity in metaverse environments, emphasising their role in shaping new models of online self-presentation. C. Ríos-Llamas (2022) developed this idea, interpreting avatars as autonomous personal brands capable of functioning as independent communicative subjects in digital space. Y. Choi & C. Lee (2025) made a significant contribution to the investigation of cognitive responses to virtual images by analysing the phenomenon of avatar multiple personalities. However, their study did not consider how stylistic systematisation can unite fragmented visual images into a coherent brand strategy. Similarly, the study by A. Naz *et al.* (2025) substantiated the influence of avatars on self-perception through the mechanisms of social presence, but the graphic means of forming a visual narrative were left out of consideration. In turn, the research by V.V. Habayluk (2025) revealed the semiotic potential of style as a means of visual communication, but the proposed approach did not contain applied models for character classification that could be used in digital design and branding practices. Thus, existing studies demonstrated considerable interest in avatars as a tool for digital identity and communication, but leave insufficiently explored issues of systematic stylistic classification of virtual characters and their integration into long-term personal or corporate branding strategies.

Ukrainian discourse, notably T. Fisenko (2022), traditionally views the character as a mascot – a static graphic tool for image formation. This approach limits the character to a representative function. In contrast, contemporary fashion design requires a shift toward modelling a digital media agent. This necessitates a multi-level matrix integrating technological parameters with dynamic narrative roles. A.V. Seleznova (2024) detailed the process of developing concept art for a typical character using computer graphics, highlighting the key technological stages of its visual embodiment. The study by A. Kemp *et al.* (2023) focused on the phenomenon of narrativity in contemporary design and revealed branding strategies through storytelling, where the character acts as a key mediator in the communication process between the brand and the consumer. Despite the significance of the researcher's substantiated storytelling concept, the development of a specific visual matrix that would enable the differentiation of a character's stylistics in accordance with the semantic content of the brand narrative remains outside the scope of scholarly attention. An analysis of research in the field of digital fashion demonstrated a thorough exploration of the morphological and technical accuracy of the virtual body. Furthermore, the sociocultural dimension of design was examined by O. Kolisnyk *et al.* (2021), who interpreted it as a phenomenon of social interaction in which visual objects function as mediators between a person and a brand.

Studies have demonstrated a growing interest in integrating the concept of tactility. In particular, N. Skliarenko & O. Romaniuk (2023) focused on the role of sensory characteristics in digital design, while V. Boiko & N. Skliarenko (2024) analysed methods of emotional visualisation, rethinking the character as an object saturated with sensory properties and capable of evoking deep empathy. J. Arsenyan & A. Mirowska (2022) proved the effectiveness of using virtual agents in digital communications. However, their role in the fashion industry still needs to be systematised. This necessitates rethinking the character as an integrated structure that combines emotional expressiveness and technological dynamics within a single visual narrative.

These studies did not provide specific algorithms for classifying characters according to the level of their communicative influence. This revealed a methodological gap between the engineering precision of an object and its semiotic content, highlighting the need for a systematic classification that integrates technical accuracy with the characteristics of a character as an intellectual interface capable of managing interaction within the brand-consumer system. In summary, a significant gap exists regarding interdisciplinary character systematisation. Existing studies were narrowly focused, and a unified stylistic framework linking visual language to marketing strategies was absent. The lack of a clear algorithm for selecting stylistic approaches created obstacles for effective design practice. The purpose of this study was to provide a theoretical substantiation and to develop a multi-level stylistic systematisation of characters as a fundamental tool for shaping visual narrative identity within the contemporary fashion communication system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on contemporary trends in fashion visual communications, digital character modelling, and the semiotic structures of fashion narratives. An interdisciplinary approach was employed, combining systemic and structural analysis, semiotics, and conceptual modelling to examine the character as a pivotal tool for visual identity. The research followed the stages of the developed four-level systematisation. At the initial stage, systemic and structural analysis was used to establish the first level, classifying characters by their technological embodiment (2D, 3D, or generative graphics). This provided a framework for understanding their digital nature. In the second stage, a semiotic approach substantiated the second level, focusing on the signs of the artistic image. Characters were analysed as systems of visual codes: lines, colours, and textures, that transmit brand identity through graphic symbolism. The third stage involved examining characters as communication mediators, which allowed for the identification of their specific roles in visual storytelling. Through morphological analysis and modelling of conceptual structures, a fourth level was

developed, which synthesised character types according to a complex of external, social, psychological and behavioural criteria. The use of the comparative typology method allowed combining these stages into a holistic multi-level matrix, which provided a logical transition from the technical parameters of the image embodiment to its complex narrative role. At the final stage, an analysis was conducted regarding the dynamic characteristics of the digital character, whose identity and behavioural model were programmed within the brand's marketing logic. This allowed for the verification of the character's status as an active media agent, ensuring a long-term strategic brand presence in the digital environment.

To verify the proposed systematisation and confirm its universality, a sample of 22 representative characters from the fashion industry created between 2016 and 2025 was analysed. The study included digital images demonstrating various types of artistic forms: from static CGI-models (Computer-Generated Imagery) to complex space-time game avatars that systematically function in the fashion segment and are involved in collaboration with brands. A fundamental methodological decision was to focus specifically on digital characters in the fashion industry, as their presence within the communication environment was algorithmically regulated, visually constructed, and fully controlled by developers and brands. The model involved an analysis of each character across three interconnected dimensions: the level of visual realism, communicative function, and the degree of brand integration. Each parameter was coded on a three-level scale (1-3), enabling quantitative interpretation and subsequent statistical analysis.

Visual realism (dimension 1) was evaluated based on the following criteria: 1 – stylised image (the character possesses conventional, simplified, or animated plastic; anatomical proportions may be distorted; there is no photorealistic texturing of the skin and materials; the visual language tends towards illustrative or multimedia aesthetics); 2 – semi-realistic (the image combines a realistic anatomical basis with noticeable stylisation elements; proportions are close to physiological ones, but aesthetic convention is preserved); 3 – hyper-realistic (maximum imitation of physical corporeality; reproduction of micro-details, light-and-shadow models, and materiality, closeness to photographic or cinematic realism). Communicative function (dimension 2) was evaluated based on the following indicators: 1 – narrative function (the character acts as a carrier of story and symbolic identity; content is focused on plot, emotional interaction with the audience, and the development of a symbolic field, rather than direct product promotion); 2 – hybrid function (a combination of narrative and commercial elements; advertising integrations are embedded into the character's overall image and their own storylines); 3 – commercial function (includes content structured around the promotion of brands and products; featuring advertising campaigns,

collaborations, and product demonstrations). Brand integration (dimension 3) was assessed according to the following indicators: 1 – episodic cooperation (one-off campaigns); 2 – strategic (regular partnerships, recurring collaborations); 3 – ecosystemic (the character functions as a long-term digital asset of the brand and is integrated into its communication infrastructure). Data coding was carried out based on the analysis of the duration of cooperation, the repetition of campaigns, and the degree of character inclusion within the brand ecosystem. The purpose of the testing was to identify structural patterns in the distribution of cases within the model and to test the hypothesis regarding the interplay between the level of visual realism and the degree of character institutionalisation in brand communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the contemporary system of fashion communication, the character is a key tool for shaping visual narrative identity. According to an interdisciplinary approach, a character is defined as an artistic image or protagonist integrated into the structure of a myth, literary text, visual art, or media environment. Drawing on R. Barthes' (1983) classical concept, the character becomes a key element of the fashion system, where visual images function as semiotic structures transforming material objects into symbolic forms. According to L. Manovich (2001), the digital nature of such objects determines a new logic of existence through programmability and variability, allowing characters to adapt across diverse media contexts. In the fashion industry, this image becomes the foundation for building a dialogue between the brand and its audience. This study proposed a classification of characters according to the method of embodying the artistic image, adapted for the analysis of visual strategies in fashion. The classification is based on three types of artistic image existence, each of which plays a specific role in conveying stylistic identity: plastic (spatial) characters in fashion represent images fixed in a static dimension of form and function as visual and material carriers of artistic concepts, realised in pictorial and graphic practices (fashion illustration, collection sketches, advertising posters) and sculptural forms (mannequins, boutique installations, art objects), where the physicality of the character emphasises the architecture of the costume and the spatial organisation of the clothing (Fig. 1).

Temporal (verbal) characters in fashion are images constructed in the mind of the recipient through textual narratives and semiotic strategies of description. They are implemented in the form of literary and mythological characters (brand storytelling heroes, lookbook characters with detailed biographies) and folklore archetypes used to provide the collections with symbolic depth, cultural continuity, and semantic complexity. Spatial and temporal characters form the most complex and synthetic group, combining visual corporeality with temporal unfolding and narrative

extension. These include real media personalities (models and actors in advertising campaigns and fashion films), and synthetic images (animated characters, game design heroes, brand collaborations with video games, and digital avatars in metaverses), in which visual identity is formed through a sequential change of frames or software simulation of movement.

This segment has seen a shift in influence: previously, digital characters copied real-world fashion, but this has changed so that virtual reality now dictates trends in the physical world. The exaggerated

plasticity and distinctive digital luminosity of game characters are becoming the primary source for creating real-world collections, changing conventional design thinking. The convergence between anthropomorphic images and game avatars (for example, in Balenciaga's projects for Fortnite) demonstrated how a character becomes a digital ambassador (Fig. 2). The visual form (lines, attributes) becomes a direct carrier of style, allowing the brand's ideology to be instantly read in a hybrid environment.

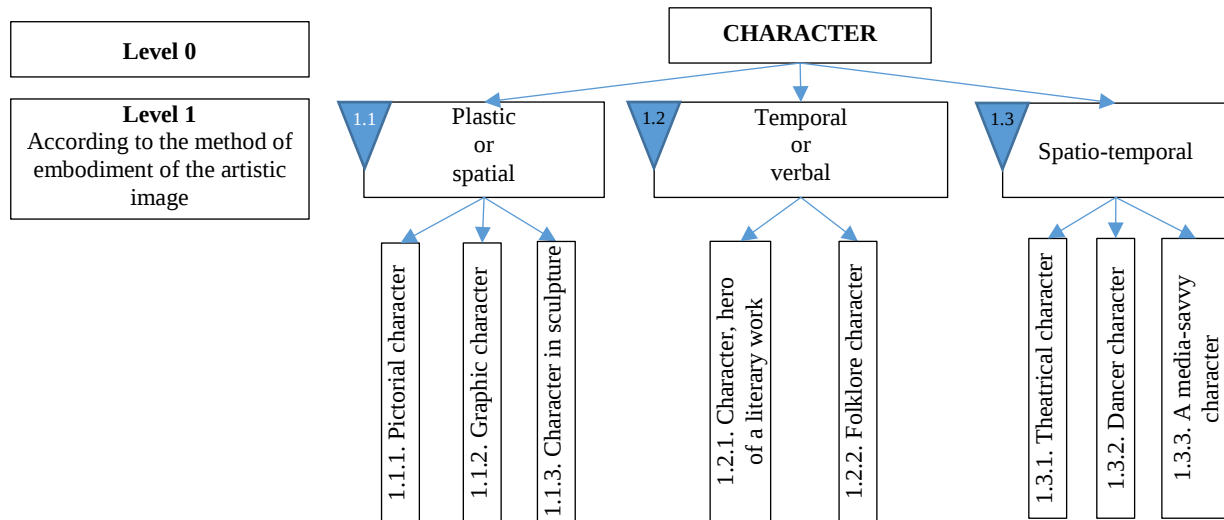


Figure 1. Systematisation of classification features of a character by the method of embodying the artistic image
Source: compiled by the authors

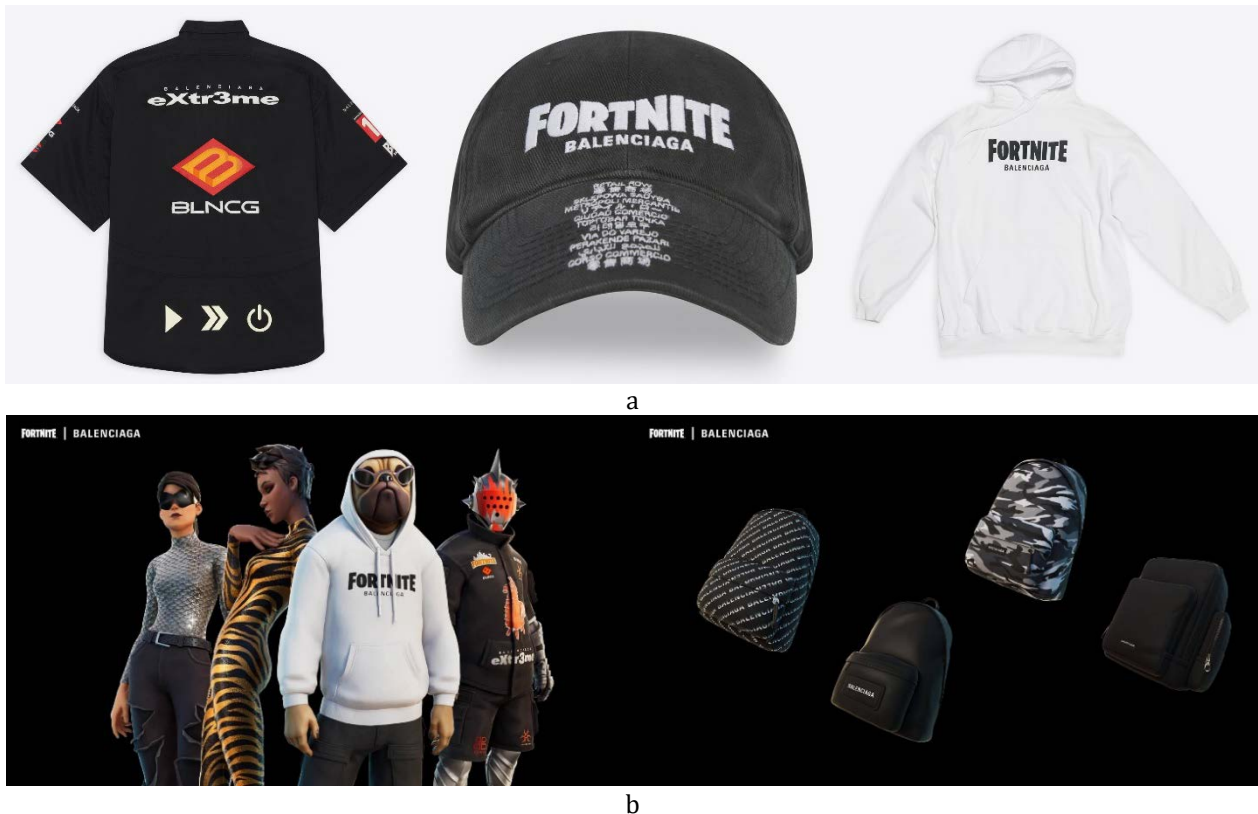


Figure 2. Balenciaga's collaboration with Fortnite and Epic Games

Note: a – physical collections; b – virtual collections in a digital gaming environment

Source: S. Yotka (2021)

Of particular importance for research is the illustrative character that emerges at the intersection of the plastic and temporal arts. This type of image is a unique hybrid: it accumulates the descriptive, semantic qualities of literature and the strict visual specificity of graphics. In the context of fashion communication, this allows the abstract idea of a brand to be transformed into a tangible visual narrative. In fashion communication, graphic characters become tools for stylistic systematisation: they allow brands to abstract themselves from specific human faces (models), creating a unique, easily recognisable visual code. Such systematisation allows disparate visual elements to be transformed into a unified narrative identity, where the character's drawing style, proportions, and colour palette convey the brand's values more effectively than traditional photography. Unlike characters made of material (decorative plastic), graphic and illustrative images have greater mobility in the digital space of fashion communication, which makes them a priority for analysis in this paper.

Spatial and temporal characters (cinema, animation, game design) are also of scientific interest within this study, as their share in the fashion industry is rapidly growing due to the development of metaverses and

virtual fitting technologies. The visual image of such characters is becoming the main object of style modelling, where compositional techniques are directly borrowed from traditional clothing design and transferred to the digital plane. The interconnection between graphic characters and dynamic models in game design allows taking a fresh look at the categories of movement and physicality. Analysis of compositional solutions in the clothing of digital heroes revealed a new pattern: not only does real fashion dictate images for virtual worlds, but the aesthetics of game design (virtual corporeality) are also becoming a powerful tool for shaping visual narrative identity and dictating real trends in the physical world. This convergence of physical and virtual aesthetics finds its practical implementation in the creation of complex brand environments, a prime example of which is the Gucci Town virtual space on the Roblox platform (Fig. 3). Functioning as a multi-layered ecosystem, this project integrates a gaming zone, an art hub, the Vault Plaza exhibition space, and a Gucci digital store. Such a multidimensional structure serves as a comprehensive model for interaction with users, where the stylistic systematisation of digital assets effectively combines entertainment, cultural representation, and digital commerce.



Figure 3. Gucci Town on Roblox as a model of communicative and commercial interaction

Source: Welcome to Gucci Town (n.d.)

Figure 4 demonstrated the adaptation of Louis Vuitton visual identity within the digital environment of League of Legends. The comparison of the physical clothing model and the virtual character design illustrated how fashion aesthetics are translated into game character styling through expressive silhouettes, decorative elements, and symbolic motifs, highlighting the growing interaction between luxury fashion and digital gaming culture.

A striking example of character transformation in the context of digital culture was the first Metaverse Fashion Week in the virtual space of Decentraland, where the user's avatar acts as a full-fledged fashion subject and style icon. The event featured digital collections from brands such as Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Balenciaga, Burberry, Ralph Lauren, etc., and

purely digital fashion houses such as The Fabricant. In this context, the avatar character functions as a spatio-temporal image: it not only demonstrates clothing during virtual shows, but also participates in communicative practices (concerts, lectures, parties), purchases digital items, and thus becomes an interactive carrier of brand identity. Thus, a digital character in the metaverse is not a secondary representation of a person, but an autonomous mediator of the fashion experience, where visual form, animation, and the possibility of personalisation form a new type of aesthetic and social presence.

At the second level of classification (Fig. 5), the character's artistic image is revealed through a system of visual signs and archetypes that serve as a foundation for conveying brand identity. The proposed

typology (sections 2.1-2.9), based on sign nature, enables the identification of mechanisms for adapting character semantics to the fashion communication field by strategically utilising its cultural genesis. Specifically, the historical character is treated as a specific individual whose visual recognition becomes a

tool for legitimising brand heritage or a means of retrospective style modelling. This approach aligns with the findings of B. Castillo-Abdul *et al.* (2022), who demonstrated that utilising recognisable branded content on Instagram increases audience engagement precisely by appealing to familiar cultural codes.

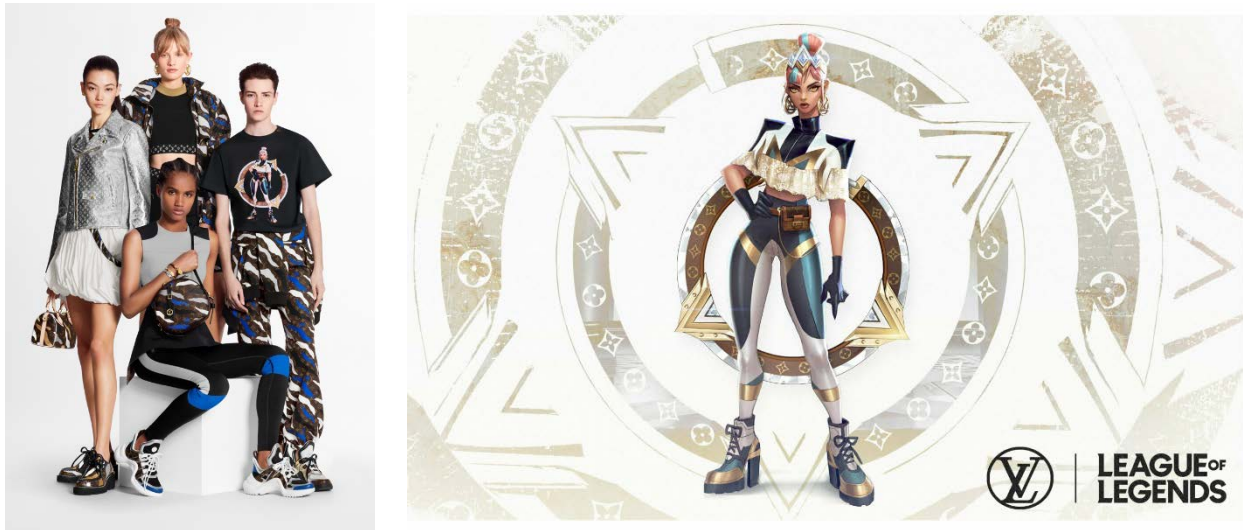


Figure 4. Integrating Louis Vuitton's visual identity into the League of Legends esports space
Source: B. Nash (2019)

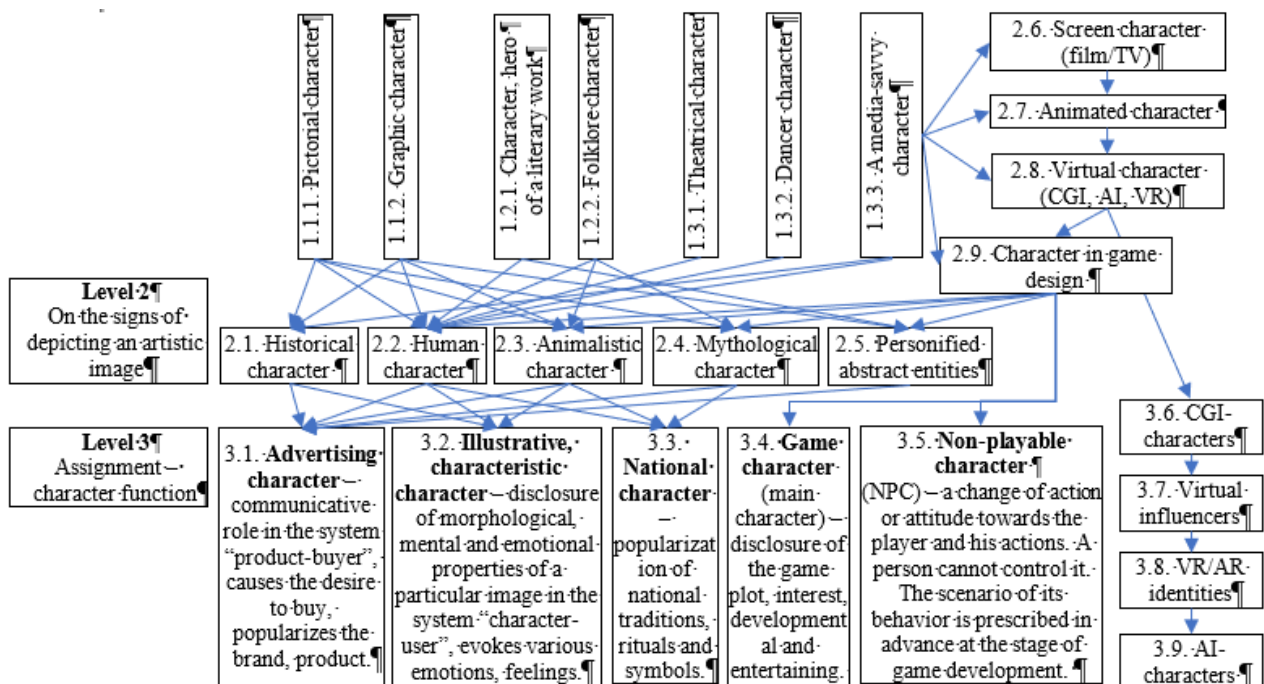


Figure 5. Systematisation of classification features according to the signs of the depiction of an artistic image and the function of the character

Source: compiled by the authors

The human character (anthropomorphic image) acts as a universal carrier of corporeality and style, through which social and aesthetic ideals are transmitted. In the context of the digital transformation of luxury fashion, as noted by A. Joy *et al.* (2022), such images become the foundation for metaverses and NFT collections, where anthropomorphic avatars function

as the primary mediators of the consumer experience. The animalistic character is based on zoomorphic motifs, where animal figures act as metaphors for specific qualities: grace, strength, or exoticism. They acquire the status of iconic elements within the visual code, serving as symbolic identity carriers for fashion houses. According to Ye. Gula *et al.* (2023), such iconic

images in the information space of graphic design ensure instantaneous brand recognition by the audience.

Mythological characters and personified abstractions, encompassing both ancient symbolic systems and fictional entities such as the concept of a digital soul, elevate the fashion product to the level of an extended narrative. These images imbue the product with symbolic transcendence, transforming it into a sacral artefact that exists beyond its material form. This creates a space for user social identification, as corroborated by C.I. Teng *et al.* (2023): avatar-mediated communication through complex entities allows consumers to integrate more deeply into the brand's ideological community. The virtual character (CGI, AI) represents the most technologically advanced group, where the artistic image functions as an algorithmically controlled (AI) identity. As noted by O. Lahoda *et al.* (2024), the use of virtual reality and digital imagery radically transforms both the creative process and audience perception, making interaction with the character immersive and tactually rich.

It is important to emphasise that in the context of visual narrative identity, these types of characters function in two ways. In the literary or descriptive component of the brand (storytelling), they exist as mental images that arise in the process of narration. However, in visual communication (graphics, fashion films, illustrations), they are transformed into illustrative symbols. It is this symbolism that allows the character to be instantly recognised by the audience: the visual form (lines, colours, attributes) becomes a direct carrier of the stylistic concept. Thus, the choice of character type at the second level of classification directly determines the nature of the visual language through which the brand constructs its narrative and engages with contemporary trends. In the digital environment, group of spatio-temporal characters requires additional detailing at the second level of classification. Within this logic, the category "Film and television characters" is distinguished, which, in the context of contemporary media convergence, covers a number of specific types of artistic images that function at the intersection of fashion, screen culture, and digital technologies. An animated character is defined as a product of computer modelling (3D animation) characterised by a high degree of visual detail and technical sophistication. This type allows brands to demonstrate the complex texture of fabrics, light and shadow effects, and the dynamics of a costume in virtual space, expanding the boundaries of traditional collection presentations. In game design, a character is interpreted as the most interactive form of artistic representation, in which the character becomes a full-fledged digital ambassador of style: their visual identity directly correlates with game mechanics, the achievement system, and symbolic prestige within virtual worlds, forming a stable model of brand value

representation in the digital environment. Digital (synthetic) characters occupy a separate analytical niche, appearing as the most complex hybrid form in the hierarchy of contemporary design. Unlike purely gaming or animated images, this type of character is based on the principles of autonomous existence and photorealistic imitation of life. In contemporary design, it is differentiated into several key varieties:

1. CGI-characters: high-tech digital models that are integrated into a real video environment or exist in completely generated worlds, demonstrating the boundary between physical and computational reality.

2. Virtual influencers: digital personalities with their own biographies and social activity on the network, functioning as independent media entities and direct marketing tools.

3. VR/AR identities: characters that exist in augmented or virtual reality, providing an immersive experience of user interaction with the brand through the effect of presence.

4. AI characters: dynamic images, whose behaviour and visual reactions are generated by neural networks in real time, allowing for the creation of a personalised communicative experience.

This expansion of classification allows viewing characters not simply as objects on screen, but as dynamic tools for stylistic systematisation. The inclusion of animated, game, and digital images in the general system of visual signs emphasises that contemporary fashion communication is no longer limited to the physical body. On the contrary, it actively uses synthetic forms to scale its narrative, turning the character into a key link between artistic intent and digital consumption. The third level of classification is related to defining the functional purpose of the character and answers the question of its role in shaping the aesthetic and cultural position of the brand. In the fashion communication system, where visual image is of paramount importance, the character acts as a mediator between the brand's underlying narrative and the consumer, translating conceptual ideas into an accessible and emotionally perceptible form. In this context, advertising characters (Fig. 6) take on particular significance, as they are seen as tools for creating a lasting emotional impression.

In the fashion industry, it represents an original, stylistically refined image – whether a person, an animalistic figure, or an anthropomorphic entity – that is associated with the company's visual code and is fixed in the collective perception of the audience. In the context of digitalisation, such a character can exist in both static form (e.g., an illustration in a glossy magazine) and dynamic form (an animated digital avatar on social networks and in virtual spaces). Its key function is to create a positive brand image, strengthen the audience's emotional attachment, and expand the circle of loyal consumers through visual storytelling and the repetition of iconic characteristics (Fig. 7).

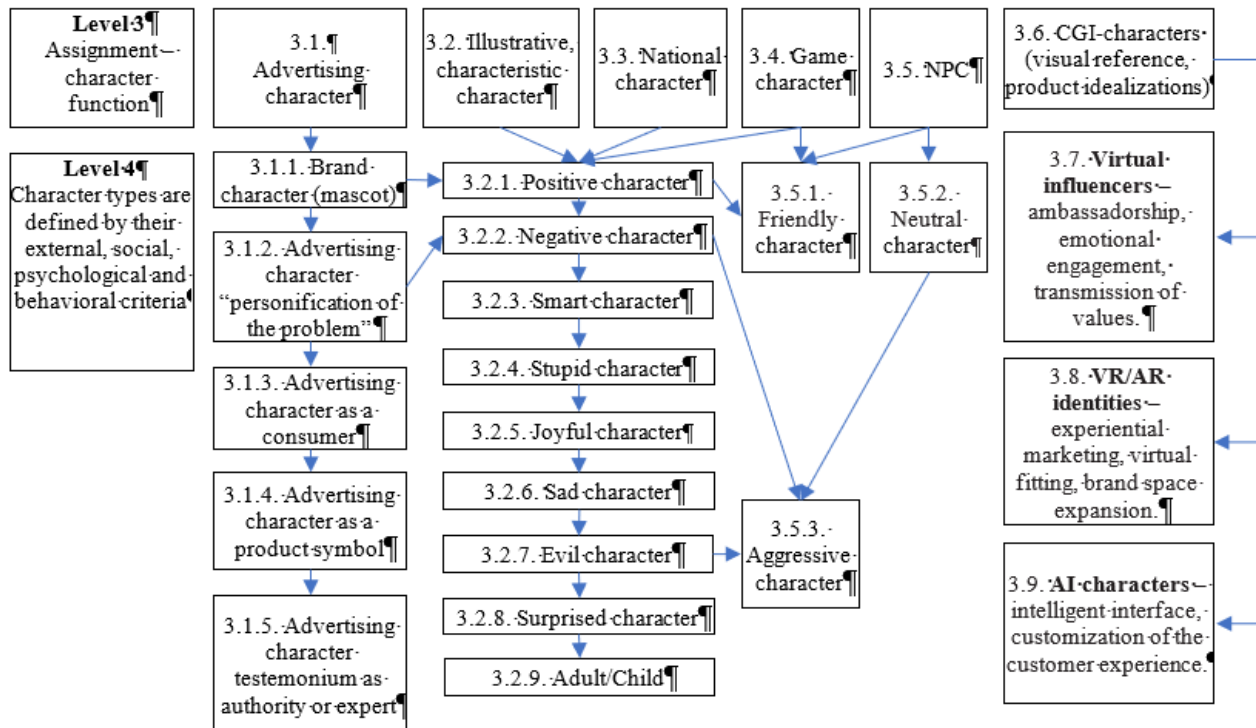


Figure 6. Typology of characters considering external, social, psychological and behavioural criteria
Source: compiled by the authors



Figure 7. Use of Virtual Face technology in the Prada Candy advertising campaign
Source: S. Salibian (2021)

Within this group, several functional types of brand characters are distinguished, each serving a unique role in fashion communication and brand identity. A brand character (mascot) is considered a visual constant within brand communication – a fictional figure that represents the brand's identity, embodies its core values, and functions as a generalised symbol of its visual representation. It performs a dual function: informative (conveying style codes) and emotional-spectacular (creating an attractive image that consumers desire to be a part of). An exemplary case is Polo Bear, the Ralph Lauren brand's mascot, which

consistently appears in clothing collections and advertising campaigns, becoming one of the brand's most recognisable symbols (Fig. 8a). Similarly, the character Vivienne (Louis Vuitton) symbolises a sophisticated synthesis of the brand's historical heritage and the spirit of modern travel, transforming traditional monogram elements into a dynamic narrative tool (Fig. 8b). In the broader context of visual communication, the Morton Salt Girl serves as a long-standing symbol of reliability and resilience in difficult situations, demonstrating how a mascot can anchor brand trust over decades (Fig. 8c). At the same time, the

Comme des Garçons Play Heart represents a shift toward minimalist, avant-garde character design, where a simple graphic icon becomes a powerful global identifier of subcultural belonging (Fig. 8d). Thus, the

mascot functions as a representative element of the brand's narrative identity, motivating emotional involvement and ensuring long-term loyalty through various stylistic forms.

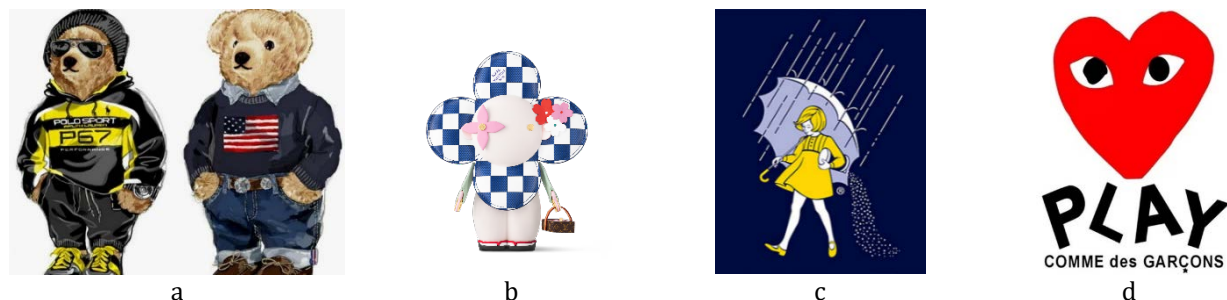


Figure 8. Classic brand characters as symbols of product qualities

Note: a – Polo Bear; b – Vivienne; c – Morton Salt Girl; d – Comme des Garçons Play Heart

Source: T. Fisenko (2022), Ralph Lauren (2024), Comme des Garçons (2025), Louis Vuitton (n.d.)

In contrast, a character that embodies a problem represents a different functional type within the system of brand visual communication. Unlike positive mascots, this type may feature negative traits, embodying aesthetic imperfection, discomfort, or a lack of style – problems that the brand claims to solve. In fashion narratives, such characters are constructed based on vivid associative imagery, illustrating a transformation from an inappropriate or outdated state to a stylish appearance and highlighting the brand's role in solving the problem. Another type is the consumer character, which serves as a typical representative of the audience. This character inspires trust due to its similarity to a real buyer, making it an effective tool for democratising fashion, particularly in the middle and mass segments. Through such a character, the brand conveys a clear consumption logic, creating an engaging and convincing message without relying on expensive celebrities. The focus here shifts from technical features to lifestyle and product design.

The character as a product symbol is a highly concentrated image that personifies specific product qualities, such as fabric softness, durability, or futuristic design. This type of character represents the visual essence of a brand, translating the physical properties of the product into artistic symbols, enhancing its visual identity and appeal. An expert character (Testimonium) leverages the authority of a well-known personality to legitimise the brand's aesthetic values. In fashion communication, an expert can be a real person (such as an influencer, designer, or actor) or a digital or animated character with high social capital. By integrating professional or media opinion, this character boosts consumer confidence in the product's quality and reinforces the brand's position as an expert in the field of style, making it an effective form of user marketing where the character acts as a guarantor of the consumer's choice.

An illustrative, characteristic character is defined by a pronounced personality, with the most significant manifestation of stylistic systematisation. This character's age, social activity, and emotional state are

conveyed through clothing and accessories. The composition of clothing – such as silhouette, form development features, and colour and texture characteristics – acts as a style marker. This characteristic can be interpreted by the fashion industry as a basis for trends and collections, making it a valuable object for design analysis. Ultimately, a game character is a digital figure in a computer game controlled by a human player, while NPC is controlled by the game's artificial intelligence. The appearance of a game character functions as a digital representation of the user and serves as a tool of self-presentation within the stylistic system of the brand. NPC, on the other hand, forms the game's contextual environment. Their visual design – whether friendly, neutral, or aggressive – dictates the stylistic atmosphere and compositional dynamics of the virtual space, shaping the player's experience within the game. Thus, brand characters in various forms – whether mascots, personifications of problems, or game figures – play distinct and crucial roles in shaping brand identity, consumer engagement, and the overall narrative of fashion and digital spaces.

The evolution of expert characters in the form of CGI influencers deserves special attention. Unlike real media personalities, such images are characterised by complete stylistic control, which gives the brand the opportunity to minimise reputational risks and ensure continuous support and control of visual identity in the digital environment. The functional role of such a character is to create a controlled narrative where every gesture, piece of clothing, and surrounding digital space works to strengthen the brand's overall image. This leads to the emergence of a new type of communication design, where the character becomes a digital twin of the brand's philosophy. The introduction of such interactive models into the communication field allows brands not only to convey aesthetic values, but also to collect data on audience preferences through game mechanics of interaction with the avatar, turning character design into a powerful tool for marketing analytics and trend forecasting. Thus, contemporary

CGI influencers have become autonomous subjects of fashion communication. Analysis of the activities of characters such as Noonnoouri, and Shudu allows

tracing the mechanisms of integrating virtual corporeality into real brand strategies (Fig. 9).

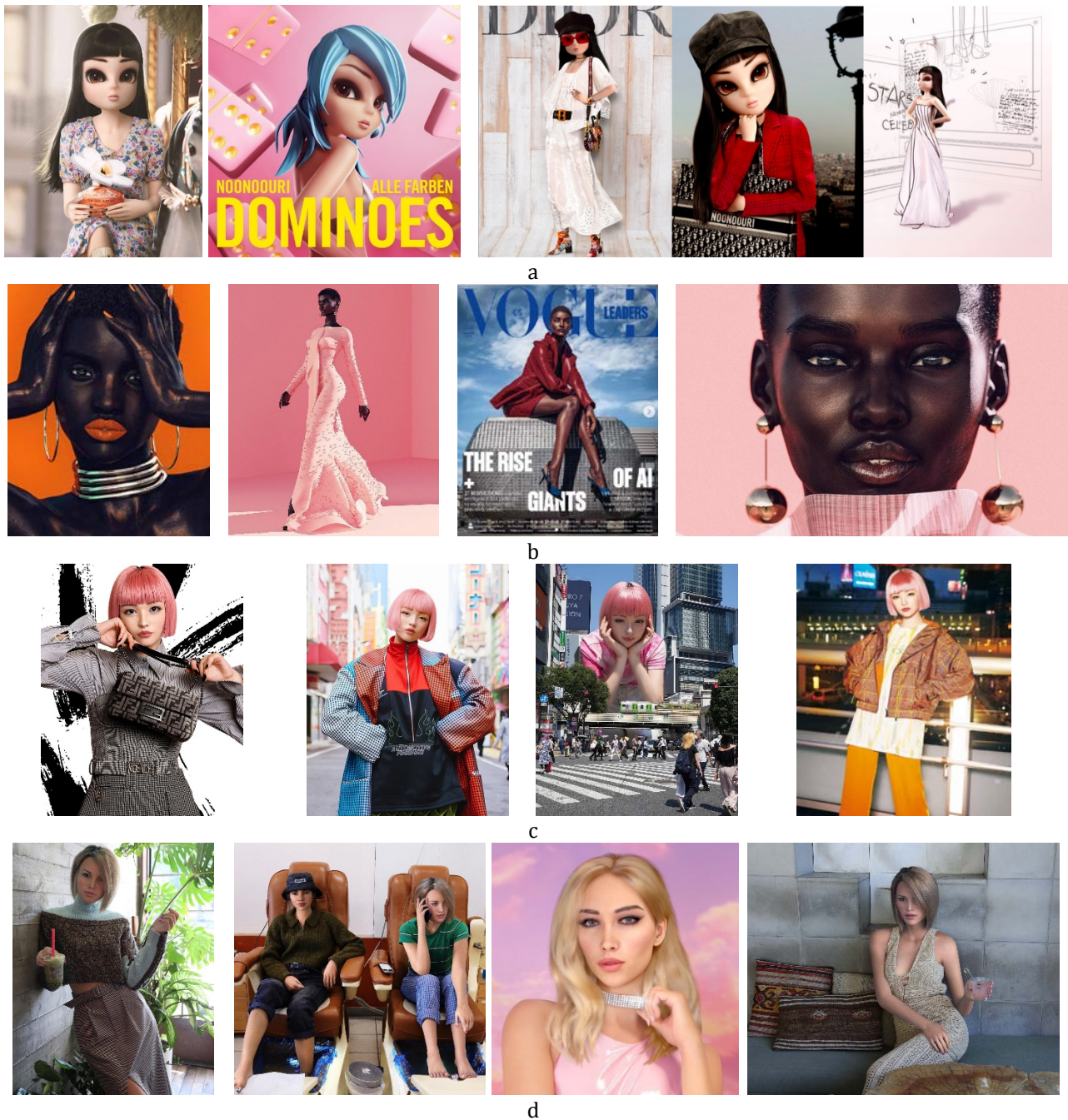


Figure 9. Virtual influencers as representatives of aesthetic strategies in digital fashion

Note: a – Noonnoouri; b – Shudu; c – Imma; d – Bermuda

Source: compiled by the author based on the analysis of official Instagram profiles (as of 2026 March 2) Noonnoouri (n.d.), Shudu.gram (n.d.), Imma.gram (n.d.), Bermudaisbae (n.d.) and official data from creative agencies Aww Inc (n.d.), and The Diigitals (n.d.)

A prime example of how such a character functions Bermuda (created by Brud studio), whose visual identity in collaboration with Chanel emphasises glossy luxury and a social media lifestyle (Fig. 9d). Another visualisation strategy is demonstrated by Noonnoouri – a stylised animated character with an emphasised fairy-tale-glamorous aesthetic (Fig. 9a). Her successful

collaboration with Dior, Versace, and Valentino illustrates the role of the character as a stylistic filter. Unlike realistic models, Noonnoouri transmits the values of brands through grotesque digital plasticity, which enhances the effect of “sacralisation” of fashion. Meanwhile, the case of Shudu (Fig. 9b), the world’s first virtual supermodel, created by photographer C.J.

Wilson, marks the intersection of the technological excellence of 3D-modelling and the current demand for cultural representation of African appearance in Balmain and Fenty Beauty projects. This line is continued by Imma (CGI-model from Aww Inc.), whose image combines streetwear and digital minimalism in collaboration with IKEA and Puma, symbolising contemporary urbanism (Fig. 9c). Combining these examples into a single system allows for the argument that digital characters in contemporary fashion act as intellectual mediators. Another prime example is Lilmiquela (n.d.). As a digital model and music artist, she demonstrates the potential for absolute stylistic consistency in collaborations with giants such as Prada and Calvin Klein. Her image, which balances on the edge of hyperrealism, allows brands to maintain strategic control over communication, eliminating the reputational risks associated with living media personalities. Continuity of the brand narrative is ensured within a hybrid environment where the boundary between the physical object and its digital projection is becoming increasingly transparent. This confirms the thesis that character design is not only an

artistic but also a strategic marketing tool for forecasting and shaping trends.

The generalisation of the obtained data allows for the statement that contemporary character design has transformed from a purely aesthetic solution into a strategic marketing tool. The dynamics of indicators presented in Figure 10 illustrated the transition from the decorative use of virtual models to their functioning as intellectual brand mediators. A detailed analysis of the sample distribution across three dimensions reveals key patterns in the development of digital brand platforms. The average score for "Integration" across the sample is 2.4, confirming the dominance of a systemic approach. The "Function" dimension demonstrated the highest stability, with 70% of the studied cases (e.g., Lil Miquela, Rozy, Noonnoori, Lu do Magalu) receiving the maximum score of 3, indicating a priority for communicative efficiency over visual form. Conversely, the "Realism" scale proved to be the most variable, with indicators ranging from 1 point (stylised characters like Janky, Bermuda_2, and early-stage Blawko) to 3 points (hyper-realistic models such as Rozy and Margot), reflecting the coexistence of diverse graphic strategies depending on the brand's archetype.

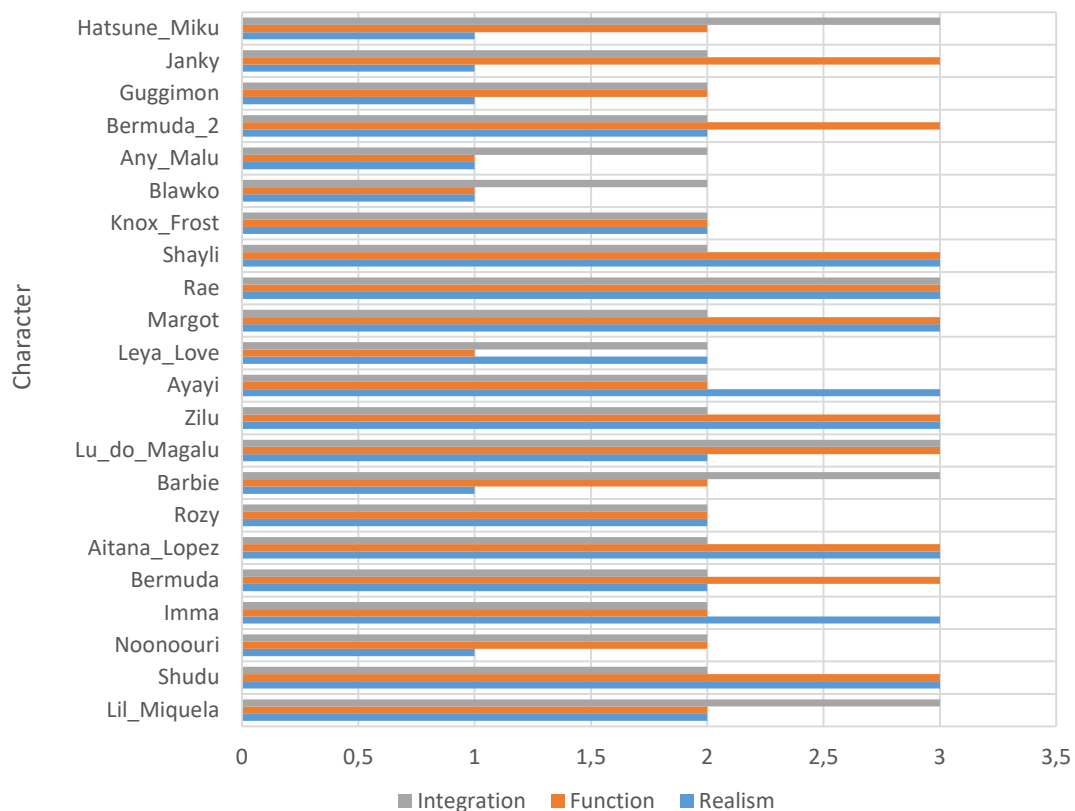


Figure 10. Comparative analysis of digital characters based on visual realism, communicative function, and brand integration parameters (n=22)

Source: authors' development

The distribution analysis demonstrated the dominance of the strategic integration level (12 samples; in particular, Lil Miquela, Shudu, Imma, Noonnoori), indicating a transformation of digital

characters from one-off advertising tools into stable communication partners for brands. The ecosystemic level (7 samples; in particular, Lu do Magalu, Zepeto characters, Knox Frost) is characterised by the

profound integration of the character into the brand structure and their functioning as a digital asset. Episodic integration (3 samples; in particular, Bermuda and Blawko during the early stages of their brand collaborations) demonstrates the gradual replacement of one-time collaborations with systemic strategies. The evolution of CGI-influencers demonstrated the development of a new type of actor in the fashion industry – a stylistically managed digital agent, which provides brands with control over the communication narrative, predictability of reputational risks, and a long-term strategic presence in the digital environment. Hyperrealistic models are more likely to be carriers of stable commercial cooperation and are integrated into long-term brand strategies. Stylised characters function as a stylistic filter, enhancing the symbolic and conceptual dimension of the brand. In both cases, the digital avatar ceases to be just a visual image and becomes a tool for strategic brand building.

The findings confirmed that the artistic image of a character in the fashion industry has evolved from a secondary decorative element into a central strategic agent of the brand ecosystem. This shift in design thinking marks a transition from purely formal stylistic decisions to the creation of complex phygital platforms where the character ensures narrative continuity and economic integration. The proposed systematisation of character classification features allows for the organisation of contemporary scientific discourse, moving it from isolated observations toward a comprehensive system of projective modelling. However, the practical realisation of such complex strategic agents requires a high degree of technological precision and morphological accuracy.

In this context, the current research correlates with the foundational study by A. Slavinska *et al.* (2018), who established a mathematical framework for the interactive transformation of 3D mannequin surfaces into 2D garment sweeps. While A. Slavinska *et al.* focused on the engineering precision of clothing construction, authors' classification expanded this concept by adding a semiotic dimension to the described mesh and surface models. The ability to adapt 3D models to diverse body types (both typical and atypical) serves as a rigorous engineering basis for the high-quality, detailed reproduction of the anthropomorphic category of characters. The reliability of visualisation achieved by A. Slavinska *et al.* through database verification and silhouette transformation scenarios is a primary factor in establishing a character's visual realism. Consequently, the authors' concept of character systematisation bridges the gap between abstract graphic design and functional clothing engineering, enabling the character to function as a realistic mediator of brand values.

The thesis of the character as an active media agent was supported in the study by O. Kolisnyk *et al.* (2021), where design was viewed as a tool for organising social interaction. The current classification expands this approach by defining the character as the brand's

intelligent interface, ensuring narrative continuity within the brand-consumer system. The authors' findings confirmed contemporary scientific theses regarding the acquisition of parasocial subjectivity by digital objects. By separating virtual influencers into an independent group, a significant methodological gap in contemporary science has been filled. The character is no longer a passive advertising sign but a dynamic subject of communication. This perspective is further supported by O. Kolisnyk *et al.* (2021), who interpreted contemporary graphic design as a phenomenon of social interaction. This idea was emphasised by stating that the fashion character acts as an intellectual interface, organising the brand's social ecosystem through constant engagement in the narrative.

Furthermore, the integration of cultural genesis into character design, as evidenced in second level of classification, aligns with the research by O. Yezhova *et al.* (2024), who focused on the artistic and traditional cultural aspects of corporate identity, author's model demonstrated how these codes are adapted to phygital reality. The use of historical or mythological archetypes is not merely an aesthetic choice but a mechanism for legitimising brand heritage. This is consistent with the evidence provided by B. Castillo-Abdul *et al.* (2022), who demonstrated that branded content on platforms such as Instagram achieves higher engagement when it appeals to familiar cultural codes. Authors' classification provided a systematic framework for selecting these codes, ensuring that the character's semiotic nature resonates with the target audience's collective memory.

The synthesis of the proposed authors' systematisation, the emotional and technological approach of O. Slityuk & N. Nochenko (2023), and the ethno-cultural identity research by O. Yezhova *et al.* (2024) allowed defining the character as a strategic, multi-layered tool in contemporary design. Authors' thesis on the parasocial subjectivity of a digital agent is methodologically reinforced by the principles of animated characterfulness, where visual resonance is enhanced through national cultural codes and specific geometric shapes that convey leadership and professionalism. Specifically, it has been established that the use of anthropomorphic mascots, unique corporate fonts, and symbolic elements (such as circular shapes or specific colour palettes) ensures brand recognition and dynamism. The integration of AI and NFT technologies transforms these graphic constants into an autonomous digital identity, the successful representation of which relies on visual realism algorithms and engineering precision. Thus, combining the graphic language of archetypes, traditional cultural aspects, and high engineering fidelity creates a unified methodological foundation for building consumer trust and ensuring strategic brand integrity within an immersive environment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate the transformation of the character in the fashion industry from a secondary decorative element into a strategic

mediator of brand communication within the phigital environment. The proposed classification system integrates engineering precision of modelling, semiotic meaning, and cultural codes, forming a coherent methodological framework for designing characters as intelligent interfaces between the brand and the consumer. The synthesis of graphic design approaches, digital technologies, and cultural heritage allows the character to be interpreted as a multi-layered instrument for shaping narrative brand identity and supporting economic integration. In this way, the character becomes a central structural element of the brand ecosystem, ensuring visual coherence, narrative continuity, and effective communication with the audience.

CONCLUSIONS

Within the framework of the conducted research, a complex three-level model of character classification as a key tool for the development of visual narrative identity in fashion was formed and theoretically substantiated. The proposed structure allowed systematising the variety of artistic images that function in the contemporary hybrid media space. A typology has been developed based on the method of embodiment of the artistic image, which allowed combining plastic, temporal, and spatio-temporal forms into a single analytical system. This emphasised the continuity of character development from classic fashion illustration to complex synthetic models that exist in the digital dimension.

A second-level classification is proposed and detailed, where for the first time within a single approach, on-screen, animated, game and virtual characters (CGI, AI) were differentiated. This approach allowed substantiating the transition of the character

from the status of a passive object of contemplation to the role of an autonomous “digital ambassador”, whose identity was algorithmically managed and fully integrated into the brand’s marketing logic. The functional purpose of characters was systematised, which allowed identifying new roles in the media environment: from immersive interaction in VR/AR identities to intelligent customisation of the client experience using AI agents. It was substantiated that the contemporary character acts as a mediator of complex cultural meanings, ensuring the transmission of stylistic codes of the brand without being tied to the physical body of the actor or model.

Prospects for further exploration are seen in the transformation of the proposed theoretical model into an applied toolkit for designing digital images in the fashion industry. The next stages of the work involve the development of a matrix for strategic character selection based on empirical analysis, which will allow forming an algorithm for selecting image parameters (type, level of realism and function) in accordance with the specific marketing objectives of the brand. Special attention will be paid to the analysis of the correlation between the visual code (“virtual corporeality”) and the level of audience involvement, which will allow determining the optimal characteristics of the character for building trusting communication.

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Стилістична систематизація персонажів як інструмент формування візуальної наративної ідентичності в модній комунікації

Анна Селезньова

Кандидат технічних наук, доцент
Хмельницький національний університет
290016, вул. Інститутська, 11, м. Хмельницький, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8238-5340>

Тетяна Надопта

Кандидат технічних наук, доцент
Хмельницький національний університет
290016, вул. Інститутська, 11, м. Хмельницький, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9338-7827>

Оксана Михайловська

Кандидат технічних наук, доцент
Хмельницький національний університет
290016, вул. Інститутська, 11, м. Хмельницький, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5025-6571>

Анотація. Персонаж дедалі частіше функціонує не як допоміжний елемент айдентики, а як самостійна естетична система, що визначає стилеві коди, композиційні принципи та характер комунікації. Водночас у науковому дискурсі відсутня цілісна модель його стилістичної систематизації, що ускладнює аналіз впливу персонажа на сучасне проектування костюма. Мета роботи полягала в теоретичному обґрунтуванні та розробці багаторівневої стилістичної систематизації персонажів як базового інструмента формування візуальної наративної ідентичності бренду, а також у визначенні механізмів їхнього впливу на композиційне моделювання в умовах цифрового середовища. Методологічну основу становило поєднання системно-структурного аналізу, семіотичного та іконологічного підходів, методу порівняльної типології, елементів морфологічного аналізу форми, а також моделювання концептуальних структур. Розроблено теоретичну модель стилістичної систематизації, у межах якої персонаж інтерпретується як багаторівнева структура, що забезпечує цілісність візуальної наративної ідентичності бренду. Модель включила три взаємопов'язані рівні. Технологічний рівень визначив морфологію та способи втілення образу, від статичної графіки до динамічних систем ігрового дизайну. Семіотичний рівень ідентифікував архетипні основи та культурні прототипи, включаючи як історичних постатей, так і цифрових аватарів. Функціональний рівень визначив комунікативну роль персонажа як символічного представника, експертного посередника або стилістичного домінанта в рамках стратегії бренду. Дослідження обґрунтувало перетворення символу з пасивного знака на автономного естетичного посередника між цифровими середовищами та фізичним дизайном одягу. Воно продемонструвало, що просторові та часові символи породжують нові підходи до композиції, силуету та динаміки форм, впливаючи на сучасні модні тенденції. Отримані результати можуть бути використані у дизайн-проектуванні, розробці бренд-стратегій, створенні цифрових колекцій та освітніх програмах з дизайну одягу і візуальних комунікацій

Ключові слова: багаторівнева аналітична модель; семіотика бренду; цифрове втілення; морфологія символів; архетипні структури; гібридне візуальне середовище; стратегії комунікації бренду