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THE GEN-Z SNEAKERHEAD PARADOX: BALANCING SUSTAINABILITY AND
STREETWEAR IN THE WORLD OF NIKE: FASHION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The fashion industry, a global force with growth potential, faces sustainability conflicts due to its focus on fast fashion and short-term trends. To address this, implementing sustainable practices, such as a circular economy model and low-impact materials, is crucial. Influenced by digital platforms and social media, Generation Z seeks sustainable, high-quality fashion, but faces barriers like limited options, higher prices, and a lack of awareness. Additionally, streetwear fashion shapes the industry and sneaker market. This literature review explores the consumer demand for sustainable fashion and highlights the challenges in adopting sustainable practices within the fashion industry.

Keywords

Sneaker, circular economy, consumer behavior, Gen-Z

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1. Introduction

Fashion has evolved into a concept that encompasses far more than just the notion of clothing; it represents a distinct entity due to several influences. Fashion represents a lifestyle, culture, a way of living and a manifestation for how people want to present themselves and how they choose not to. As younger generations become more conscious of their impact on the environment, topics like sustainability are gaining significant momentum, the consumer landscape is transforming. With this change in consumerism, product categories, such as sneakers, are especially taken into consideration due to their negative environmental impact associated with their production. The sneaker industry therefore faces a variety of demands and values that must be regarded, ranging from social values to aesthetics to other ethical considerations. Additionally, the fashion and sneaker industry has given rise to a multitude of subcultures, one of them being the streetwear culture, which is characterized by a demanding consumer cohort and precisely followers of fleeting trends. It is therefore interesting to consider these two dominate trends and influences, and how these can be taken into consideration for the sneaker industry. This literature therefor seeks to explore Gen-Z's consumer demand for sustainable sneakers and highlights the challenges in adopting sustainable practices within the streetwear industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is a global phenomenon that encompasses everything from clothing design and manufacturing to retail sales and advertising. In recent years, it has experienced significant growth, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5% between 2016 and 2021, expecting growth in value from \$1.5 trillion (about \$4,600 per person in the US) in 2020 to \$2.5 trillion (about \$7,700 per person in the US) (about \$7,700 per person in the US) by 2025. The industry's contribution to global GDP is also substantial, accounting for over 2% of the world's total GDP in 2020 (Papamicheal et al. 2023). According to Al Maghreby (2018), fashion can be described as "a series of recurring changes in the choices of a group of people, which, though they may be accompanied by utility, are not determined by it" (25). The French word 'La Mode' translates to fashion, as it is believed to stem from the word 'La Modernité' (novelty), indicating how fashion is a concept of what is currently seen as new or novel (Hurlock 1929). MacKinney-Valentin (2010) describes fashion as "a system of innovation engineered to meet and encourage seasonal consumer demands and fulfilling cultural requirements to define ever-shifting social identities and relationships" (27), while Robinson (1961) describes fashion as nothing more than a dominant type of style at a given point of time. What these definitions all have in common is an emphasis on the nature of fashion being inherently dynamic, constantly changing, and adapting to changing trends, tastes, and preferences (Mackinney-Valentin 2010; Robinson 1961). Based on these findings, it would be of interest to research more on the possibility of implementing sustainable practices in the ever-changing landscape of fashion.

2.1.1 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is one of the biggest industrial sectors, being one of the biggest polluters. It has long been based on the notion of selling clothing based on its fashion value

rather than its long-term value (Niinimäki 2010). Already in the 1970s, considerations regarding the topic of sustainable fashion began. Since then, there have been no guidelines on how to transform a polluting industry into one that is sustainable (Baier, Rausch and Wagner 2020). To set a sustainable guideline, an agenda was formulated which encompasses the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including 169 goals that must be realized by 2030. In essence, the plan aims to convert a linear industrial business model into a new business model, which Gazzola et al. (2020) introduced in their research as a circular economy design. The new business model represents a “product manufacturing cycle with a view to both economic and environmental sustainability” (5) entailing the optimization of resources included throughout all processes of producing a fashion product (Gazzola et al. 2020).

Compared to a linear model of the industrial economy, whereby materials are consumed in mass and disregarded after use, the circular economy model emphasizes the reuse and recycling of used materials utilized to produce clothes. Within their research, Gazzola et al. (2020) emphasize that for the fashion industry to become more environmentally friendly, greater focus needs to be placed on the production processes involved in manufacturing fashion items. Brewer's research builds upon this discovery by examining the production processes of fashion items and found that the primary cause of high pollution levels is the use of raw materials during manufacturing (Brewer 2019). Specifically, for producing one kilogram of cotton around 20,000 liters (about 5283.44 gals) of water are being used, contributing a tremendous amount to global water pollution (Kant 2012; Brewer 2019). Additionally, the decomposition process of other materials such as polyester or Nylon takes up to 200 years, being harmful to aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. This underscores the need for a scholarly focus on production and material usage in the clothing industry. According to a study, the European Commission addressed the issue by revising the definition of sustainable fashion to encompass solely the sustainable design of apparel (Towa 2021). Environmental design and hence

sustainable fashion can be understood as using low-impact materials in the production of clothing and accessories. Low-impact materials are those that are sourced responsibly and produced in a way that minimizes the use of chemical products and hence environmental harm (Zamani, Sandin and Peters 2017).

Fast Fashion and Slow Fashion

Inherently, the fashion industry's pursuit of satisfying consumer demands by continuously providing the latest fashion trends to maintain exclusivity is conflicting with the definition of sustainability, as stated by Brewer (2019). Fashion brands following these seasonable short-term fashion circuits are substantially adapting to a business model within the fashion industry known as fast fashion. Fast fashion prioritizes the quick production and sale of low-cost clothing to meet consumer demand for the dynamic of the fashion industry. Retailers such as H&M, Zara, Topshop, or Mango source cheap materials and labor to have a rapid turnover of styles and adapt to current trends ranging from haute couture or ready-to-wear (Brewer 2019). Yet due to its lower sales prices, fast-fashion clothing becomes accessible to different consumer groups, specifically to those that can't afford any designer brands (Mackinney-Valentin 2010). While Mackinney-Valentin (2010) emphasizes how fast fashion makes trends accessible for younger and lower-income groups, Brewer (2019) emphasizes the social concerns coming along with the fast fashion industry.

With new collections being introduced every season, consumers are enticed to buy fast fashion items to follow the most current and prevailing fashion trends. However, short-lived fashion trends have an enormous negative environmental impact, which must be considered. According to BCG's and High Snobiety's research report, sustainability has therefore become increasingly important when making purchase decisions. Compared to a survey they conducted in 2019 and 2020, sustainability moved up from being the 10th to the 6th most important decision driver when buying fashion items (BCG and Highsnobiety 2021). Yet, the fashion

industry still grapples with a fundamental paradox between style and sustainability, stemming from its inherent nature.

According to Niinimäki (2013), it is generally challenging to create sustainable fashion as the industry is primarily focused on change and novelty. Hurlock's research (1929) emphasizes this contrast between sustainability, which requires a focus on re-use and continuation, and the fashion industry, which is fast-paced in its nature as it keeps up the needs of modern consumers (Hurlock 1929). As a counteraction to the fast fashion model, Fletcher (2007) introduces a business concept namely Slow Fashion, which surrounds the idea of both slow production and consumption (Fletcher 2007). According to McNeil and Moore (2015), an eco-friendly production process that avoids the exploitation of natural resources and focuses on manufacturing small batches is considered slow production and therefore Slow Fashion (McNeill and Moore 2015). In essence, Slow Fashion aims to prolong the life and utility of a fashion product, implying reduced and hence slow consumption. This longevity can be achieved through high-quality design enticing people to buy less but at higher quality (McNeill and Moore 2015).

In their study, Gomes et al. (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of sustainable practices communication between slow and fast fashion brands and its impact on consumer purchase decisions. The study revealed that while consumers place a high value on sustainable practices in fashion brands, they are generally unwilling to pay premium prices for green and slow fashion brands (Gomes de Oliveira, Miranda and de Paula Dias 2022). This finding raises a controversial issue in consumer behavior research, highlighting the need for further research to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to this paradoxical consumer behavior.

Gen-Z Culture

Generation Z or Gen-Z, in short, is defined as the generation born between the mid-90s early 2010s and is the first generation to fully grow up in a digital environment (Liu and Hei 2021). Their exact age range is yet difficult to pin down due to different studies. According to Reilly and Hawley (2019), streetwear trends are born within an environment “in which brands, celebrities, magazines, bloggers, and end consumers on social media all jostle for influence over, what’s ‘in’ and ‘out’ of fashion” (Reilly and Hawley 2019, 91). A study indicates that social media is predominantly used for influential purposes by women, with 77% of them engaging in it, in contrast to only 23% of men, indicating that the fashion sector is dominated by female users (Collabstr 2023). Furthermore, research suggests that Gen-Z, known as digital pioneers, ultimately influence fashion trends by sharing their outfits, promoting brands, and creating "fashion hauls" on various social media platforms (Reilly and Hawley 2019).

According to a study by Patel and Mehta (2021), Gen-Z is primarily swayed by influencers or individuals when it comes to determining what is currently in vogue. This can be traced back to the fact that Gen-Z shoppers predominantly use social media platforms and grew up in a digital environment, where streetwear trends are prevalent. As a result, this particular consumer group is constantly being directed toward the latest streetwear trends, trying to become part of an exclusive community. Subsequently, Gen-Z developed into a more and more demanding generation of trend-hunters expecting fashion brands to be more than just a brand with a logo and name. Instead, Gen-Z demands fashion brands to reflect well-spread values including values such as equality, diversity, and foremost sustainability in their products and general image (Rosén 2022).

According to Vajkai and Zsóka (2020), for a fashion brand to stay relevant, it must reflect positive connotations with its products, that Gen-Z consumers can identify with. Research by Rosén (2022) shows that low-quality products resulting from unsustainable

production are seen as highly negative by Gen-Z consumers, whereby high-quality products are perceived as cool and relevant. Liu and Hei (2021) therefore refer to Gen-Z as the “generation green” (7), as they use sustainability and hence high quality as a status symbol distinguishing their shopping behavior from other generations. Additionally, Gen-Z is most prone to follow social trends whereby sustainability and specifically second-hand shopping primarily are seen as a current trend and accelerate an exclusivity factor. The research generally points out Gen-Z's green shopping attitude and their prone nature to hunt trends on all levels.

Gen-Z's Fashion Consumerism

A study by Nayak (2019) explores the emergence of sustainable fashion as a modern trend, a fundamental shift in consumer attitudes rather than a short-lived trend. The research highlights the consumers' desire to seek out more green fashion options. According to Gazzola et al. (2020), sustainability has become one of the most important trends that are propelling the fashion industry, as it developed into an “important new driver in consumers' purchase decisions” (3). Even though fast fashion can offer clothing options that are considered up-to-date and in vogue, it conflicts with the ethical consciousness that is prominent among younger generations.

A recent report by Unidays (2023) characterizes the attitudes of Gen-Z as environmentally aware, influencing their shopping behavior and requiring brands to prioritize sustainability to remain relevant in the market. According to the report, 67% of Gen-Z consumers demand ethical fashion while 56% prefer to buy from sustainable fashion brands over fast fashion brands, whereby the phenomenon of fast fashion was regarded as negative by 94% of the younger consumers. However contradictory to these findings, a report by Neumann, Martinez and Martinez (2020) revealed that besides having pro-environmental shopping attitudes, 62% of the Gen-Z cohort still shop at fast fashion companies monthly. Moreover, only one out of six respondents could recall the name of a sustainable fashion brand indicating

the unawareness of brands that produce green fashion. Regarding this, previous research by Saicheua et al. (2012) has shown that there is a clear gap between Gen-Z's purchase behavior and purchase intention to buy sustainable fashion, which can be attributed, in part, to a limited comprehension and insufficient information on sustainable fashion. Findings suggest that fashion brands must therefore provide greater transparency and guidance when promoting sustainable fashion.

Additionally, sustainable fashion must visually attract the attention of younger audiences (Saicheua, Cooper and Knox 2011). According to Kumar (2017), “aesthetics plays such an important role in clothing choice, it matters equally in the context of sustainability” (11), and therefore, it is essential for sustainable clothing to offer a visually pleasing appearance to its consumers. Additionally, it is most important for brands to illustrate that sustainable fashion items “can be trendy while at the same time generating social and environmental benefits” (Blanchet 2017, 38) addressing the issue of aesthetic deficiencies in sustainable clothing. Another contributing factor to the discrepancy between the consumers' intentions to purchase sustainable fashion and their actual purchase behavior, can be led back to the increased costs of sustainable fashion production that result in a premium pricing structure. According to a study by Neumann, Martinez and Martinez (2020) and Shen, Richards and Liu (2013), fundamental reasons why younger consumers tend to favor fashionable items over sustainable clothing are attributed to pricing, limited options, and inadequate aesthetics. Shen, Richards and Liu (2013), point out that a possible explanation for the relatively low demand for sustainable sneakers is the perception that sustainable products are more expensive. While fast fashion companies like H&M cut costs at all corners to keep their prices competitive, sustainable clothing brands prioritize using environmentally friendly materials throughout the production process. Consequently, these brands usually need to charge higher prices to stay profitable. The price premium of sustainable clothing is often seen as an obstacle to consuming

green (McNeill and Moore 2015), yet according to the study by Niinimäki (2015) with the growing prevalence of innovative techniques in the field, prices will be lower for sustainable fashion in the future. It is therefore important to make the consumer aware of this often-wrong price perception of sustainable garments and the benefits that come with “the use of environmentally friendly and/or organic materials, and their one-off, hand-made design” (Henninger, Alevizou and Oates 2016, 405)

2.1.2 Streetwear and Sneaker Industry

Streetwear & its Growing Popularity

As previously mentioned, street fashion or streetwear fashion is one of the most powerful dimensions of the fashion industry and regards turning clothes into a lifestyle. According to Patel & Mehta (2021), streetwear is traditionally defined by the fashion industry “as trendy, casual attire worn by Gen Z and other fans of popular culture” (53), among other things originally inspired by the hip-hop, K-pop, and skateboarding culture. The surging popularity of streetwear as a fashion trend has played a significant role in driving the growth of the fashion industry and dominating the sneaker industry. According to Tseng et al. (2020), clothes have ever since been used as a form of self-expression turning fashion into a concept that embodies a desired identity that the consumer wants to represent. It is therefore important to recognize the growing influence of streetwear brands as a major trend and determining factor for what is considered aesthetically pleasing in the fashion industry.

Within the realm of the streetwear industry, specifically the youth community is a powerful consumer cohort. Once a streetwear trend is renowned among the younger consumer groups, streetwear trends start to circulate. Subsequently, the promotion of streetwear trends within the digital environment is important for trends to faster resonate among the digital youth. Online platforms, like Hypebeast or Highsnobiety, have therefore become digital trend guides giving fashion advice to Gen-Z consumers and setting streetwear trends (Moreno 2020). In

comparison to typical fast fashion companies, such as Zara or Mango, streetwear brands follow the idea of a “cult brand” (Oe 2022, 15), to which consumers have a strong attachment and show strong loyalty.

The consumers of a streetwear brand embody unity and a certain level of exclusivity. Multiple streetwear brands therefore turned away from traditional marketing strategies and used cult branding, which includes marketing strategies that increased consumer engagement and convey a sense of belonging (Oe 2022). A study by Lee et al. (2022) suggests the use of cult branding in marketing strategies, specifically the raffle model, as a tool to boost consumer involvement. Raffles are a distribution method used by streetwear brands and include consumers joining a lottery-like process to purchase a new limited edition of a streetwear product. This appeal of exclusivity creates hype around the brand motivating consumerism and anticipation around the product (Lee et al. 2022; Iskandar and Ali 2019). Another marketing strategy often used by streetwear brands is known as the ‘drop model’. By utilizing concepts such as drop dates, which require consumers to endure long waitlists, streetwear strives to cultivate an aura of exclusivity. One may need to go to great lengths, such as camping outside a store or registering on several websites, to be among the first buyers of a newly launched pair of sneakers (Johnson 2022). With this drop model, streetwear brands establish a well-recognized brand image and hence high demand, which helps to justify higher retail prices. The brand Supreme became an expression of this success model and therefore exemplified how financially profitable a scarcity model can be. Consumers were willing to pay high prices for limited edition apparel to be “regarded as a more prestigious person” (Macedo 2015, 16) or to be part of a group they desire to identify with. As streetwear trends, similarly to general fashion trends, mostly live a short life, it inclines that streetwear generally tends to give in to fast fashion practices by producing clothes in large quantities (Bianchi 2002). However, the incorporation of sustainability practices in streetwear has been gaining significant momentum

among Gen Z, as this generation is increasingly drawn to environmentally friendly and socially conscious fashion. This shift is evident in the growing popularity of the drop model, which has motivated streetwear brands to move away from mass production and towards small-batch production (Johnson 2022).

However, as societal concerns continue to rise, the streetwear industry must explore more sustainable approaches to meet Gen-Z's demands. Deducing on these findings, it would be of interest to research more on the intersectionality between sustainable practices and streetwear to explore the potential of sustainable streetwear as a viable avenue for the future of fashion.

Sneakerheads: where Hype meets High

Examining the streetwear industry in greater detail reveals various sectors and enterprises that serve as key drivers, one of them being the sneaker industry. The word ‘flourishment’ is often used to describe the boom of the sneaker industry (Gurian 2002). Over the past few decades, the sneaker industry has experienced tremendous growth, with its value increasing from \$58 billion in 2018 to an estimated value of nearly \$88 billion in 2024 (Molokwane 2022). Considering the sneaker industry in the realm of streetwear, it is important to point out the cultural influences the sneaker industry has. A study by Cassidy (2018) introduces the term “sneakerheads” representing sneaker enthusiasts to illustrate the culture that was created around the sneaker industry. Sneakerhead is a term used for sneaker buyers that collect a variety of sneakers to become part of an exclusive subculture representing a certain type of lifestyle. The hype around the sneakers can specifically be explained through their “level of exclusivity, number of premium materials used, general aesthetics, and popularity among other collectors” (Cassidy 2018, 8).

Additionally, Patel and Mehta (2021), address the different influences the secondary sneaker market and luxury market have on this subculture. The streetwear sneaker industry has

even given rise to so-called sneaker auctions on an online platform called Stockx, predicting prices for scarce sneakers, which helps accelerate different streetwear trends (Patel and Mehta 2021). Shoppers, specifically younger consumers, are drawn to this exclusive and subcultural allure created by these limited-editions and highly anticipated sneakers (Wu, Chiu and Chen 2020). Another phenomenon that popped up within the realm of streetwear sneakers, is the idea of luxury brands collaborating with streetwear brands by creating a sense of cultural infinity (Pedeliento et al. 2021; Macedo 2015). For example, the luxury brand Jacquemus collaborated with Nike to bring the 'Nike x Jacquemus Air Humara LX' sneaker onto the market, aiming to capture the attention of their younger audience (Polfuss 2021).

This convergence of hype and high fashion justifies higher sneaker prices and additionally taps into sustainable fashion, by offering a more durable product that is made with higher quality materials and manufacturing processes (Macedo 2015). It is therefore interesting to dig deeper into how high-quality production can turn streetwear sneakers into sustainable products, while still offering feasible prices and creating hype around the product.

Sneaker Industry and Green Footprint

With a shift in consumer preferences, as Gen-Z specifically is paying more attention to sustainable production, the sneaker industry will need to shift and break ground to resonate with younger consumers. The current sneaker production practices often prioritize profits and efficiency over environmental concerns, resulting in a significant amount of waste, pollution, and depletion of natural and hazardous resources. This approach can have detrimental effects on the environment, including habitat destruction or the acceleration of climate change (Binkley 2010). Due to its carbon-intensive production processes, the sneaker industry is responsible for 1.4% of the greenhouse gas emissions while air travel takes up to 2.4% of greenhouse gas emission (Quantis 2022).

According to Perez (2022), these negative environmental impacts can be traced back to the fact that the industry is highly dependent on synthetically derived materials such as polyester or rubber, which are derived from fossil fuels and other chemicals. Kirchain, Reed Miller and Greene (2015) found that the production of one rubber sole, for many sneakers, leads to an estimated 1.1 kg CO₂e and produces a CO₂e impact equivalent to driving a car for 2.5 miles. Other materials such as leather are also highly resource intensive. The process of tanning leather can create hazardous waste and requires a big amount of water. Using leather for producing a sneaker takes up to 1.7 square feet of leather having a carbon footprint of 10kg CO₂e (Kirchain, Reed Miller and Greene 2015).

Therefore, with greater consumption of sneakers, it is crucial to take environmental concerns into account throughout the manufacturing process. The World Footwear Business Survey (2020) has found that sustainability concerns have become one of the most powerful drivers in sales performance, being on the same rank as the ‘fashion trend’ concerns (WorldFootwear 2021). According to Kwak et al. (2023), sneaker brands have come to understand that sustainability issues are important to address and that “CO₂ emissions in the footwear industry come mostly from materials processing and manufacturing, rather than logistics, use, and disposal” (4). Therefore, different approaches have been introduced to turn sneakers into sustainable products, whereby sneaker manufacturing firms should mainly focus on using innovation to design, manufacture and produce greener shoes. Additionally, Joshua (2021) instigated the previously mentioned concept of circular design whereby the sneaker is made sustainably end-to-end. This accompanies being fully recyclable. Another approach for the sustainable production of sneakers is the prior mentioned and popular concept of ecodesign, which utilizes low-impact materials to produce more efficiently and reduce any environmental impacts (Vezzoli and Manzini 2008). Perez (2022) taps into the concept of ecodesign and additionally introduces a range of low-impact and “Polyester-based fabrics can be replaced by

Biosteel, Climatex (9). He additionally introduces a range of alternative sustainable materials that serve as equivalent to leather including “Appleskin, BeLeaf™, BioVeg, Biocouture, Cellulosic Fiber, Cactus Leather” (Perez 2022, 9).

There are multiple fast followers within the realm of eco-friendly sneakers as they start to use alternative sustainable materials for shoe production. One of them is the French brand VEJA, which utilizes ecological production methods, such as using recycled cotton from textile industry cuttings, to produce their sneakers (Leglay 2021). Big brands like Adidas also followed the sustainability trend and brought a sustainable sneaker collection to the market, selling 11 million eco-conscious sneakers, all made of ocean plastic. The company announced to further develop collections fully manufactured of biobased materials specifically “biodegradable biopolymers produced in large-scale bioreactors, the material called bio steel” (Baier, Rausch and Wagner 2020, 8). According to research by Kwak et al. (2023), there is an optimistic market projection for the sustainable footwear sector, with an anticipated value of USD 11.8 billion by 2027. This optimistic outlook for the sustainable sneaker industry underscores the importance of further investigation into the literature on sustainability and streetwear trends in the realm of the sneaker industry.

2.1.3 The Paradox of Streetwear and Sustainability

The Clash between Sustainability and Streetwear Trends

Fashion is reflecting what society wants, being oversaturated with emerging trends. Trends are what we understand as the focal point of what is perceived to be an aesthetic and what the consumer can find or cannot find in retail stores. It is a concept that dictates what is out-of or up-to-date in fashion and therefore tells the consumer which fashion items one should invest in and in which not (Mackinney-Valentin 2010). Trends within the streetwear industry can be born at night and die the next morning, meaning they are fast-paced, making it hard for companies to adapt.

In comparison to general fashion trends, streetwear appeals to a highly influential consumer cohort, being present on social media channels, which subsequently helps spread any new trend even faster. With this being the case, it is hard to identify the longevity of a streetwear trend hence “making it difficult for fashion companies to produce fashion that is sustainable – both economically and environmentally” (Reilly & Hawley 2019, 90-91). Due to the competitive nature of the streetwear industry, fast fashion became the predominant sensation and a necessity for streetwear brands to stay relevant in a trend-sensitive environment. Consequently, the pace of the streetwear industry has accelerated more, causing more waste, water consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions. Hur and Cassidy (2019) address the issue of the fast-paced trend of nature by relating it to environmental issues. The continuous process of producing trendy streetwear fashion starts in contrast to producing sustainable fashion as “the term ‘sustainable’ is essentially associated with longevity or maintenance at a certain level; it is derived from the function of ecosystems that assist themselves over periods of time” (Hur and Cassidy 2019, 5). Hence, the conflict arises whether the philosophy of sustainability can even be implemented within the streetwear industry, which is characterized by a strong emphasis on transient trends boosted through Gen-Z online behavior.

Concerning this, Geraffo’s research (2019) on trends and streetwear emphasizes how streetwear trends relate to more wastefulness as they need to be delivered at the speed of a dynamic digital environment and work with even stronger cultural pressures to remain relevant in the community. Similarly, the overproduction of streetwear fashion due to mindless consumerism, characterized by the desire for the latest and most exclusive fashion items, is highlighted in Cavusoglu and Dakhli’s study (2017). This trend-driven behavior can result in a self-cannibalizing pattern resembling the production and consumption practices of fast fashion. Additionally, sustainability and streetwear often clash due to the price misconception consumers have, as sustainable clothes are often perceived as more costly scaring consumers

off, which can discourage particularly Gen-Z consumers with limited financial resources. Subsequently, this can create a barrier for sustainable streetwear to thrive (Saicheua, Cooper and Knox 2011).

A study by Brandão and Gonçalves da Costa (2021) reviews the common misconception that sustainable fashion is inherently more expensive by comparing the retail prices of sustainable and non-sustainable clothing items. For instance, a Nike sneaker made from non-sustainable materials and a VEJA sneaker produced with vegan leather, both fall within the same price range. This can be ascribed to the distinct pricing criteria of both brands, whereby the price of a Nike sneaker is predominantly determined by its brand image, and the cost of an environmentally friendly VEJA sneaker is evaluated based on its use of organic materials. Subsequently, the comparison emphasizes the necessity of communicating the true value of sustainable fashion and practices to the consumer (Brandão and da Costa 2021).

3. Conclusion

This literature review helped to gain insight into the paradox that Gen-Z consumers embody towards sustainability and following trends within the streetwear industry. For further research, it would be subsequently of interest to dive deeper into the streetwear sneaker industry and sustainability, by researching what a common Gen-Z sneakerhead, who usually consumes trend-leading fashion items, values specifically in sneakers. Thereby it would be of interest to identify specific attributes Gen-Z consumers pay attention to when buying a sneaker, and how this can be adapted to streetwear and sustainable trends.

It could be of further interest to investigate what would need to change in terms of production and promotion of such a sneaker to make it attractive for the Gen-Z consumer. In terms of greener sneaker production, concepts such as the circular design or the general use decomposable materials, could be considered. Regarding promotional techniques, research could dive deeper into the efficiency marketing models such as the drop and raffle.

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