

## **Identity & Self Expression: Rethinking Fashion Marketing Strategies to Target Gen-X Women**

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### **Abstract**

Stereotypical ideas of ageing are prevalent within the fashion industry, both in terms of advertising and product offerings (Hill, 2020). The fashion industry's ideas of ageing produces and reproduces ideas of gender and age that often contribute to stereotyping, as well as dictating dominant power structures within society (Edstrom, 2018). Within fashion literature Generation-X women are often overlooked, focusing instead on Generation-Y and Generation-Z consumers who are considered more fashion orientated and more likely to buy fashion more frequently. Similarly, fashion marketers present younger models to portray brands, assuming Generation-X women are not suitable role models to attract younger female demographics (Salfino, 2019).

Gen-X women have a larger disposable income than the younger Gen-Y and Gen-Z consumers, they are settled in their careers, unlike the majority of Gen-Z consumers and have fewer family financial commitments than Gen-Y women (Fernando-Hor-Meyll & Pinto Godoy, 2018). A change has occurred in the behaviour of mature female consumers, in particular Gen-X women, who have adopted an individualistic mindset, spending on themselves, unlike previous generations, who worried about the inheritance they would leave their children (mintel, 2020). Many Gen-X women are enthusiastic about fashion, primarily due to this group of consumers having the financial means to purchase high quality fashion products, (Salfino, 2020). A study conducted by Goshtai (2020) which explored the spending power of various segments of the UK population, through analysing data from a range of publicly and commercially available sources, such as the edited Electoral Roll, the UK Census and permission-based market research data – taken from lifestyle questionnaires, found that Generation-X females are currently at the peak of their powers earning, spending

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and contributing more than females of any other generation. This year, Generation-X females look set to retain their place in the driving seat of the UK economy. Their levels of income, taxation contributions and spending in almost all areas are higher than every other age group. Furthermore, given their superior savings potential, they look set to continue in this role for some time. Collectively, this presents Generation-X women as both highly influential and lucrative to fashion marketers and retailers. Therefore, this study intends to build on the findings of Goshtai (2020) by developing an understanding of how Generation-X females consume fashion to construct their identity, thus, forewarning marketers of societal advances whilst providing practical solutions to enable fashion retailers to target this demographic whom are affluent and active within fashion consumption.

This research aims to create a more inclusive fashion environment through exploring how Generation-X women (born between 1965-1980) navigate the current fashion market and examining the extent to which this powerful demographic are challenging stereotypes surrounding aging, womanhood and fashion consumption. Data was collected through Z-MET interviews. Consumer behaviour research relies on qualitative methods such as interviews and consumption diaries which are based on written or verbal interactions (Chen, 2008). Karlins & Navarro (2014) critique this form of research, arguing that research that is based solely on written or verbal interactions will miss critical details- after all, 90 per cent of human communication is non-verbal. ZMET has the ability to uncover these often-missed critical details which are elicited from non-verbal cues-due to ZMET being created using visual and other sensory images to obtain the metaphors of consumers, which in turn adds robust insights and explanations to research (Sugai, 2005).

The aim of the Z-MET interviews was to develop an understanding of how Generation-X women construct their identities through fashion and related accessories. The participants were asked to provide eight photographs, advertisements, drawings or other visual media, which conveyed their thoughts and feelings about fashion as a Generation-X woman. Due to the ongoing global pandemic and the need for social distancing, data were conducted remotely through a mediated interface for collage construction which was created to incorporate online video technology. While Z-MET interviews are a well-established methodology, the move to an online platform is a novel approach.

A purposive sample of 12 Gen-X women was selected for the investigation using personal solicitation. Depending on the topic, the number of participants can be increased until the interviews no longer reveal new core themes. After the point of saturation is reached, the addition of new participants is not necessary (Anghelcev et al., 2015). In this study, saturation was evident in the 10th-12th interviews, at which point no additional informants were contacted. All informants were familiar with the topic of fashion and identity as a Generation-X woman. Knowledge of the topic is a necessary condition in ZMET investigations (Christensen and Olson, 2002). The data collection process was followed by narrative and metaphoric analysis.

Preliminary findings of the study will be presented at the conference. It is predicted that this study will provide practical solutions that will enable fashion retailers to overcome stereotypical notions of ageing and mature womanhood and effectively target the powerful Generation-X women. It is anticipated that this research will also enrich the field of consumer behaviour, as well as informing fashion design, marketing, and management practices of how best to understand Generation-X women. Adopting a Z-MET approach will also enable fashion retailers to gain a competitive advantage as well as aiding researchers in understanding how a new offering fits with consumers' mental models (Geurts & Lawrence, 2006). Therefore, this novel methodology will enable marketers to identify how existing product offerings could be altered to generate superior connections with Generation-X women, ultimately making the fashion industry a more inclusive environment.

**Keywords:** gen-x, identity creation, ZMET, inclusivity

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