

FROM FIBER TO RETAIL

THE NEW REALITY OF INTIMATE APPAREL

BY ASI EFROS

COVID-19 has brought dramatic changes to just about every aspect of the intimate apparel industry. It has facilitated new brand-to-consumer ways of engagement, brought to the surface disruptive technologies, and instilled an appreciation for sustainable textiles. In addition to technological progress, powerful political and social forces have lately been sweeping across the industry. Inclusivity and diversity are becoming intrinsic to brands' ethos and a direction for social shifts. It's been five years of evolution in one. Here are several examples of that transformation.



Green Hosiery Collection by Sarah Borghi

One of the ways for brands to express their ecological point of view and explore their relationship with nature is with the use of sustainable materials.

In 2020 the first-ever collection of biodegradable hosiery was brought to market by Sarah Borghi. Its Green Collection is made of Amni Soul Eco and Roica fibers, both of which break down without releasing harmful substances into the environment. The Green Collection offers comfortable, breathable, and sensuous looks that embrace the highest fashion standards. At the same time, the production of this collection is eco-responsible and ethical.

Cupro - A Fiber for a Better Future

Making its debut in many designers' collections as a fiber manufactured from cotton linter, Cupro is a waste product of the cotton industry. The fiber is generated in a closed-loop process similar to those producing fibers like Tencel. This prevents harmful chemicals from being released into the environment.

Cupro is 100 percent biodegradable and can easily be machine- or hand-washed. Furthermore, it is also exceptionally lightweight and breathable, making it an ideal fabric for clothes worn in warm weather and during the hotter months of the year.

Perhaps the greatest benefit that comes with this unique fiber is the look and feel that it offers. As one of the softest materials out there, it's often used as a vegan-friendly



Fashion Devices & Applications

The tech start-up Weart brings a different type of solution into the digital world. Weart's app devices recreate the sense of touch and enhance the tactile experience, which is lost in the process of digital communication.

Applications like Nettato make taking body measuring fun and simple. By introducing a fully integrated 3D body scan feature, the app makes it easier for consumers to measure their bodies in the privacy of their own homes. Nettato has greatly improved

customers' ability to find the correct size of clothes while shopping online. The industrial version of Nettato allows brands to analyze the fit data and develop new size charts.

alternative to silk, because it has a similar texture, and it drapes just as beautifully. In fact, several brands such as **Wallace Cotton** and **Deeba**, to name two, are beginning to incorporate Cupro into their collections.

Digitalization - New Tools & New Solutions

No business can underestimate the impact that digital innovation has had on the world – especially during COVID-19. From new tools and new solutions to more effective customer outreach and communication, each and every company has undergone a quick and effective transformation in the span of 12 months. To achieve high levels of agility and flexibility, they have effectively digitized their operations, ensuring that they are built to withstand future global pandemics and to thrive in all circumstances.

Digital Textile Libraries & Marketplace

A Swedish fashion-tech company, **Material Exchange**, has created a global digital material library and begun to leveraging exciting digital data that makes it easier for designers and brands to source the fabrics and create beautiful intimate apparel pieces that embrace sustainability.

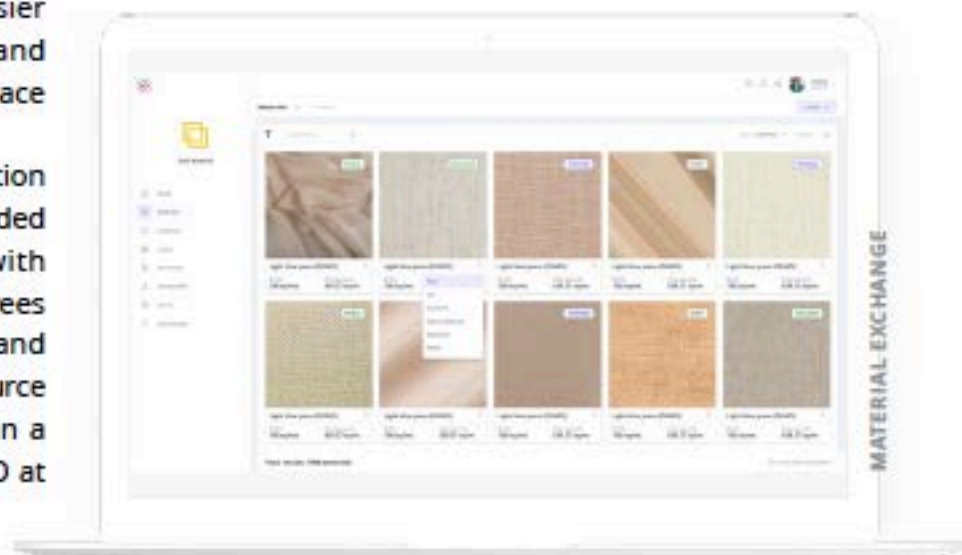
"The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of the industry by at least 5 years. Our business exploded overnight as the fashion industry realized that with global travel halted, textile fairs canceled and employees forced to work remotely; fashion brands, suppliers, and manufacturers had a pressing need for a solution to source materials and manage relationships with suppliers in a completely digital environment." Darren Glenister, CEO at Material Exchange.

Virtual Bra/Lingerie Fittings & Styling Suggestions

One of many brands that have taken steps to add virtual bra/lingerie fittings is Triumph. The brand introduced the digital feature to help women gain a sense of what a new bra or lingerie looks like, all without stepping foot outside their homes.

Brick & mortar lingerie boutiques now include virtual bra fittings with bra fitting experts, into their customer service repertoire. Done by appointments and via video conferencing, the fittings are a private experience, which is very similar to the one that is done in person.

A multi-brand online boutique, Journelle, has taken additional steps to enhance their interaction with the intimate community by offering styling advice, which provides women with insights into how to build their intimate apparel wardrobes.



A lingerie-swimwear brand, **Demery Jayne International**, showcases their seasonless collections via their own virtual showroom, powered by Snapchat. It allows this progressive brand to create an immersive experience via live streaming for customers and buyers all year round. Multiple lingerie e-commerce sites, online boutiques, and department stores enhance customers' experiences and make it easier to buy intimate apparel on the web from any device.

Throughout the past year, studies have shown that customers are becoming more and more interested in the idea of shopping virtually and online, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The act of shopping as we once knew it already looks different today, and it'll be interesting to see just where it goes in the coming years.



The Evolution of Diversity



Last year I had the opportunity to speak on the Curve's Diversity panel, and it was the first time I was able to articulate my experiences and speak to what it is like to be a Black female founder in an industry with very little POC representation. I was recently asked how I feel things have evolved or changed since that panel and truthfully the verdict is still out. We are just now coming out of our mutual Covid limbo, with glimpses

of what our industry might look like in the years to come. Thankfully, this is an unprecedented opportunity to rewrite the norm. The industry as we knew it is gone, and we now get to move forward with a dedication to equality. This is our chance to make diversity an intrinsic part of how we operate our businesses and how we approach our consumers.

Initial steps towards change have been taken, but the true evolution of diversity in our industry will be rooted in a conscious effort and awareness around what it means to be diverse. It has to be a ubiquitous part of our everyday, because diversity, without a commitment to be inclusive, is a word that holds very little weight. Our industry must move beyond performative actions to remain relevant and place value in contributions by the POC community. Not because it fits in with the latest buzz words but because creators of color have earned this and we bring immense value to the table. Without this key distinction the industry's evolution will be stunted. But I am hopeful that our community is consciously working towards meaningful and lasting change.

Amber Tolliver | Founder of Liberté