

Research Proposal

Generation Z and Gender Fluidity in Fashion Industry: How Zoomers Are Impacting on Consumer Behaviour. A Case Study of Asos - Collusion

Student Alessandro Ledda - 1921858

Field Marketing

Supervisor Tushara Balendran

Introduction

Gender fluidity is the topic that is crossing most of the aspects in the world's economy: the global diffusion of pronouns he/him, she/her, they/them; also, Germany is the second European Country to adopt the intersex gender status, allowing people to switch their gender, confirmed by medical certification; London has been one of the first cities to introduce gender neutral public toilets; ready-to wear and luxury fashion companies are driving their strategy into genderless collection, creating sometimes proper communities. The online fashion store Asos, for instance, is still collaborating with *Zoomers* influencers for *Collusion*, a total gender neutral collection; also, Gucci is still promoting the self identity expression through celebrity endorsement, showing Harry Styles as main symbol of fluidity. For all of these aspects, the balance is showed by the Generation Z (Zommers), aged between 15 and 21: the new target is asking for the companies to be more inclusive about all types of identity, generating a new paradigm even for the marketing and new variables by the consumer perspective. This study want to analyse the marketing literature, by the fashion perspective, considering the evolution about the gender role in the consumer behaviour, starting when blue meant masculine and pink as feminine, until the overcome of the binary duo. The focus on Generation Z and its characteristics will explain why the topic of the gender identity is straightly linked to the fashion consumerism and how it is evolving into fluidity, destroying masculinity and femininity stereotypes. Genderless Fashion is, more than ever, referring to the conception of garments without prescribed to a predefined gender during design. As mirror of the society, fashion is redefining the parameters of the binary identity, through fluidity, responding to the new needs of Generation Z, as much young as mature to understand values and drive own decision about integrity and inclusivity. The evolution of that new consumer behaviour is evolving the redefinition of the socio-cultural references about masculinity and femininity factors and drivers. Usual unisex collections are leaving the scene to more powerful extensions: this is the reason why fashion and beauty companies are offering

Research question

- How Generation Z is approaching to gender identities?
- How Generation Z is influencing the Consumer Behaviour?
- Is the Fashion Industry improving the Generation Z self-expression?

Aim and objectives of the Research

Aim

The aim of this research is to understand how Generation Z and its gender identity conception are influencing the Fashion Market, as temporary trend or, most probably, as present and future.

Research Objectives

- To ascertain how the *progressive* approach of Generation Z is changing social norms about gender identities
- To establish how the Generation Z *lifestyle* is reflecting on Consumer Behaviour, in terms of needs and desires
- To establish if a specific gender fluid collection, like *Collusion* of Asos, is considered by Generation Z, to support their own identity

Literature Review

Gender and Consumer Behaviour

The initial reluctant attitude towards gender identity was based in the interchanged use of "gender" and "sex", activating a debate; according to Deaux (1985) and his psychological point of view, it is possible use sex in reference to biological factors and gender for the psychological characteristics associated with sex, socially constructed.

At the same time, literature has always specified the difference between *gender role concepts* and *attitudes on the gender role*: gender role involves the behaviours and activities that are culturally derived and related to masculinity and femininity to which an individual chooses to adapt; attitudes on the role of gender refer, instead, to the personal conventions of the individual with respect to the rights and responsibilities of men and women.

Gender identity refers to how an individual identifies himself/herself with male and female personality traits. There is agreement among researchers on these traits, to consider the female ones towards communal / expressive tendencies and the male ones towards instrumental / agency tendencies. The main evolution of that approach can be seen in the Conferences of the ACR - *Association for Consumer Research*: since the first one in 1991 entitled *Gender and Consumer Behavior* and focused on the typical differences between men and women, as different responses to the same stimuli, through the 1996 one entitled *Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behavior*, indicating the central role of Marketing in the study of gender (prominent was Thompson and Haytko's study of gender and fashion, a theme subsequently developed and published in the 1997 *Journal of Consumer Research*), and the 2004 Conference focused on Judith Butler's gender theories (*Gender Trouble*, 1990 and *Bodies That Matter*, 1993) and new studies about, cross-dressers and LGBT consumers, until

Since 1963, 31 empirical analysis have been conducted regarding consumer behaviour and focused on gender identity. According to Bam's Gender Scheme Theory (BGT, 1981), individuals acquire and exhibit traits and behaviours consistent with their gender identity, seen as the function of self-organisation, through which individuals process information about themselves and the world around them.

The Multifactorial Gender Identity Theory (MGT, Feather 1984; Spence 1984, 1991; Taylor and Hall 1982) contradicts Bam's one, considering the gender phenomena are multifactorial in nature and as desirable traits of gendered personality which constitute a factor: masculinity and femininity are distinct concepts from gender role expectations, attitudes and preferences.

New throes are building a new interpretation, through the deconstruction, with the aim of the binary oppositions which, like a domino effect, generated indefinite dichotomies: male - female, mind - body, reason - emotion. However, faced with this gender fluidity, feminists still argue the importance of sex, boycotting the relevance of masculinity in everyday life. This is especially the case when quality of life indicators such as education, health and income see women as widely disadvantaged.

Nowadays there is also a deconstruction of the gender in marketing point of view: through the years studies showed relations between gender and technologies, in production and consumption. The technological devices followed the gender by association process: in fact, according to Schwanen, T., & Morahan-Martin, J. (2014) there are few domestic technologies used by males and females at the same time, or those white technologies that are now instinctively connected to women (washing machine). According to Li, N., & Kirkup, G. (2007), other types of non-domestic technologies or black / brown technologies are related to males (electric - musical drills). For the design also, studies showed how white technologies as easy to understand and unattractive, while they pay more attention to leisure technologies, associated with cutting-edge work. Through the new concept of gender identity, technologies can be studied in their new use, as in the case of the microwave oven, originally designed for men. Another example is represented by wireless, known as with a masculine term precisely because it was initially addressed to males.

Brands and Cross-gender extensions

According to Kapferer (1991, 2004) it is necessary to define the difference between *image* and *brand identity*, where the identity reflects the values that the company wants to transmit and pass on, while the image is the same brand perceived by consumers. Identity, to which cultural anthropology approaches the principle of permanence which allows the individual to remain the same and persist in his being despite the alterations of the roles he plays.

According to Floch (1995; Roux and Floch, 1996) two components of the brand's identity are the aesthetic invariants (the recognisable meanings of the brand) and the ethical invariants: gender is part of both aesthetic and ethical invariants and refers to strong associations (Remaury, 2004; Park and al, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2004). The male-female opposition is a semantic axis that describes culture and becomes the starting point for understanding brands as cultural products, containers of shared meanings: a brand will have gender if it will contain, together with aesthetic and ethical invariants, also female values or male.

Brands use codes, signs and symbols to refer to feminine and masculine values in fiction, advertising and retail: gender as a variant allows the brand to establish relationships between males and females (Remaury, 2004). Cross-gender extensions (extensions from the male to the female market and vice versa) translate the brand identity for the opposite segment, as physical similarity, conceptual form and typicality. Physical similarity compares the material characteristics of the products, but the brand is not only composed of products, so the others take over, such as the conceptual form that analyses the connection between the different products of the brands and the typicality that compares the concrete characteristics and abstract that turn out to be the same or different.

Fashion between gender and social identity

The self expression, in consumerist culture, becomes a reflective project that is modelled through the consumer's choices; representing the body as a communicative text, gender performance revolves around this: femininity and masculinity. According to Jean-François Lyotard (1984), contemporary media offer the opportunity to create new identities; Jean Baudrillard (1983) affirms the presence of changing pseudo-identities that revolve around the concept of simulation, particularly through deconstructing codes and meanings, where parody, mimesis, irony become the foundations for new representations of gender.

According to Marjorie Garber (1993) another key to playing with the genre seems to be the cross-dressing, where clothes take on a symbolic role. Cross-dressing arises as a critique of the binary system, but it still needs to specify the difference between cross-dressing and cross-over, the latter being a form of cross-dressing, more socially accepted and corresponding to the woman wearing men's clothes and the man wearing clothes and feminine accessories.

The male segment of generation Y had already initiated greater awareness for the way of dressing and presenting themselves, responding positively to fashion (Bakewell, Cathy, Mitchell, Vincent and Rothwell, Morgan 2006): Duboff (2014) refers to these men with the terms *yummy* and *young urban men*. As Beynon (2002) explains, men are not born with an inherent degree of masculinity, but are guided towards it by social codes; this is the reason why some males have been conditioned by the fear of being considered perhaps too feminine compared to fashion. Studies have shown how environments deemed safe can encourage creativity to challenge masculine hegemony.

Constant social changes require new interpretative skills and one of these is the technology: it has been analysed how women have less positive personal fears and opinions towards the cyber world. This attitude could be connected to the fact that technologies are identified as non-neutral, obviously to the detriment of the female segment and as a domino effect, Li and Kirkup (2007) explain, how the gender gap that has developed in usage has also been reflected online: females who shop online are more involved in fashion and have a higher awareness than men. Genderless fashion also could allow companies to rethink traditional communication practices, with the aim of

attracting new customers, cooperating in creating the identity of potential customers, which will result in loyalty (Ross, 2010).

Latest Updates

In the last years, literature has still analysed clothing genderless in all its complexity, through : many areas of study such as sociology, fashion design and marketing giving a multidisciplinary character to this investigation (B. Reis & R. Miguel M. Pereira, S. Azevedo, N. A. Jerónim, *Genderless clothing issues in fashion*, 2018 Conference Paper); colours and gender (Hong, YunJung, Joo, Mi Young, *A Study on Characteristics of Pink Color and Fashion Images Used in Gender Neutral Men's Fashion*, 2020 Journal of Fashion Business); body image and shapes (Vasan, S., , Pujar, R. S., & S. Gopalakrishnan S., *The shape and size for designing the unisex clothing: A study*, 2019, International Journal of Human Resource); gender neutral advertising (Stavrianea, A., Kamenidou, I, Kanaouti, S., Theodosios, A., *Stereotypes and gender-neutral advertising: perceptions of the Generation Z and Y cohorts*, 2021, Asia Pacific Journal of Advanced Business and Social Studies); gender neutral identity pronouns (Tony Sun, Kellie Webster, Apu Shah, William Yang Wang, Melvin Johnson, *They, Them, Theirs: Rewriting with Gender-Neutral English*, 2021, University of California - Santa Barbara).

Methodology and Methods

Methodology

The purpose of the research is to to gain familiarity with the phenomena of gender fluidity in Fashion, through an exploratory prospective; this is the reason why the choice has been between *qualitative* and *quantitative* types. In the case of *motivation research*, including human behaviours, qualitative approach is usually considered more correct for the purpose. However, given for consolidated the phenomena as main characteristic for Generation Z, the researcher has chosen a **quantitative** methodology research, following an interpretative approach, to analyse the quantity of social actors, linked to the fashion field.

Methods

Data collection is the process to measuring variables of interest, to answer research questions stated research questions, and evaluate outcomes. Methods should ensure accurate and honest collection, starting with from data required followed, until the selection of a sample. Quantitative data follow a mathematic nature, through different scales and standardised approach. The researcher has chosen to follow:

- Primary data - *Questionnaire*, to identify how many people of Generation Z consider themselves as a gender fluidity supporters;
- Secondary Data - *Reports, Published Censuses*, to create an updated analysis about the target of Generation Z.

Approach

The researcher has chosen to follow an interpretative approach, reaching a conclusion through the data collection.

Sample Size

The researcher will be based on a sample size of 50 participants.

Sample Type

The sample type will include Zoomers participants: Generation Z includes people aged between 7 - 22 (1997- 2014). The researcher has chosen to focused on adults participants, including all type of gender (males, females, and non-binary).

Analys quantitative data

The interoperation of the data will be through Microsoft Excel., allowing the researcher in the creation of charts, graphs, and diagrams.

Research Ethics

The research ethics will follow a responsible conduct of norms, values, cultures, and behaviours, focusing on the welfare of participants and society.

Considering gender and gender identities as sensible data that need to be protected, the researcher has considered ethical issues that need to be maintained during the process of the research:

- a) The aim of the research will be explained in details
- b) Consent from participants will be taken, prior the research
- c) Anonymity of participants will be maintained
- d) No confidential data will be asked and participants will decide if bypass any questionnaire question

Gantt Chart

[illegible]

References

A Study of Clothing Purchasing Behavior By Gender with Respect to Fashion and Brand Awareness, Koca-Koc, European Scientific Journal, 2016/12-7

Brand gender and cross-gender extensions, Veg - Nyeck, Centre de Recherche DSMP, 2007/364

Gender fluidity in the age of technologically mediated environments: Implications for Fashion Industry, Hickman-Ozuem-Okoya, Advances in Marketing, Customer Relationship Management, and E-Services, 2017

Gender Identity in Consumer Behavior Research: A Literature Review and Research Agenda, Kay M. Palan, Academy of Marketing Science, 2001 No. 10

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION, S. M. Sajjad Kabir, Curtin University, 2016

Quantitative Data Collection Methods, M. Busair Ahmad, Nile University of Nigeria, 2019