



# THE CASE FOR SOCIAL, DIGITAL REALITIES

Micro trend 2020

A search for meaningful experiences over blind consumption is driving a change in the use of digital realities. Instead of existing mainly on our personal screens, they could take us to whole new worlds - together.

Christina Haxholm, January 2020  
5 min. read



We have seen digital realities develop over some time now, and they are being used in interesting ways in the retail sector - IKEA created an AR app, allowing users to digitally place and view furniture in their homes before buying them. In a similar feature, Sephora is using AR in their app, to allow users to digitally try on beauty products, and even call on the community of peers for evaluation and guidance.

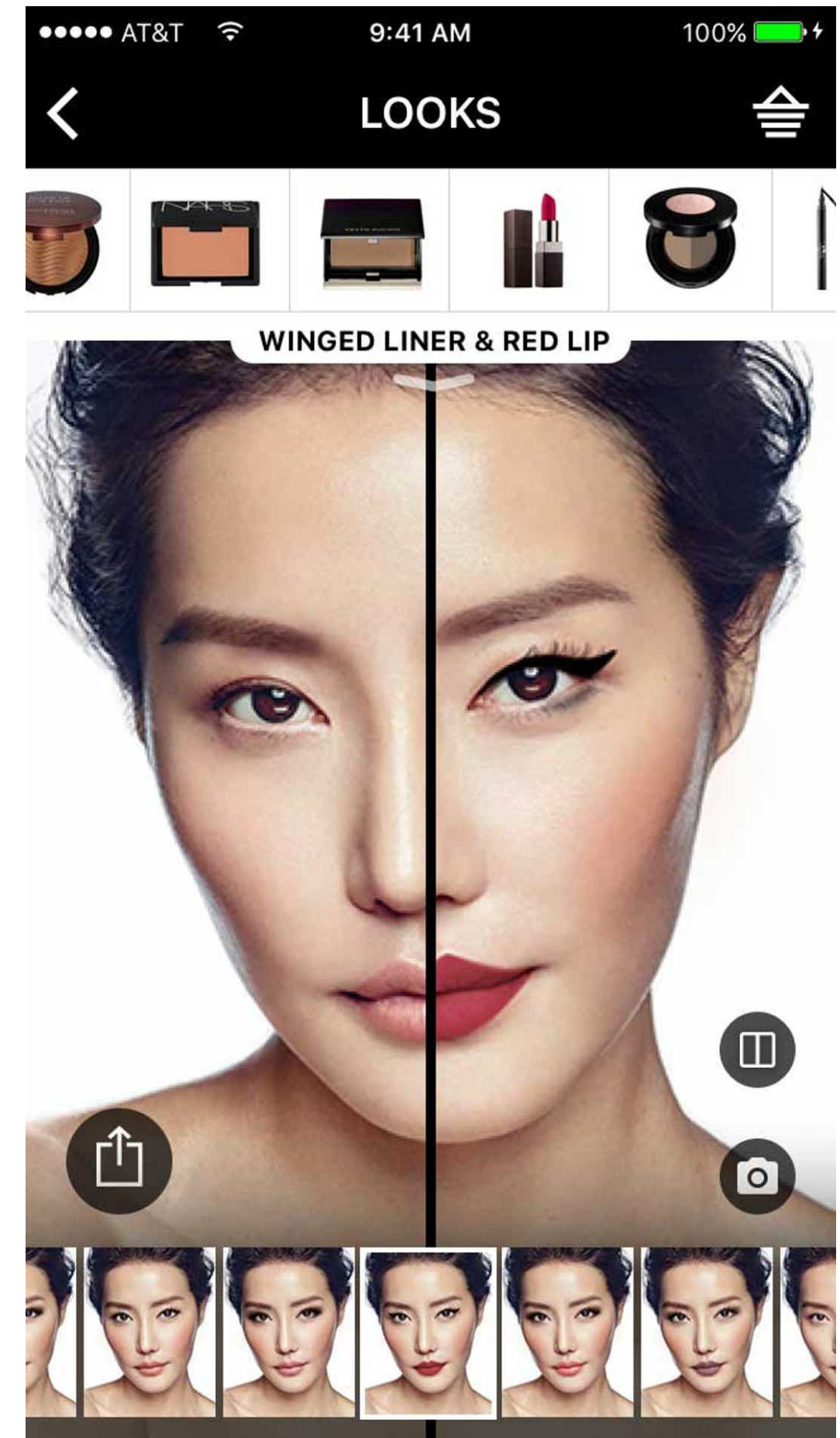
However, considering the rising aversion in millennials towards excessive consumption and traditional ownership, the magic of digital realities could be making waves in a different way.

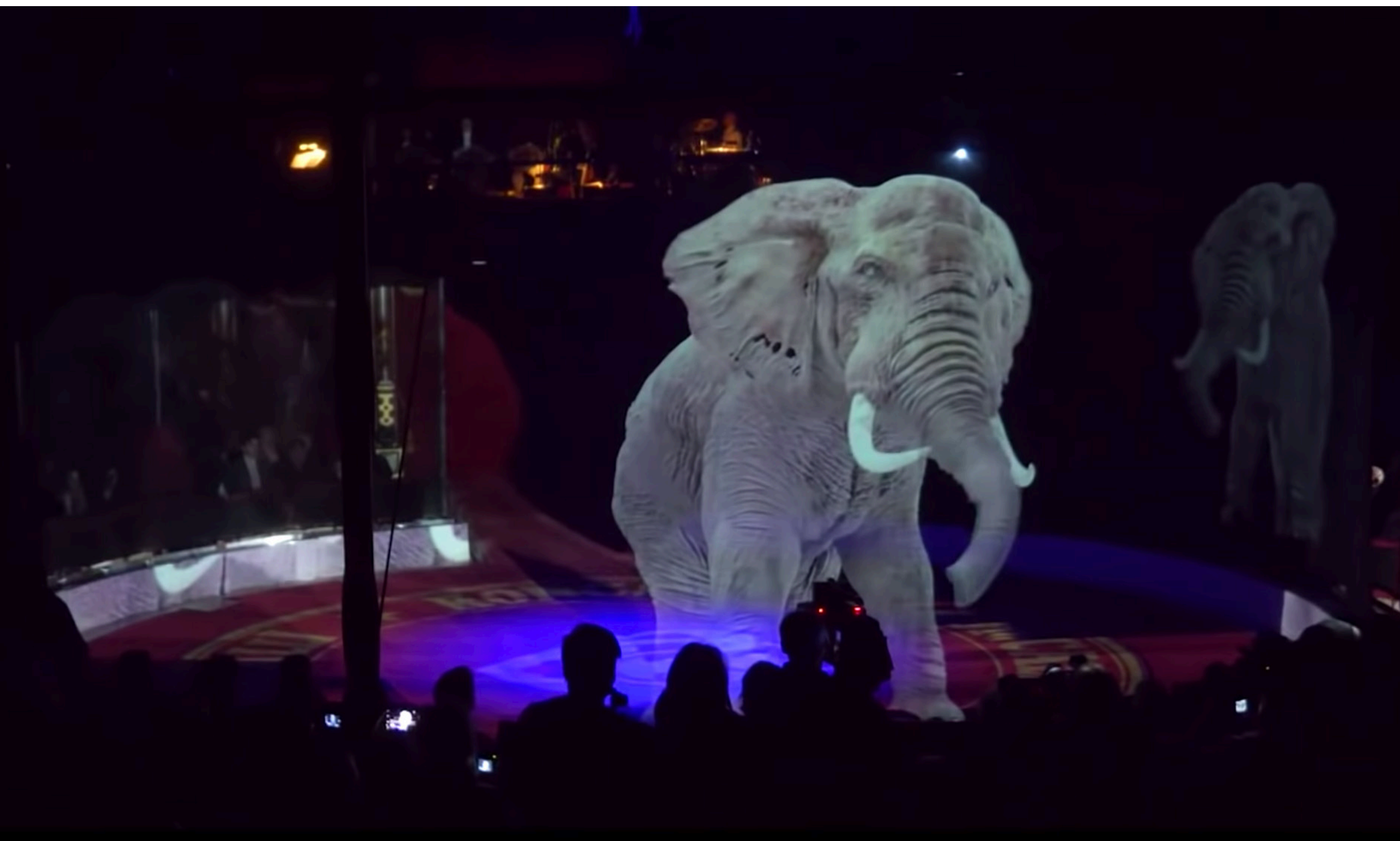
The idea that social media may be causing social anxiety and loneliness is not new, and a 2017 study published on the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that, young adults spending two hours a day on social media, doubles the risk of experiencing social anxiety. Participants who were online 50 times or more per week, were found to have thrice the risk of perceived social isolation, compared to those who went online 9 times pr. week.

Social media and the digital technologies that follow, can accentuate states of loneliness. But there are cases when they do the exact opposite.

Researchers at Kent University has been studying the effects of using virtual reality to help dementia patients recall past memories, reduce aggression, and improve interactions with caregivers. Using a VR headset, participants visited virtual environments like a forest, a cathedral and a rocky beach. The stimuli, which are often difficult to achieve for dementia patients, prompted participants memories, enabling them to talk about past experiences, like holidays on rocky beaches. The memories not only provides positive mental stimulation and better moods, but the sharing of experiences can bring dementia patients closer to their caregivers, and improve their social interaction.

As it becomes easier to produce 360-degree VR videos, it could be possible to create digital experiences designed for individual patients, for example by having family members or friends record a video of their favourite location.





In a very different, but maybe equally surprising setting, we'll find Circus Roncalli - a German circus that hopes to preserve the tradition of animal acts, while leaving animal cruelty behind. As the show begins, you'll find holographic elephants and horses, performing tricks and galloping around the ring. Eleven projectors provide a 360-degree visibility for spectators around the tent. The director calls it a sign of the times, and spectators are loving it. The experience is quite visually spectacular, and is similar to AI, but with one big difference - it doesn't happen on your mobile screen, it happens in front of everyone. It's a shared, digital experience, and one that surely feels more engaging and less anxiety provoking than the AR face filters of Instagram. Not only is the experience creatively engaging and visually impressive, it also serves a larger cause of freeing animals from the abuse of circus performance.

From top: Rocky beach VR for dementia patients by Kent University; Visual Artist by Sephora.  
Left: Holographic Projections by Circus Roncalli.  
Below: Digital blockchain dress, The Fabricant; Silverhood metallic track top by Carlings; Marques Almeida Puffer Jacket by Marques Almeida and The Fabricant.



Circus Roncalli are not the only ones to use digital realities to tackle an ethical issue in their industry.

Digital fashion house The Fabricant specialises in photo-realistic 3D fashion design and animation. They work with brands and designers to illustrate fashion items, and because of their digital nature, they can create shots and camera movements that goes beyond the laws of physics. Their exceptional visuals has sparked the interest of many fashion and design interested people, and in 2019, Fabricant sold the world's first digital blockchain dress for \$9,500 at an auction in New York.

In a similar fashion, norwegian fashion brand Carlings is creating digital-only collections. When buying an outfit, you'd upload an image of yourself to the webshop, and a digital tailor fits the digital garment to your image, making it ready for upload on social media.

The programme making it all possible is fashion design software CLO 3D, which exists to enable real time development of garments. The purpose? To save time, money and resources on developing a style, which normally goes through X amount of sample revisions, before being produced in large quantities. And that's before brands could even know if the product will sell.





With CLO 3D designers wouldn't need samples, production, or even a photoshoot before launching the product. Brands could simply produce on demand, while saving materials and polluting processes.

Although CLO 3D may exist as a helping hand for the fashion supply chains we know already, it is opening up whole new possibilities for digital-only shopping, and the way users would wear that clothes is through AR, or even personal avatars, made possible by 3D body scans, or innovations like the ZOZOSUIT - a white-dotted, black bodysuit, made to track the shape of a body using just a phone camera.

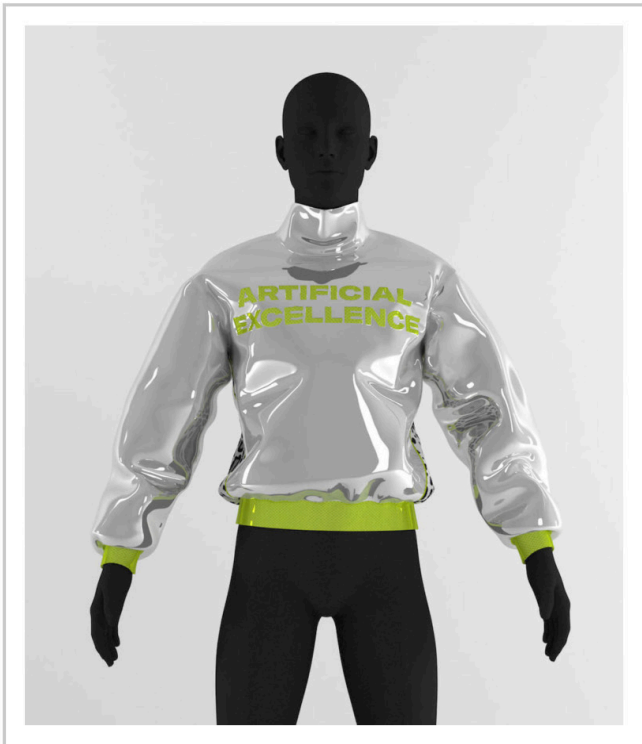
# Silverhood metallic track top

€20

Oversized shiny metallic coated track top with stripes of yellow reflective fabric and snow leopard velour on the sides.

This is a digital product that will be applied to your photo, you will not receive a physical version of this item.

EXPIRED



Marques Almeida Puffer Jacket  
€0.00

ADD TO CART

Considering the amounts of waste, horrible working conditions and pollution the conventional fashion industry sheds, the idea of a digital fashion industry is exciting.

But let's be mindful. Digital worlds allows us to engage with the things we used to know, but in a way that seems less harmful, because we can 'fake' it with digital images - no animals in the circus, no new clothes on the runway.

But if we don't challenge the speed of consumption, and if we fail to create legislation that protects the workers in global production chains, we could end up with yet another fashion industry that will exploit overseas workers, only this time, they will be digital artists instead of textile workers. At the same time, if we keep pushing for more polished images on social media, chances are we'll only become more anxious.

It is time for the digital realities to become engaging social experiences. Experiences that brings people closer, that you'd want to associate with your brand, that would bring people to your store, or that you could simply sell as that - a social experience, just like at the circus.

And whether users send their personal avatar on a VR trip to hike in the mountains, to spend Christmas with their family overseas, or to a hot date in Rome, chances are, they could do with one of those digital outfits.

## NOTES

1. At a time when even tech savvy generations are seeing the emotional downside of using socials and the digital realities, consider how your brand can turn digital realities into a social experience.

2. Kent University has shown how the use of digital realities can prompt human responses and feelings that are useful for social interaction and emotional wellbeing.

3. Circus Roncalli has successfully demonstrated the use of holographic projection used as a form of AR, that happens not on your screen, but in front of a whole audience.

4. There is an opportunity for industries such as fashion to develop parallel, digital versions of themselves. The question is, whether that is really what we want.