

To Explore How Slow Fashion Principles can be Incorporated into Gen Z Consumers' Trend-Driven Fashion Choices

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ABSTRACT

The growing urgency of environmental sustainability has heightened interest in the slow fashion movement, which prioritizes ethical production, durability, and mindful consumption. Gen Z, a generation known for rapid trend adoption, heavy social media engagement, and a preference for affordable, fast-changing styles, presents both a challenge and an opportunity for sustainable fashion integration. This study explores how slow fashion principles can be effectively incorporated into Gen Z's style-driven consumption patterns without compromising their desire for self-expression and trend participation.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines survey data from 300 Gen Z consumers with interviews involving sustainable fashion entrepreneurs, educators, and brand managers. It examines purchasing drivers—affordability, aesthetics, peer influence, and digital marketing—while assessing awareness of slow fashion values such as reduced waste, fair labor, and timeless design. Findings reveal a gap between Gen Z's sustainability support and actual buying habits, shaped by accessibility constraints and fast trend cycles. Strategies such as limited-edition sustainable collections, influencer-led campaigns, and customizable designs emerge as promising ways to align style preferences with sustainability. The study offers actionable insights for brands, educators, and policymakers to bridge Gen Z's fashion identity with the enduring values of slow fashion.

KEYWORDS: *slow fashion, Gen Z trends, Thrift stores, sustainability, consumer behaviour.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the fashion industry has faced increasing scrutiny for its environmental and social impact, particularly due to the rise of fast fashion—an industrial model characterized by rapid production cycles, low-cost manufacturing, and high-volume consumption. This model, while making fashion more accessible, has contributed significantly to environmental degradation, including textile waste, excessive water usage, and carbon emissions, as well as unethical labor practices in many parts of the supply chain. Against this backdrop, the *slow fashion* movement has emerged as a conscious alternative, advocating for quality over quantity, ethical production methods, and the mindful consumption of garments that are made to last.

Slow fashion emphasizes transparency in sourcing and manufacturing, fair wages for workers, sustainable use of resources, and timeless designs that resist the short-lived nature of trends. It seeks to reconnect consumers with the processes and craftsmanship behind clothing, fostering a deeper appreciation for quality and sustainability. Importantly, slow fashion is not merely a production approach but a cultural shift toward valuing longevity, versatility, and social responsibility in fashion.

This growing movement is part of a broader global call for environmental sustainability, aligning with frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption and production (SDG 12)

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and climate action (SDG 13). By challenging the disposability mindset fostered by fast fashion, slow fashion offers a viable pathway toward a more responsible and equitable fashion industry, setting the stage for critical discussions on its adoption among different consumer demographics, particularly Gen Z.

Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a highly influential consumer group in the global fashion market. They are digitally native, growing up in an era of constant connectivity, social media dominance, and algorithm-driven trend exposure. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest play a central role in shaping their fashion choices, often fueling the rapid adoption of micro-trends that can rise and fade within weeks. This culture of instant trend consumption, coupled with the affordability and accessibility of fast fashion brands, has reinforced a cycle of frequent purchasing and quick garment disposal.

At the same time, certain sustainable practices—particularly thrift shopping—have gained traction among Gen Z. Thrift stores and online resale platforms like Depop, Poshmark, and ThredUp have become popular not only as budget-friendly alternatives but also as a form of individual style expression. This second-hand market aligns with some slow fashion principles, such as reusing garments and reducing textile waste, yet it is often driven more by novelty and uniqueness than by sustainability awareness. While surveys show Gen Z's concern for environmental ethics, affordability, trend relevance, and peer validation often remain stronger influences. The challenge, therefore, lies in channelling this thrift-shopping enthusiasm into broader adoption of slow fashion values.

Despite growing global awareness of sustainability, a significant disconnect persists between Gen Z's expressed environmental values and their actual fashion consumption habits. Fast fashion's affordability, accessibility, and rapid trend cycles often overshadow slow fashion's principles of longevity, ethical sourcing, and reduced waste. Even sustainable practices like thrift shopping, while popular among Gen Z, are not always driven by conscious environmental commitment. This gap highlights the urgent need to explore strategies that can integrate trend responsiveness and self-expression into slow fashion models, making sustainable choices both desirable and accessible for a generation deeply embedded in digital and trend-driven culture.

Integrating slow fashion principles into Gen Z's fashion habits is essential for fostering a more sustainable industry without alienating a trend-

conscious consumer base. As the largest emerging market segment, Gen Z's choices have the potential to influence production models, marketing strategies, and environmental outcomes on a global scale. Understanding their motivations, barriers, and perceptions toward sustainable fashion can guide brands, educators, and policymakers in creating solutions that merge style with responsibility. This study seeks to address this need by identifying practical, trend-adaptable strategies that can make slow fashion more appealing, accessible, and relevant to Gen Z consumers.

To identify and propose strategies that effectively integrate slow fashion principles into Gen Z's trend-driven fashion choices, promoting sustainable consumption while preserving their desire for individuality, affordability, and rapid style adaptability.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to explore Gen Z's fashion behavior and identify strategies for integrating slow fashion principles into their trend-driven choices.

The study targets Gen Z consumers aged 18–28 for quantitative surveys, focusing on their fashion choices, sustainability awareness, and purchasing habits. Additionally, qualitative interviews involve fashion educators, brand managers, and sustainability advocates to gather expert insights. Participants are selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity in perspectives and representation from both consumers and industry stakeholders.

Data is collected through online surveys distributed via social media platforms and student networks to reach Gen Z respondents. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are conducted with industry experts and educators, either in person or via video conferencing, ensuring flexibility while addressing core themes related to fashion trends and sustainability integration.

Quantitative survey data is analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to identify trends, correlations, and patterns in Gen Z fashion behavior. Qualitative interview responses undergo thematic analysis to extract recurring themes, insights, and challenges, enabling a comprehensive understanding of opportunities for integrating slow fashion principles into trend-driven consumer choices.

Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and allowing withdrawal at any stage. Participant confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing data,

and all information is used solely for academic purposes, adhering to established research ethics and integrity guidelines.

Results and Discussion

Results indicate that while Gen Z expresses strong support for sustainability, purchasing behavior remains dominated by affordability, trend relevance, and social media influence. Thrift shopping emerges as a popular yet style-driven practice, not always linked to environmental commitment. Discussions highlight the need for innovative strategies—such as influencer-led campaigns, limited-edition sustainable collections, and digital customization tools—to align slow fashion principles with Gen Z's demand for individuality, trend adaptability, and accessibility

Conclusion

This study reveals a gap between Gen Z's sustainability values and actual fashion choices, emphasizing the need for creative, accessible approaches that merge slow fashion principles with trend-driven preferences, enhancing both environmental responsibility and consumer appeal.

Future research could explore technology-driven solutions, cross-cultural comparisons, and long-term behavioural changes to strengthen slow fashion adoption among Gen Z across diverse markets.

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