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Threads of Identity: Decoding Gen Z's Fashion Fads and Trends

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Abstract

Generation Z's fashion trends and fads are marked by vibrant self-expression, a focus on sustainability, and the impact of social media, while blending vintage styles with modern, inclusive aesthetics. The study determined the fashion trends and fads of the Generation Z students and young professionals, participated by 30 Generation Z composed of 10 males, 10 females, and 10 LGBTQ people, who were selected through inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher used a phenomenological qualitative research design and was conducted using a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide to gather data. The collected data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using thematic analysis. The fashion choices of the male, female, and LGBTQ Generation Z were influenced by a combination of personal preferences, self-expression and various external influences. Male Generation Z preferred simple and streetwear styles that are comfortable and practical, inspired by social media and cultural traditions. Female Generation Z liked minimalist and pretty styles influenced by Korean and Asian fashion, focusing on comfort, modesty, and soft colors like pastels, with inspiration from TikTok and Korean celebrities. LGBTQ Generation Z mixed simple, streetwear, and vintage styles that express their identity, valuing comfort, easy movement, and natural fabrics, with ideas coming from social media and personal feelings. Generation Z chose their outfits based on several reasons like decision-making for daily outfit, styles influence, outfit criteria and priorities, comfort and practicality, occasion-based dressing, mood and emotional influence, and fashion shaped by experience when choosing outfits that are similar across males, females, and LGBTQ. They all think about comfort and practicality, occasion they are dressing for, and how their mood or feelings affect their choices. The proposed output of the study was catalog where it can serve as a practical and visual tool to showcase Generation Z's fashion references.

Keywords: Generation Z, Trends, Fads, Fashion, Apparel, Students, and Young professionals.

1. Introduction

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is transforming the way fashion is created, shared, and consumed. Unlike earlier generations, Generation Z grew up with the internet, social media, and technology, which have had a significant impact on

their fashion choices. Social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have made it possible for consumers to swiftly discover and share the latest fashion styles, driving trend dissemination like never before (Bacinski, 2024). One significant

aspect of Generation Z's fashion is their concern for originality and sustainability. They have a higher propensity to support eco-friendly firms or purchase used apparel. This contrasts with previous generations that prioritized rapid fashion and purchased numerous inexpensive, stylish garments (Biswas and Gofur, 2025).

However, Generation Z trends might not last long. Though they have the potential to soon vanish, social media made it possible for trends to go viral. What's trendy now might not be tomorrow. Influencers or viral challenges on websites like TikTok are frequently the driving forces behind these trends (Turner & Rankin, 2022).

The researcher wanted to know how Generation Z is interested in fashion and current trends, as well as the impact they have on their peers and colleagues. As the researcher observed, Generation Z is always the bravest and most expressive in the clothes they wear. Because of fashion, one's individuality matters even if it follows a trend. This observation motivated the researcher to conduct the study, which aimed to determine Generation Z's fashion trends and fads.

The integration of Generation Z into the field of Home Economics, particularly in the study of fashion and apparel, carries significant implications for educational curricula, teaching methods, and industry practices. As the first generation to grow up with constant digital connectivity, Generation Z's approach to fashion is shaped by technology, social media, and evolving cultural values, influencing how fashion is taught and learned within Industrial Education programs. The rapid pace of fashion trends, driven by platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Pinterest, requires educators to adopt more flexible and adaptable teaching methods. This involves balancing foundational skills in garment construction and design with an awareness of current trends, ensuring students remain up-to-date while mastering traditional techniques. Furthermore, Generation Z's emphasis on individuality, self-expression, and inclusivity challenges educators to move beyond traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches, promoting customization, sustainability, and ethical practices within fashion education (Itubay GMG, 2025).

The growing influence of digital tools and technologies on the fashion industry highlights the need to integrate advanced techniques into Home Economics programs. Generation Z's affinity for digital fashion design software, 3D printing, and virtual garment fitting should be reflected in the curriculum to ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to navigate the technological innovations in shaping the future of fashion. By incorporating topics, such as sustainable fashion, ethical production, and eco-friendly materials, educators can prepare students to meet the demands of a socially conscious consumer base. The influence of Generation Z highlights the need to adapt Home Economics education by emphasizing adaptability, inclusivity, and the integration of technology. This updated approach would equip future professionals with the skills needed to succeed in the changing fashion industry and effectively respond to the challenges and innovations introduced by a generation in reshaping the field.

This study aimed to determine the Generation Z's trends and fads, specifically the fashion choices of the male, female, and of the selected LGBTQ Generation Z and the reasons in choosing their outfit.

2. Methodology

This study used a phenomenological design and was carried out as qualitative research. According to Creswell and Poth, (2018) qualitative research is a type of research that focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It is a method used to gather in-depth insights into people's experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. This type of research typically uses non-numerical data like interviews, observations, and textual analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. The goal is to understand how people make sense of and interpret their experiences, emphasizing their perceptions and emotions.

This study used a phenomenological research design to understand Generation Z's experiences with fashion trends and fads. The main goal is to find out how Generation Z individuals personally feel about their fashion choices, why they follow certain trends, and

what those fads mean to them. Generation Z is known for quickly changing fashion styles, being very active online, and being aware of how their clothes show their personality and group identity. While surveys can show which trends are popular, only phenomenology can explain why and how these trends matter to them personally and socially. It helps reveal how they express themselves, how friends influence their fashion, and how their identity is shaped.

Phenomenology focuses on seeing things from the participants' point of view, without outside ideas influencing the results. By talking with participants in interviews or group discussions, this method provides deep insights into how Generation Z understands the importance of trends, how they balance being themselves with fitting in, and how social media and friends affect their fashion choices. Because of this, using a phenomenological design is the best choice. It helps uncover the feelings, reasons, and personal experiences behind Generation Z's connection to fashion. This information can be useful for teachers, mental health workers, and the fashion industry.

As a data-gathering technique, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with the participants using a Focus Group Discussion Guide. The FGD was recorded, transcribed, coded inductively, and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method allowed for a deep exploration of the fashion choices of Generation Z and how they choose their outfit. By examining these themes, the study aimed to develop the fashion choices of Generation Z.

The context of the study on Generation Z fashion focused on how this generation is reshaping the fashion world by blending nostalgia with innovation and emphasizing values like sustainability, individuality, and inclusivity. Generation Z's fashion reflects a mix of vintage and modern styles, such as the Y2K (Year, 2000) revival and gender-neutral layering, while prioritizing ethical brands and eco-friendly practices. Social media plays a crucial role on how Generation Z discovers and influences trends, making fashion a form of personal expression that breaks traditional rules and embraces digital culture. Their fashion choices highlight a shift from fast fashion to sustainable consumption, with Do It Your-

self (DIY) customization and tech-infused clothing gaining popularity, all underscoring their desire for authenticity and freedom in style.

Social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become critical spaces where Generation Z discovers, shares, and shapes fashion trends. These digital hubs enable rapid dissemination of fashions, democratizing trendsetting beyond traditional industry gatekeepers like designers and magazines. Influencers and peer creators play a vital role in popularizing new looks, often blending various cultural, subcultural, and global inspirations. Viral fashion challenges, styling hacks, and thrift hauls contribute to how fads emerge and spread, reinforcing fashion as a participatory, community-driven culture centered on authenticity and self-expression.

A defining characteristic of Generation Z fashion is their ethical and sustainable consumer mindset. There is a notable shift away from fast fashion, as they prioritize eco-friendly materials, ethical production, and transparent brand practices. Secondhand shopping, clothing swaps, and upcycling have become mainstays in their consumption habits, reflecting an environmental consciousness deeply intertwined with their style choices. Additionally, interest in tech-infused and digital fashion, including virtual clothing and avatar customization in metaverse platforms, expands their engagement with fashion beyond physical garments, indicating an evolving relationship between technology, sustainability, and personal expression in the future of fashion.

The participants of the study were 10 males, 10 females, and 10 LGBTQ individuals. They were identified using the inclusion and exclusion criteria and fell under the Generation Z age range of 16 to 27.

This study utilized a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide. This validated guide was essential for gathering the necessary information from the participants. The FGD Guide questions served as the primary tool to gather the information necessary to answer the statement of the problem of this study. A set of interview guides was prepared for Generation Z, who served as participants. The guide consisted of 17 structured yet open-ended questions, specifically

designed to gather qualitative insights about Generation Z fashion, focusing on trends and fads. The primary objective of this instrument was to explore the factors driving Generation Z's fashion choices, distinguish between enduring trends and fleeting fads, and understand the social and cultural influences in shaping their style preferences. Each question was crafted to encourage detailed and thoughtful responses, enabling an exploration of the motivations, values, and behaviors behind Generation Z's engagement with fashion. The open-ended format facilitated rich qualitative data collection during the discussions, allowing participants to share their perspectives in an interactive setting. This collaborative environment promoted dynamic exchanges, where participants could build upon each other's observations, leading to more nuanced insights into the evolving landscape of Generation Z fashion. The discussions were conducted with professionalism and respect, ensuring that participants felt comfortable expressing their views openly and authentically.

This study followed a systematic approach to ensure the credibility, validity, and ethical considerations in data collection. The data collection process was through FGD, which was conducted for this study through the appointment of the participants.

Before the data collection, the research instrument was subjected to validation by experts in the field. The validation process ensured that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. Feedback and recommendations from the experts were incorporated to improve the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire.

To ensure compliance with ethical and institutional guidelines, formal approval was obtained.

Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researcher identified and classified the male, female, and LGBTQ+ populations as participants. Afterward, the researcher personally approached the students and professional Generation Z individuals to serve as key participants for the study. Upon gaining approval, the researcher requested an interview schedule with them. For the actual interview, the researcher asked the participants for their preferred time and date.

Upon approval, a formal letter of invitation was sent to the identified participants. The letter outlined the purpose of the study, expected participation, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation.

In this study, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was done according to their selected time, date, and virtual platform. A cellphone, which served as a recorder, was used to capture the conversations during the interview. The researcher probed further or asked follow-up questions until the responses provided a sufficient explanation.

In addition, photos were taken to provide further evidence. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim. The transcriptions were then thematized and coded, and the commonalities found were used for the analysis. The themes that emerged from the patterns of responses were examined to determine their applicability and their potential solutions to the research questions.

The data collected from the Focus Group Discussion and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible and systematic method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to uncover key themes relevant to the research questions while also accommodating the emergence of unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved several stages. Initially, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading the transcripts. Subsequently, initial codes were generated by pinpointing significant features of the data pertinent to the study's objectives. These codes were then organized into broader themes that encapsulated the main ideas and recurring patterns within the data. The themes underwent a process of review, refinement, and definition to ensure they accurately represented participants' responses and aligned with the research questions. Finally, the themes were named to reflect the core patterns identified. Throughout the analysis, data were categorized, coded, and interpreted to highlight factors influencing parental involvement, barriers encountered, and potential strategies for improvement. The process was conducted comprehensively to ensure alignment with

the study's objectives and theoretical framework. As noted by Kiger and Varpio, (2020) thematic analysis is a robust yet adaptable method suitable for exploring experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across diverse qualitative data sets and can be applied within various epistemological frameworks.

This study employed thematic analysis to systematically examine participants' qualitative responses and identify patterns and themes. An inductive coding approach, as outlined by Colaizzi, (2018) was utilized, allowing codes to emerge directly from the data without imposing preconceived categories. These codes were then assigned to meaningful excerpts, capturing specific concepts and ideas, which subsequently organized into sub-themes.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms were used, and all collected data were securely stored. Participants were reassured that their responses would remain anonymous, fostering a sense of safety and encouraging honest, open dialogue about personal fashion choices, cultural influences, and identity expression. They were also made aware that they could choose not to answer any question they found uncomfortable.

Minimizing harm was a key consideration, particularly given the personal and sometimes sensitive nature of self-expression and identity about clothing. Interview questions were carefully worded to avoid judgmental or intrusive language, ensuring participants felt respected and supported throughout the process. The study maintained transparency by clearly communicating how the data were used to better understand fashion trends among Generation Z and the social, psychological, and cultural factors influencing their choices. Cultural sensitivity played a critical role in framing interview questions inclusively, with respect for the diverse ethnic, gender, and social backgrounds of participants. Finally, responsible data management practices were followed, with secure storage of information during the study and the ethical disposal of raw data upon completion to preserve confidentiality. Overall, the study was rooted in ethical standards designed to protect participants while authentically capturing the voices and perspectives of Generation Z regarding their fashion choices, con-

tributing to a richer understanding of youth identity, style, and societal influence.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the thematic analysis of the responses gathered through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the result revealed that the fashion choices of the male Generation Z were influenced by fashion preferences, self-expression, comfort and functionality, choice of color and fabric, fashion inspiration, and cultural / societal influence.

The result revealed that the male Generation Z showed a variety of fashion preferences, with some favoring streetwear and casual styles, which focused on comfort and trendy pieces like oversized shirts and sneakers. A larger group preferred minimalistic and simple styles, valuing clean designs, neutral colors, and practical clothing. Additionally, there was an interest in Y2K and vintage fashion, with some appreciating retro items like cargo pants and wide-leg denim, showing how past trends continue to influence their style choices. They have transformed fashion into a powerful platform for self-expression by combining bold individuality, digital inspiration, and strong values like inclusivity and sustainability. Since 2017, Generation Z men have mixed retro, streetwear, and modern styles, often favoring oversized, gender-fluid, and comfortable clothing, to challenge traditional norms and promote body positivity. Social media had driven trends like "soft boy" and Y2K looks, while thrifting and eco-conscious brands highlighted their environmental values. Through Do It Yourself (DIY), statement accessories, and techwear, Generation Z men used fashion to uniquely express their identities and beliefs.

The result implies that the male Generation Z were shaped by a combination of factors, such as their personal fashion preferences, the need for self-expression, and the importance of comfort and functionality. Additionally, their selection of color and fabric played a significant role in their overall style, reflecting both aesthetic appeal and practicality. Fashion inspiration from various sources, such as social media, peers, and cultural icons, further influenced their choices, while cultural and societal factors also impacted how they dress. These themes

entailed that male Generation Z's fashion decisions were multidimensional, balancing individuality, comfort, and social influences. This understanding provided valuable insights into the complex motivations behind their fashion behavior.

The result of the study agreed with Analyzify, (2025) who emphasized that these preferences reflected Generation Z's values of comfort, self-expression, sustainability, and nostalgia, heavily influenced by social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube. It highlighted the growing preference for sustainable and ethical clothing choices, which are influenced by cultural beliefs and social factors.

The result supported Sherina and Selamat, (2023) who investigated how consumer ethnocentrism, perceived quality, and emotional value affect Generation Z's purchase intentions toward local streetwear brands in Jakarta. Their survey of 197 young respondents aged 9 to 24 revealed that these factors significantly encouraged streetwear buying behavior. The study emphasized the role of cultural identity, product quality, and emotional connection in shaping Generation Z's fashion choices. It highlighted the rising importance of local streetwear brands in emerging markets and their appeal to younger consumers.

The result aligned with that of Lloyd and Pennington's, (2020) on their research on minimalism. There were five key themes emerged: autonomy, competence, mental space, awareness, and positive emotions. Results were in harmony with previous research that yielded simplicity, pro-ecological behaviours, and materialism, and gave a new view on low-consumption lifestyles.

Based on the thematic analysis, the result revealed that the fashion choices of female Generation Z were inspired by fashion preferences, self-expression, comfort and functionality, choice of color and fabric, fashion inspiration, and cultural / societal influence.

The result implies that the fashion choices of the female Generation Z were influenced by several important factors, such as personal style, self-expression, comfort and usefulness, choice of colors and fabrics, fashion inspiration, and cultural or social

influences. These themes helped people understand how this generation thought about fashion, showing that their clothing choices are not just about looks but also about showing who they are and what they believe in. Comfort and practicality were very important to them because they want clothes that fit their busy and active lives. They also pay close attention to colors and fabrics, often choosing materials that look good and are good for the environment. Fashion ideas from social media and friends played a big role in shaping their style. Cultural and social factors also influenced their fashion, as they mix popular global trends with their own cultural backgrounds. Their fashion choices were varied and thoughtful, and influenced by a mix of personal expression, comfort, and cultural values.

The result was consistent with prior research by Williams and Hodges, (2023) which found that female Generation Z members prioritize comfort, personal expression, and sustainability in their fashion choices. Both studies highlighted the strong influence of social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, on female Generation Z's style inspiration and purchasing decisions. Fashion for these individuals is not only a form of self-expression but also reflects their environmental awareness and social identity. Additionally, the emphasis on versatile, functional clothing and the blending of cultural influences demonstrated Generation Z's values-driven approach to style.

The result supported Amekplenu, (2024) who explored how individuals use fashion as a means of self-expression and identity construction, emphasizing the influence of personal experiences, culture, and social factors on fashion choices. The study highlighted fashion as a powerful tool for communicating personality, values, and beliefs. The result aligned with that of Suganthi and Senthilkumar's, (2020). They found significant correlations between subjective comfort assessments and physiological parameters like skin temperature and humidity, emphasizing the importance of fabric properties and garment fit in wearer comfort.

Based on the thematic analysis, the result revealed that the fashion choices of LGBTQ Generation Z were motivated by fashion preferences, self-expression,

comfort and functionality, choice of color and fabric, fashion inspiration, and cultural / societal influence.

The result implies that the fashion choices of LGBTQ Generation Z were influenced by a combination of personal preferences and broader social factors. Key motivations included their desire for self-expression, comfort, and functionality, as well as deliberate choices in color and fabric that reflected their identity. Additionally, fashion inspiration and cultural or societal influences played significant roles in shaping their style. This showed that LGBTQ Generation Z used fashion not only as a means of aesthetic preference but also as a powerful tool to communicate individuality, navigate social contexts, and affirm their identity within cultural frameworks.

The result supported Siddiqui and Rane, (2024) who examined how LGBTQ+ individuals use fashion as a means of authentic self-expression and empowerment, particularly highlighting the growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities among Generation Z. It also discusses how fashion brands can effectively engage in LGBTQ+ advocacy through inclusive advertising and sponsorship to connect with younger consumers and enhance their brand image. Another study by Capucão *et al.* (2024) explored Generation Z's fashion preferences, shopping behaviors, and brand influences, highlighting their strong emphasis on individuality and ethical, sustainable products. It also identifies social media and affordability as key factors shaping Generation Z's fashion choices.

Based on the thematic analysis, the result revealed that the reasons of the Generation Z were affected by outfit decision-making factors, influences on fashion choices, factors when choosing outfits, comfort and practicality, occasion based dressing, mood and emotional influence, fashion shaped by experience and personal expression and identity.

The result implies that male Generation Z individuals' outfit choices were influenced by a complex interplay of factors extending beyond mere aesthetics. Their decision-making incorporated daily practical considerations alongside style influences, reflecting a balance between personal expression and current trends. Key priorities included comfort and practicality, indicating

that functionality is crucial in their fashion choices. Their adaptability was shown through occasion-based dressing tailored to different social contexts. Mood and emotional states also played a role, with clothing serving as a medium to express internal feelings. Additionally, their style evolved through personal history and cultural exposure, highlighting fashion as a dynamic tool for identity formation, emotional expression, and social navigation. Similarly, female Generation Z's outfit choices balanced practical needs, such as comfort and appropriateness for occasions, with emotional and psychological factors, including mood, personal experiences, and the desire for self-expression and identity affirmation. This underscored the complexity of their fashion decisions, which harmonize functionality with emotional wellbeing and individuality. For the LGBTQ Generation Z individuals, outfit choices prioritized comfort and practicality while also considering occasion, mood, personal experiences, and identity expression. Their fashion decisions were multifaceted, reflecting both functional needs and a strong desire for self-expression and emotional alignment.

The result supported Rosén, (2022) who found that male Generation Z's fashion choices were influenced by factors such as the desire to stand out, express social identity, and perceptions of brand coolness. These elements collectively shaped how young men select and wear clothing, enabling them to reflect their individuality while also fostering a sense of social belonging. Similarly, the result also aligned with Capucão *et al.* (2024), who found that LGBTQ+ Generation Z individuals used clothing as a powerful means to express their identity, affirm themselves, and gain emotional empowerment. Their outfit choices were shaped by influences including social media, cultural values, and a desire for authenticity. Central motivations for this group included comfort, self-expression, and inclusivity, highlighting the multifaceted role of fashion in supporting their unique identities.

4. Conclusion

The male Generation Z's fashion choices reflect a dynamic interplay between self-expression, functionality, and social consciousness. Through their selection of styles, colors, and fabrics, they assert individuality

while embracing comfort and practicality. Influenced by digital platforms, global trends, and personal values, these choices reveal fashion as not merely aesthetic, but as a meaningful extension of identity and cultural awareness. Their clothing is more than attire; it is a statement of who they are and what they stand for. The female Generation Z's fashion choices mirror a conscious blend of individuality, comfort, and cultural awareness. Their style is not just about aesthetics, but a reflection of values, identity, and the world they engage with. Influenced by digital platforms, global trends, and a commitment to social responsibility, they use fashion as a powerful tool for self-expression and advocacy. As they continue to redefine norms and embrace authenticity, their fashion becomes a vibrant narrative of who they are and what they stand for. The fashion choices of LGBTQ Generation Z are strongly influenced by a desire for self-expression, comfort, and practicality. This group favors clothing that reflects their distinct identities and personal styles while also being functional for daily wear. Their selections of colors and fabrics often involve bold experimentation balanced with comfort, inspired by a variety of sources, including social media, queer role models, and inclusive fashion movements. Cultural and societal factors significantly impact their fashion preferences, with many individuals gravitating toward brands and styles that promote diversity, inclusivity, and social justice. They view fashion as a meaningful way to authentically express themselves, combining creativity, comfort, and cultural significance. Generation Z, encompassing male, female, and LGBTQ individuals, approaches outfit choices with careful consideration, prioritizing comfort, practicality, and suitability for various occasions. Their fashion decisions are shaped by multiple factors, including their mood, emotions, and personal experiences, all of which influence how they select their attire. Although these influences are common across the group, female and LGBTQ members of Generation Z place a stronger focus on personal expression and identity, using fashion as a key way to convey who they are. Generation Z's fashion choices strike a balance between functionality and self-expression, guided by both internal emotions and external factors.

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6. Conflicts of Interest

The author attests to having no conflicts of interest.

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