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	<i>Please provide the following:</i>
Six keywords (separated by commas)	Streetwear, Luxury, Fashion, Consumerism, Socio-economic, Culture
Your LEAD QUESTION	How has streetwear been impacted socially, culturally and economically, by luxury fashion and its integration of streetwear styles?
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How has streetwear been impacted socially, culturally and economically, by luxury fashion and its integration of streetwear styles?

Name: Malique Cox-Patrice

Course: BA (Hons) Digital Marketing

Year of graduation: 2024

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Introduction

“Ultimately, the consumer is more important than the gatekeeper: that’s why streetwear has become so popular even in high fashion” (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.33)

This dissertation looks to explore the influential figures behind the development of streetwear’s cultural and socio-economic position today. The exploration of this dissertation question is deemed to be significant as it takes us through the responsibility luxury fashion has, regarding streetwear’s proliferate growth from niche to mainstream, due to its integration of streetwear styles. Importantly, the dissertation question was posed the way it was, as it allows for a deeper analysis of human psychology when looking into why we make purchases and allows for further investigation into the potential future of streetwear.

I was motivated to write about this question as I aim to pursue a career as a luxury streetwear brand owner and designer. Within this dissertation, I have the desire to develop more of an esoteric understanding of the factors that have helped streetwear to traverse to its current state. Therefore, it is imperative that I investigate the historical origins of streetwear, the significance of consumption and the streetwear’s potential future landscape.

This dissertation will be broken down into three chapters. Chapter One will discuss the growth and history of streetwear culture, touching on luxury fashion's significance and the sequential birth of luxury streetwear. As a primary data source, I will use a written interview I recorded with Ahmal Cox-Patrice, a retail worker at luxury fashion stockist Flannels to get an authentic perspective of streetwear’s performance in luxury fashion retailers. Furthermore, I will use modern case studies, statistics and academic reviews. Chapter 2 will explore the attitudes and behaviour within streetwear culture, to expose how we perform identity through our clothes and the practice of consumption. This will be done through the analysis of Thorstein Veblen's theories on conspicuous consumption and pecuniary emulation. Additionally, there will be a focus on Carl Rogers' theory of self-actualisation and one's desire to

achieve their ideal self. Moreover, embedded within the chapter will be primary data statistics from a survey I conducted looking into luxury streetwear consumer behaviour and spending habits. Finally, chapter 3 will look at the potential future trajectory of streetwear, considering the possible impact that luxury fashion, sustainability concerns, fast fashion and streetwear itself may have on streetwear's evolution or devolution. To do this I will analyse current streetwear examples and discuss primary data findings on the environmental concern of luxury streetwear consumers.

Throughout the dissertation chapters, I will be referencing the books *Ametora* by W. David Marx, *Burberry Days* by Brian Kitson and *Abloh-isms* By Virgil Abloh and edited by Larry Warsh. I will especially reference the opinions and ideas of the late Virgil Abloh. Even after his unfortunate death, Virgil Abloh is still a very significant figure within luxury streetwear. As the previous creative director of luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton and the owner of the successful streetwear brand Off-white, the conversations and opinions of Virgil will be of great assistance within this dissertation.

Chapter One:

The birth of luxury streetwear; luxury fashion and the growth and history of streetwear culture

Introduction

The drastic dynamic shifts that have occurred within luxury fashion, along with the birth and proliferate growth of streetwear culture in recent years, are two instrumental explanations that aid us in establishing the current situation of the fashion industry today. This chapter will investigate the subsequent ascension of streetwear, as a culture and a movement, in light of luxury fashion's integration of streetwear styles and its transition into the mainstream.

Historical context

To gain a sufficient understanding of the current state of streetwear culture and its affinity with luxury fashion, it is necessary that we explore its historical roots. The origins of luxury fashion expose us to its traditional association with offering exclusivity, privileged experiences, and expensive clothing to high-end, middle class and above, clientele. However, when looking through a corporate lens, it is clear to us that today it is more lucrative for luxury fashion brands to diversify their original fashion pieces and produce their take on trendy fashion subcultures, with streetwear being one of the most significant fashion subgenres, to generate higher profit margins and better grasp sizeable and new customer bases.



Figure 1: Group of youths at a meet, wearing streetwear clothing (The Comm, 2020)

Streetwear, is a fashion subculture that was birthed from urban inner-city Streets, in the late 80s and early 90s, with heavy influence from hip-hop music and culture, skateboarding culture and Japanese street fashion, as perfectly encapsulated within Figure 1. From the beginning, streetwear culture was rooted in rituals such as collecting rare clothing and accessories, re-selling items for profit, thrifting, upcycling and re-imagining classic clothing aesthetics such as punk aesthetics, construction, sportswear etc. Items from some of the biggest streetwear-producing clothing brands today such as Bape, Supreme, Off-White etc, had consumers purchasing items from early collections that they hoped would rise in value as these brands grew and gained popularity. The ritual to re-sell streetwear items also gained popularity due to the perceived value increase that these limited streetwear items held. This is further reinforced in W. David Marx's book *Ametora*, as Marx mentions how "the promise of high resale value only encouraged further consumption. A teenager told *Asahi Shimbun* in 1997, "I don't care about the price. If I get sick of it, I'll just sell it off" (W. David Marx, 2015, p. 183).

Streetwear is a subgenre of fashion given life majorly by working-class, inner-city youths; the early 2000s saw exponential growth for streetwear culture, giving birth to

significant inner subcultural tropes such as the "hypebeast". "At its origins, hypebeast is a derogatory term. A hypebeast is a person who lives and breathes fashion and gets [the] most expensive, most 'hyped' streetwear" (Nautica Competition, no date). In addition, new rituals formed, like "copping" (buying) exclusive "drops" (collection/ items releases) at retail prices to resell them at a profit later, or queuing overnight in long lines outside popular streetwear stores, notably Supreme, Stussy And Bape etc, in an attempt to be lucky enough to purchase a limited or exclusive item.

Figure 1 illustrates the youthful adoption, nonconformity and individuality streetwear fashion has always offered to its consumers. However, it is also a testament to why for a long while, although more quietly today, this non-conforming subculture was "once positioned as anti-fashion" (Huggard and Cope, 2020). The idea of streetwear being non-conforming comes from its gender neutrality and its tendency to break hidden societal dress codes. When analysing Huggard and Cope's 2020 academic review book titled, "Communicating Fashion Brands Theoretical and Practical Perspectives" (Huggard and Cope, 2020), the idea put forward is that luxury fashion brands have adapted to social changes in modern society by utilising different elements of streetwear culture like, for instance, the "streetwear model of the product drop" (Huggard and Cope, 2020), therefore exposing the idea that luxury fashion brands not only create streetwear products but also implement streetwear methodology into their operations. This information gives possible explanations for some of the historical developments that paved the way for the rise of streetwear fashion and its subsequent integration into luxury fashion.

Brand collaborations, cultural influences and celebrity endorsements



Figure 2: Model wearing Adidas x Gucci collection items (Gucci, 2022)

Much of streetwear's profit, status, sales and popularity growth can be attributed to its integration into luxury fashion. A vital area to analyse comes through brand adaptations and collaborations between luxury fashion and streetwear brands. In recent years, luxury brands have looked into strategic adaptation such as collaboration with streetwear brands, in an attempt to tap into their market and gain notoriety among younger, fashion-forward consumers.

A key marketing example where we see the strategic adaptation of collaboration take place is luxury brand Gucci's collaboration with sports and streetwear brand Adidas in 2022, as seen in Figure 2. In an article written by Erin Wilson, a writer on the editorial team for *Voir Fashion*, she highlights that the collaboration between these two fashion brands (Gucci and Adidas) that fit within different fashion genres "very successfully merges the two worlds of fashion (high-end and streetwear) to symbolise there are no rules when it comes to fashion design and expression" (Wilson, 2022). This is one example of many successful luxury fashion-streetwear collaborations that provide a further understanding of how luxury fashion and streetwear feed off of each other, bridging the gap between these two seemingly disparate worlds. Upon further research into the performance of the

Adidas x Gucci: A Major Motion Campaign, it was discovered that "searches for Gucci skyrocketed 286% in the 48 hours after its collection with Adidas was released in June, with the Adidas x Gucci Gazelle sneakers taking second place in the hottest women's products list." (Lyst Insights, 2022). Analysis of this collaboration campaign highlights the transactional relationship luxury fashion and streetwear have, as streetwear integration allows luxury fashion brands to increase their profits and increase their relevance among younger, fashion-conscious streetwear consumers. Inversely, streetwear brands benefit from the increase in recognition, customer base, and trust that the connection of luxury brands brings, giving insight into another way luxury fashion becoming mainstream has impacted streetwear socially, culturally, and economically.



Figure 3: Famous model Bella Hadid modelling items from the Balenciaga x Adidas collection (Bright, 2022)

The integration of streetwear styles, by luxury clothing brands, has helped to almost indoctrinate streetwear culture into post-millennial future generations, pushing the narrative that streetwear is less of a culture, but more of an aesthetic, an aesthetic that is common to all socio-economic classes, detaching it from its working class, “anti-fashioned” roots, and encrypting it into popular culture. Along with hybrid collaborations between streetwear and luxury brands, many credit the social shift, glamorisation and popularisation of streetwear culture to celebrity endorsements and

the influence of music, entertainment and sports. Figure 3 significantly shows us luxury fashion brand Balenciaga, and streetwear and sports brand Adidas use the famous model Bella Hadid for their collaborative campaign, to model their football jersey and streetwear-inspired product. Figure 3 makes us believe Balenciaga and Adidas intentionally chose to use an office setting, in a subtle attempt to further distance streetwear from its working-class urban origins.



Figure 4: Kid Cudi at the Met Gala
(Getty Images, 2021)



Figure 5: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander at an NBA game (The Oklahoman,2023)

Both Figure 4 and Figure 5 serve as reminders of how much streetwear owes its popularisation to influencers, artists and athletes. Hip-hop artist Kid Cudi can be seen wearing staple streetwear items to the Met Gala in Figure 4. We see him wearing tracksuit bottoms, trainers, a crewneck jumper and a massive chain with the logo of the streetwear brand Kaws as the pendant. Figure 4 is of great significance when trying to identify the influences that have helped to push streetwear to its global status today, as it is one of many examples of how hip-hop artists have aided the disruption of traditional fashion rituals, by pushing and challenging what is deemed as acceptable attire. By wearing streetwear items to the Met Gala, hip-hop artist Kid Cudi, like many artists within hip-hop, has helped to shift the social

perception of streetwear, putting it in a category amongst the elite luxury brands. Furthermore, figure 4 reminds us that from its earliest days, streetwear has always had an affinity with the music industry, especially with hip-hop, “Streetwear as we know it today originated in the '90s, in the hip-hop scenes of New York” (Vocast, no date). Just like the globalisation of hip-hop, streetwear culture has seen its own cultural expansion and acceptance, figure 5 shows basketball player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander wearing a streetwear outfit to an NBA game, again highlighting the popularity and adoption of streetwear as a culture and a mainstream fashion choice. From its deployment into luxury fashion to the biggest artists and athletes wearing it, the mass adoption of streetwear reflects the exterior influences outside its subcultural origins, shedding light on how deeply it is embraced socially and culturally.

Shifts in Demographics and Socio-economics

The contemporary consumers of the luxury fashion brands we all know and love, such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dior and Prada etc, now heavily juxtapose the traditional upper and middle class, highbrow elite that was often positioned as the main demographic and target of these luxury fashion houses. Revolutionary cogs, for example, social media and e-commerce, have helped to turn the gears in luxury fashion demographics, completely disrupting the esoteric essence that once glazed over these companies. Today luxury fashion brands tend to focus on catering their pricing, marketing and creative efforts to both Millennials (mainly late millennials) aged 28 - 43 and Generation Z consumers aged 12 - 27 (Beresford Research, 2024) of all social backgrounds. The Business of Fashion identifies that, alone, being the largest generation globally, Generation Z consists of around 25% of the world's population giving it significant influence on culture and the economy. In addition, with the approximate purchasing power of \$360 billion in the US, this generation, consisting of youths between the ages of 12 and 25 regards fashion as their favourite entertainment company to spend money on, as it outranks categories like dining, video games and music. (Schneider and Lee, 2022)

Before his untimely death, Virgil Abloh, the creative director of Louis Vuitton menswear, and the founder of the successful streetwear brand Off-White, often explored the growth and interconnectedness of streetwear and luxury fashion

through his work, educational lectures and his personal life. In the book *Abloh-isms*, Abloh retrospectively recounts a part of his response in an interview, that stood out to him; “ultimately, the consumer is more important than the gatekeeper: that’s why streetwear has become so popular even in high fashion” (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.33). The consumer being ‘more important than the gatekeeper’ perfectly aligns and enlightens our understanding of demography shifts within high fashion, especially due to the impact Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z) preferences have had on the transition of luxury styles.



Figure 6: Group of youths wearing luxury streetwear created by Gucci (Love Happens Magazines, 2018)

In his 2019 book *Stupid Sapiens Evolve or Become Extinct*, Benjamin Katz states, “I maintain that only the capacity to predict the future can save us from self-destruction” (Katz, 2019). Within the luxury fashion industry, we can see how brands have adopted this ‘Evolve or become extinct’ approach when reacting to demographic and socio-economic changes in an attempt to avoid self-destruction. social media marketing and e-commerce are now greatly employed to communicate, grow and manufacture a new inclusive perception for many historic luxury brands. Additionally, the implementation of streetwear styles and the idealisation of

working-class aesthetics are examples of contemporary high-end brands trying to target the new “Digital Native” and working-class consumers. A key example of this can be seen in Figure 6, as it perfectly illustrates luxury brands targeting the preference of Millennial and Gen Z consumers through the production of the much admired androgynous clothing, a key element of streetwear clothing. Figure 6 shows us a mixed demographic of youths in an urban street setting, wearing similar styles of Gucci streetwear, no matter the gender or race. From baggy tracksuits to sweater vests and preppy loafer shoes (in Figure 6), we can see how both the producers and consumers of luxury fashion today have given birth to refreshing fashion subgenres like luxury streetwear, challenging what we previously knew of the social, cultural and economic aspects of the previously niche fashion genre known as streetwear.

As coined by Marc Prensky, late Millennials and Gen Z audiences are regarded as “Digital Natives”, empowered and liberated by technology, as technological globalisation allows them to communicate and create freely as global citizens. In contrast, their older counterparts are regarded as “Digital Immigrants”, an older demographic who fail to catch up with the times (Thomas, 2011). An investigation into the Journal Of Business gives context to the target demographic of luxury fashion in the past, as it is stated that, “traditional luxury consumers are those with significantly higher income than their country’s GDP per capita” (Okonkwo, 2007 cited by Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023), hinting at luxury brands marketing for the elite alone. Not only does this allude to the hierarchical division within the luxury fashion industry in the past, but it also works as a comment on the socio-economic stance of pre-millennial society, exposing the idea that class divisions were so rife that it was also promoted through the clothes you wore and could afford. Upon deeper analysis, in an attempt to uncover the reasons why those of the aristocratic class may have purchased from the luxury fashion brands that targeted them, Okonkwo (2007) expressed that this demographic frequently paid “a premium for conspicuously or inconspicuously branded products that serve as signals to their peers” (Okonkwo, 2007 cited by Rosendo-Rios and Shukla, 2023). Although the idea of “signalling to peers” may allude to a rich get richer and poor get poorer socio-economic past, examinations of socio-economic customs today may suggest that there has been little change.

Analysis of traditional and contemporary demographic and socio-economic shifts, exposes us to the demographic saturation and perplexing socio-economic shifts within modern luxury fashion, that are responsible for the birth of many subgenres, such as luxury streetwear, as streetwear became one of the most popular trends of the 2010s. “The decade saw a number of these subcultures enter the widespread cultural lexicon, most notably normcore, streetwear and Gen-Z Internet culture” (Ilchi, 2019). Both the Millennial and Gen Z generations have taken advantage of modern tools resulting in demographic and socio-economic democratisation. The utilisation of e-commerce, means people of all social classes, granted they have a device and internet connection, can purchase luxury clothing items from any location at any time, without having to enter affluent areas to gain access to these physical stores. This completely disregards the traditional high barriers to entry that once restricted a working-class demographic. Moreover, the mere existence of social media has almost demanded the biggest luxury brands to now focus on targeting “Digital Natives” as a whole, as opposed to the elite minority, alluding to the egalitarian 21st-century socio-economic shifts.

Economic impact

When attempting to identify the economic implications caused by the popularisation of luxury clothing and its integration of streetwear styles, it is easy to hypothesise that the popularity increase of streetwear has increased consumer spending. However, as a means to get an authentic perspective of how streetwear is infiltrating and performing in luxury fashion retailers, I interviewed Ahmal Cox-Patrice, a retail worker at the well-known luxury fashion stockist Flannels. When questioned on his opinion on the future of luxury streetwear, I was surprised when Ahmal mentioned “Since I’ve been working in retail we have gone through a pandemic and cost of living crisis, and there have not been any major falls within luxury streetwear consumption”(Cox-Patrice, interview, 2024). He then stated that he believes consumers in the future will still be eager to purchase luxury streetwear items as they offer status and popularity, touching on the idea that right now it is more about the popularity and value of items over the the style and love for the designer (Cox-Patrice, interview, 2024). It was unsurprising when Ahmal said “luxury streetwear is definitely our most popular market due to the price point although it’s

still quite expensive”(Cox-Patrice, interview, 2024), however, to my astonishment Ahmal explained that Flannels’ “more luxury items tend to spike during special periods such as Christmas or Valentine's Day” (Cox-Patrice, interview, 2024), which may suggest that within the retail industry traditional luxury fashion brands that don’t offer popular styles, like streetwear, may be experiencing a decline in sales.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I believe that the mainstreaming of luxury fashion, paired with influential figures from the world of entertainment, music and sports have all contributed to the expansion of streetwear from a cultural and socio-economic perspective. To achieve this I advanced through the historical context, notable collaborations and influences, demographic and socio-economic shifts and recorded information from an industry insider as a way of gaining an indication of the economic state of affairs in streetwear. The information gathered on the dynamics uniting luxury and streetwear fashion provides esoteric apprehension into the advancements of fashion trends.

Chapter Two:

Attitudes and behaviour in streetwear culture; how we perform identity through our clothes and the practice of consumption

Introduction

In this chapter, I will use theories, and the primary data collected from my survey on consumer behaviour and spending habits, in an attempt to identify the reasons why consumers are willing to spend, oftentimes above their means, to achieve identity, collect, and belong. Delving into the streetwear consumption phenomenon will help to gain a psychological understanding of the driving forces behind streetwear culture consumerism, whilst highlighting the responsibility luxury fashion has in regards to consumer spending behaviour.

Consumer Behaviour and Attitudes: Thorstein Veblen theory analysis

Thorstein Veblen, an American socialist and economist, analysed the current socio-economic state of society, observing the idea that to avoid stultification, a man of leisure class must cultivate his tastes in luxurious goods through “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen, 1994, p.47). Veblen presumably came to this assumption as a result of witnessing members of the bourgeoisie elite purchasing products, such as clothing, that cost far above working-class people's means, to show their prestige and separate themselves from the rest of society, or in most cases the proletariat. However, when applying this theory to consumption patterns within streetwear culture, Veblen's early ideas can somewhat be applied to the purchasing patterns we see today, especially with luxury streetwear items.

Upon further examination, Veblen speaks of the idea of “pecuniary emulation”, where the consumption patterns of the elite are mimicked by those lower in the social hierarchy, as they seek to elevate their status (Veblen, 1994, p.15), inadvertently giving possible explanation to why we may notice similar purchasing behaviour to the elite, within streetwear culture today. Veblen theorised that ‘Prowess and exploit may still remain the basis of award of the highest popular esteem, although the possession of wealth has become the basis of commonplace reputability’ (Veblen,

1994, p.19). The notion that possessing wealth has become mainstream reputability, reflects the consumption culture within streetwear, as it insinuates that individuals, regardless of their social status, emulate the consumption patterns of the ruling class. In the case of the streetwear consumer, this is apparent through the habitual purchasing of luxury streetwear items, and the demand to own exclusive valuable products. This is reinforced within a survey based on luxury streetwear consumers' behaviour and spending habits, as the primary data collected shows that 60% of consumers are willing to spend 6% to 20% of their annual income on purchasing luxury streetwear items (Cox-Patrice, survey, 2024). Analysis of Veblen's theories is important as it reinforces the responsibility that luxury fashion possesses, as the desire for "possession of wealth", to boost one's social status, fortifies the significance of consumption in the matter of identity performance.

Identity performance through clothing

Fashion in contemporary society has traversed far from the arguably monolithic constraints that once halted its diversity. Today "fashion" is worn by all, thanks to its ability to help individuals shape and perform their desired single and shared identities. Within streetwear culture, the craving for cultural assimilation and self-expression often dictates the fashion choices that consumers make; this discovery is what both luxury brands and streetwear brands take advantage of.

From a marketing perspective, many luxury fashion and streetwear labels look to sign celebrities, musicians, and sports stars as brand ambassadors, for promotion and to psychologically align the brand with the qualities that their ambassador offers. A fresh example of this can be seen in a recent Rolling Stones article that states "After less than two years of re-evaluating...Balenciaga named Kardashian their latest brand ambassador" (Paul, 2024). Similarly, in a Highsnobiety article, we see famous hip-hop artist and producer Pharrell Williams get announced as an advisor for the streetwear brand Human Made, "Alongside being Louis Vuitton men's creative director" (Barker, 2024). Like many other fashion labels, the luxury brand Balenciaga realises the benefits of utilising famous pop cultural icons, such as Kim Kardashian, within this "digital age". Her heavy social media presence can help to promote Balenciaga to potentially new and existing customers, and more importantly, they understand that a large section of their consumers have the desire to look, feel

and dress just like Kim Kardashian, reflecting Carl Rogers theory of “self-actualization” (Cherry, 2020) and achieving the “ideal self” (Cherry, 2020).

Streetwear culture today has become a microcosm of the entirety of the fashion industry due to the style diversity that it offers. In a 2022 article written by Kendra Cherry on the theories of American psychologist Carl Rogers, she highlights Rogers’ perspective that every person has an innate inclination to evolve and reach their maximum potential, insinuating that the quest for “self-actualization” serves as a fundamental driving force behind human behaviour (Cherry, 2020). In regards to streetwear culture, Rogers’ theory is integral when discussing how identity is performed through clothing, as it helps to shed light on topics such as self-expression and belonging. The popularity and compulsive purchasing of streetwear products can be put down to the multitude of versatile and diverse aesthetic options that are on offer, including “luxury streetwear”, “preppy streetwear”, “grunge streetwear” etc, allowing consumers to purchase styles that help them build towards achieving their “ideal self”, whilst wearing specific styles to fit within a particular streetwear niche and lifestyle.

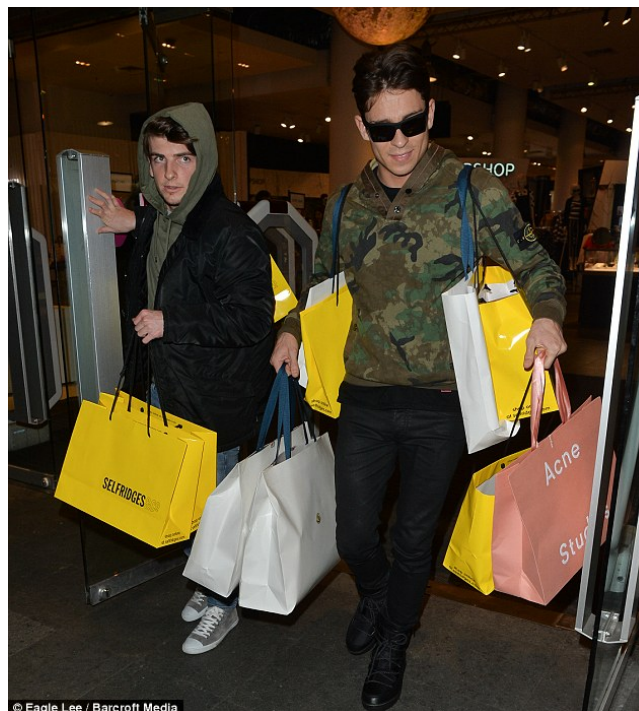


Figure 7: Celebrity Joey Essex Carrying bags of luxury fashion (Lee, 2016)

The desire to own luxury fashion items, namely luxury streetwear, has helped to catalyse economic growth within streetwear. The integration of streetwear styles, within luxury fashion, has allowed members of streetwear culture, to get a taste of luxury, therefore enabling many streetwear consumers to perform an identity of wealth, resulting in the consciousness of false class. Figure 7 perfectly assumes Rodgers' idea of self-actualisation, as well as Veblen's idea that it has become the norm to possess wealth for perceived status (Veblen, 1994, p.19). In Figure 7 we can see famous personality and television star, Joey Essex flaunting his designer bags as he goes on a luxury fashion shopping spree, allowing him to portray the perception of wealth, whether he is wealthy or not. From this image (Figure 7) we can analyse two perspectives, as Joey Essex is signalling status by performing an identity of wealth and leisure, whilst the alternative perspective is the consumer potentially idealising and aspiring to be like, and share the same lifestyle as him. This dual perspective between celebrity and consumer is frequently seen on social media and is commonly used as a marketing tool for luxury fashion and streetwear brands.

The practice of consumption

Both Veblen's and Rogers' perspectives on consumption gave possible explanations as to why luxury fashion is blameworthy when identifying the attitudes, behaviour and consumption patterns that exist within modern streetwear culture, however, it is important to hone in on the practices and rituals concerned with consumption within streetwear today from concepts such as product "drops" to the common ritual of "copping" (buying), to gain true insight on the practices involved in streetwear consumption.



Figure 8: lines in Tokyo for the drop of the Supreme x COMME Des GARÇON t-shirt (Hypebeast Jp, 2017)

By analysing Lauren Cochrane's Guardian newspaper article titled "How streetwear restyled the world – from hip-hop to Supreme and Palace" (Cochrane, 2017), we can ascertain information regarding, again the behaviour, and the practices of streetwear consumption. "New 'drops' by streetwear brands have teens queuing around the block in New York and London. It's no wonder high fashion has [its] eyes on the 'hypebeast' scene" (Cochrane, 2017). The first concept the article speaks on is product "drops", where, as mentioned in chapter one, streetwear brands would release a collection or a product, with limited stock on a specific day and allow customers to be the first to buy it via in-store or online purchase. 'On a "drop day", the traffic on the Supreme site can increase by as much as 16,800%' (Cochrane, 2017). When we fast forward to the practice of consumption today, we often see that luxury fashion's integration of streetwear styles, and the collaborative clothing produced between the two, are subject to the highest demand within streetwear culture.

In Abloh-isms, Virgil Abloh highlights his belief that generations are an important topic of conversation when looking into the consumption of streetwear. "There has to

be a conversation between consumption. I look at it from a generational perspective.” (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.32).

The mainstream desire to own luxury fashion items, married with the rising popularity of streetwear aesthetics has resulted in consumers, mainly Millennials and Generation Z, forming addictive and indestructible relationships among luxury streetwear brands. Figure 8 illustrates the global craze to purchase items from drops released by popular luxury streetwear brands, as we see streetwear lovers in Tokyo queuing in long lines outside of a closed Supreme store, waiting for their chance to “cop” (to buy) the drop of the new Supreme (streetwear brand) and Comme Des Garçon (luxury fashion brand) t-shirt. Later in the article, Cochrane addresses streetwear consumers' crippling need to purchase drop items, commonly known in streetwear culture as “copping”. When interviewing teenagers queueing in line to purchase items from streetwear brand Palace, Cochrane was shocked to hear that “Taran, 16, will spend £200, and has travelled for two hours to get to the store” (Cochrane, 2017) whilst she also states, “Omer, who is 17, queued for six hours today and will spend about £300 even though he doesn’t “really like it that much” (Cochrane, 2017). Cochrane’s observations demonstrate the vast lengths that consumers are willing to go to, to own items from their favourite streetwear brands, and further draw upon the concept of collecting within streetwear culture. Notably, it recognises that although a consumer may not “really like it much” (a product from a drop), they may still purchase an item presumably for its perceived value, offering of status, or simply due to the fear of missing out; this fear of missing out (FOMO) as well as the perceived sell on value of limited drop items is often thought to be a driving force behind the unhinged practice of consumption in streetwear culture.

The exploration into streetwear consumption may help to uncover the social sustainability of streetwear, especially when analysing the connection that consumption has to the future of streetwear and its ethical and environmental sustainability.

Chapter 3:

The dilution of streetwear culture, is this the end?



Figure 9: Models walk in the fall 1998 Louis Vuitton fashion show (WWD Archive, 1998)



Figure 10: Models wearing clothes from Louis Vuitton's 2023 men's fall-winter collection (Louis Vuitton, 2023)

Introduction

In his book 'Abloh-isms' (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.46), Virgil Abloh declared "I would definitely say [streetwear] is gonna die" (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.46)

In modern society, there are growing concerns about the loss of streetwear culture, due to its mass adoption, and the demand for sustainability within the industry. Figure 9 shows Louis Vuitton models in 1998 modelling simplistic classy clothing; whilst Figure 10 shows Louis Vuitton models in 2023 modelling luxury streetwear clothes. When we compare Figure 9 and Figure 10 we are given examples of how luxury fashion brands have gone from offering sophisticated and restricted office styles, to now, in current times, incorporating streetwear styles into their products to satisfy the masses. Besides examining how the mainstreaming of luxury fashion has led to the weakening of culture and unpredictability of streetwear's future, this chapter will also aim to explore consumer demands for sustainability within the industry. The concepts that will be investigated within this chapter will help to provide an understanding of the interplay between cultural saturation, sustainability and the prospective trajectory of streetwear.

Consumer attitudes towards sustainable streetwear



Figure 11: Clint the owner of streetwear brand Corteiz donating £16k worth of designer coats to local food banks (Larder, 2022)

There is a prominent hunger to own luxury fashion items as a means of performing identity, displaying status, collecting and as a general investment; the popularity of the luxury streetwear hybrid has resulted in a rise in fast fashion and mass production, causing massive concern over the environmental and social sustainability of streetwear. Many streetwear brands today look to find new innovative ways to produce and deliver their products ethically, by using environmentally friendly materials to create their clothing, and by using more eco-friendly transportation options. However, when analysing the ethical actions carried out by streetwear brands, it can be argued that many of these companies are more concerned with gaining positive corporate social responsibility (CSR) by doing environmentally friendly gimmicks. This can be seen in Figure 11, as Clint the owner of the streetwear brand Coteiz provides bags of designer jackets, tallying up to £16 thousand, to a local food bank as a form of recycling and donation, in an attempt to bestow an eco-friendly image onto Coteiz. The growing concern for the sustainability of streetwear clothing is an important study when analysing the weakening of original streetwear culture. When we look back to the early stages of streetwear, back when it was regarded as a niche fashion genre, we may notice that sustainability issues were something that was rarely discussed within the culture. The idea that sustainability is of considerable concern in streetwear culture today, reflects the wider concerns within contemporary society, whilst reinforcing streetwear's saturation of its demographics, thanks to its integration into luxury fashion.

Determined to gain true insight, I conducted primary research by collecting survey data on the environmental concerns of luxury streetwear consumers. With the data collected from this survey, it was discovered that when making luxury streetwear purchases, 0% of people found sustainability to be unimportant, meaning 100% believed that the consideration of sustainability in luxury streetwear was either somewhat important (70%) or very important (30%)(Cox-Patrice, survey, 2024). Furthermore, 80% of participants said the purchase of product was stopped due to ethical concerns of a company (Cox-Patrice, survey, 2024). Finally, 70% of participants said that they were not willing to entertain paying a premium for sustainable luxury streetwear (Cox-Patrice, survey, 2024). The information from the

survey reinsured the notion that there is a growing concern for sustainability within contemporary streetwear culture, however, the fact that many people are not willing to entertain paying a premium for sustainable luxury streetwear items suggests that discourse may be halting the development of streetwear's sustainable future.

Industry opinions on the streetwear trajectory; what is the future of streetwear

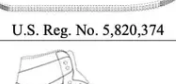
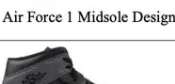
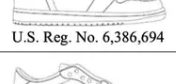
Nike's Trademarked Designs	Genuine Nike Products	BAPE's Infringing Products
 U.S. Reg. No. 3,451,905	 Air Force 1 Low	 BAPE STA
 U.S. Reg. No. 3,451,906	 Air Force 1 Mid	 BAPE STA Mid
 U.S. Reg. No. 3,711,305	 Dunk Low	 SK8 STA
 U.S. Reg. No. 5,820,374	 Air Force 1 Midsole Design	 BAPE STA
 U.S. Reg. No. 6,386,694	 Air Jordan 1 High	 COURT STA High
 U.S. Reg. No. 6,368,691	 Air Jordan 1 Low	 COURT STA

Figure 12: Nike's lawsuit against Bape proving the similarities between their shoes and Bape's (United States District Court, 2023)

Many streetwear enthusiasts and opinion leaders within the culture believe that the trajectory of streetwear is potentially, if not already, headed to a place of dilution and staleness due to it becoming oversaturated and increasingly indistinguishable.

The words self-expression and individuality once captured the zeitgeist of early streetwear culture, however, when inspecting present-day streetwear culture, a word that may often come to mind is unoriginal, as today streetwear struggles to stay dynamic and unique thanks to dampeners like the mushrooming of copycat designs.

This perspective has been reinforced through Virgil Abloh's words, "right now I think we're stuck in the ways of the first generation of streetwear that is based on exclusivity. That doesn't matter anymore. Any kid that wants it doesn't care if a million people have it — they still want it" (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.47). If we were to assume that streetwear culture was losing its originality and that Virgil Abloh's perspective had validity, a blameworthy cause would certainly be the constant replication of popular products from brand to brand. In Figure 12 we are shown Nike's lawsuit filed against streetwear brand Bape for copying multiple silhouettes of some of their most popular shoes. Through Bapes renditions of various Nike shoes, as seen in Figure 12, many streetwear brands look to slightly tweak the designs of their competitor's products in an attempt to avoid legal situations, whilst still offering their version of the same product.

This "copycat" concept is widely seen within the luxury fashion industry, and gives context to its modern-day popularity, as the majority of the biggest luxury fashion brands such as Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton, Dior etc, will look to recreate sought-after products and designs created by smaller niche streetwear brands. The proliferate replication of popular items from streetwear brands, and luxury fashion's tendency to poach and capitalise from the products and designs created by these lesser-known, lower-prestige streetwear brands, have contributed to the weakening of authenticity and originality that once defined Streetwear culture, and have left much of streetwear culture's social sustainability in limbo.

Furthermore, fast fashion is equally responsible for the progressive erosion of streetwear culture and its loss of exclusivity, due to its instantaneous ability to reproduce fashion trends and saturate the streetwear market. "Fast fashion is the term used to describe clothing designs that move quickly from the catwalk to stores to take advantage of trends...allows mainstream consumers to purchase the hot new look or the next big thing at an affordable price" (Hayes, 2023)

Personal thoughts on streetwear's future & conclusion

When analysing the current streetwear climate, it is clear that the culture, as we used to know it, may be falling victim to its success. Culturally shifting factors such as its integration into luxury fashion, its popularity on social media and among Millennial

and Generation Z demographics for the originality and authenticity it offered, and the likes of celebrities, musicians and sports stars wearing and promoting it, initially resulted in streetwear's "cultural boom". However, the modern-day social, cultural and economic sustainability of streetwear, and its once pure essence of individuality and self-expression, potentially risks experiencing cultural devolution. "[Streetwear's] time will be up. In my mind, how many more T-shirts can we own, how many more hoodies, how many sneakers?" (Abloh and Warsh, 2021, p.46). In the book *Burberry Days*, Brian Kitson, a worker at Burberry for over 20 years, highlights his belief that "luxury fashion consumers now want 'fewer but better', which is why Burberry is now looking to manufacture... for the highest class international market" (Kitson, 2016, p.153-154). This may be alarming for the future of streetwear as the suggested changes in consumer taste may lead to luxury fashion brands returning to their traditional targeting of the higher classes. Should streetwear culture not return to its roots and resuscitate creativity, unfortunately, it may face the possibility of losing its overall significance and distinctiveness in the world of fashion.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to study how streetwear has been affected socially, culturally and economically by luxury fashion's integration of its style, and to additionally understand the psychology behind consumption patterns in streetwear, as well as the direction that streetwear may be headed in the future.

Initially, the dissertation begins by looking into the historical roots of streetwear to understand the social, cultural and economic context of where streetwear was coming from. The birth of Luxury streetwear was studied within chapter one by focusing on the mainstreaming of luxury fashion, and its tendency to integrate streetwear styles. There was a focus on the significance of cultural influences, celebrity endorsements and brand collaborations between luxury fashion and streetwear. Furthermore, Chapter One looked into identifying the demographic and socio-economic shifts of luxury fashion consumers and the impact that these shifts had on the ascension of streetwear. Then in chapter two, there was an in-depth focus on the attitudes and behaviour of streetwear consumers, looking into ideas on how consumers perform identity through the practice of consumption and our clothes. This was the focus of the second chapter as it provided a psychological understanding of the driving forces behind streetwear culture consumerism and highlighted the responsibility that luxury fashion had regarding consumer spending behaviour. Finally, chapter 3 explored whether we were witnessing the end of the original streetwear culture, due to concerns of over-saturation and dilution of culture. This chapter explored streetwear's loss of culture due to its mass adoption, the demand for sustainability within the industry and the negative impact streetwear is experiencing due to luxury fashion brands poaching its most popular designs, the mushrooming of copycat designs, and fast fashion's saturation of the market due to its instantaneous ability to reproduce fashion trends. This chapter then goes on to discuss whether or not we are currently experiencing a change in consumer taste.

Whilst writing this dissertation I was able to find out that much of the success of streetwear culture, economy and social status is owed to luxury fashion implementing its styles, as both Veblen and Roger's theory help to identify how humans have an innate need to own wealth and achieve their ideal self, and luxury

streetwear, especially for working-class individuals, allowed consumers to satisfy this need.

This investigation can be considered important as it opens eyes to the driving forces behind the transition of culture, showing the significant powers helping to catapult niche fashion genres into popular homogenised culture. Additionally, this study can be used to identify the factors that may lead to a positive or negative future for streetwear, whilst exposing the factors that in the present day may be halting the growth of streetwear.

From doing this dissertation I learned that the factors that may lead to growth, could also potentially lead to decline; to continue to grow you must be able to adapt. This directly links to my aspiration of becoming a fashion designer within the luxury streetwear industry and gives a wealth of knowledge on the history and the current concerns that are being faced within the industry. My work adds to research in the psychology behind the human desire to own wealth. Based on the research carried out I would suggest that further research is conducted on ways in which we can restore the originality and authenticity of streetwear.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview transcript

2nd January 2024 - I conducted an interview with Ahmal Cox-Patrice, a retail worker for luxury fashion retailer Flannels - the aim of the interview was to discuss key questions that could aid our understanding of how streetwear is infiltrating and performing in luxury fashion retailers.

Relevant excerpts from the interview transcript:

- Interviewer:

What is the consumer behaviour towards luxury streetwear within the retail industry?

interviewee:

Consumers have definitely started to become more of a monolith in their behaviours toward luxury streetwear as most customers mainly younger audiences generally buy the same items such as Canada Goose and Moncler jackets. I think it's due to the popularity gained from rappers and social media and how obtainable it has become.

- Interviewer:

How do luxury streetwear sales perform in comparison to other categories at Flannels?

interviewee:

Luxury streetwear is definitely our most popular market due to the price point although it's still quite expensive. Our more luxury items tend to spike during special periods such as Christmas or Valentine's Day

- Interviewer:

Where do you see the future of luxury streetwear going and how do you think it will affect the fashion industry as a whole?

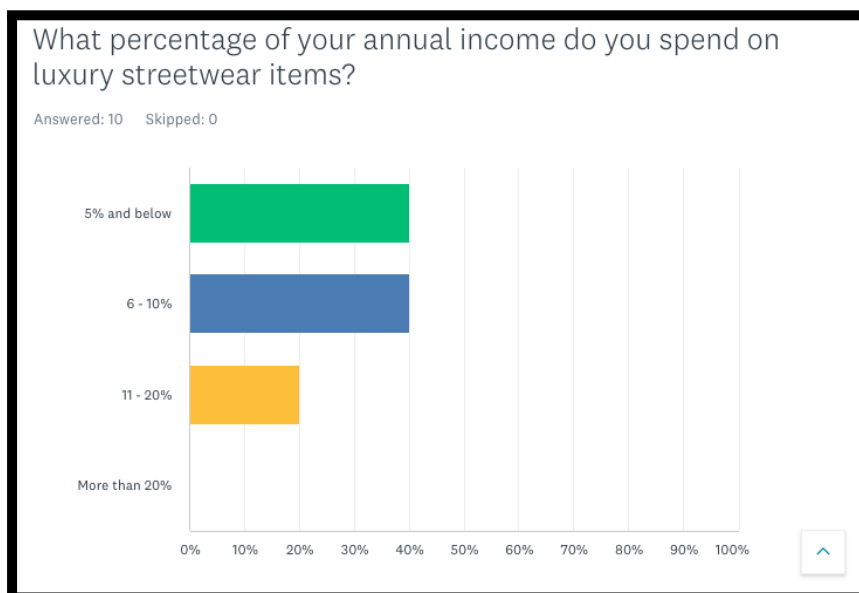
interviewee:

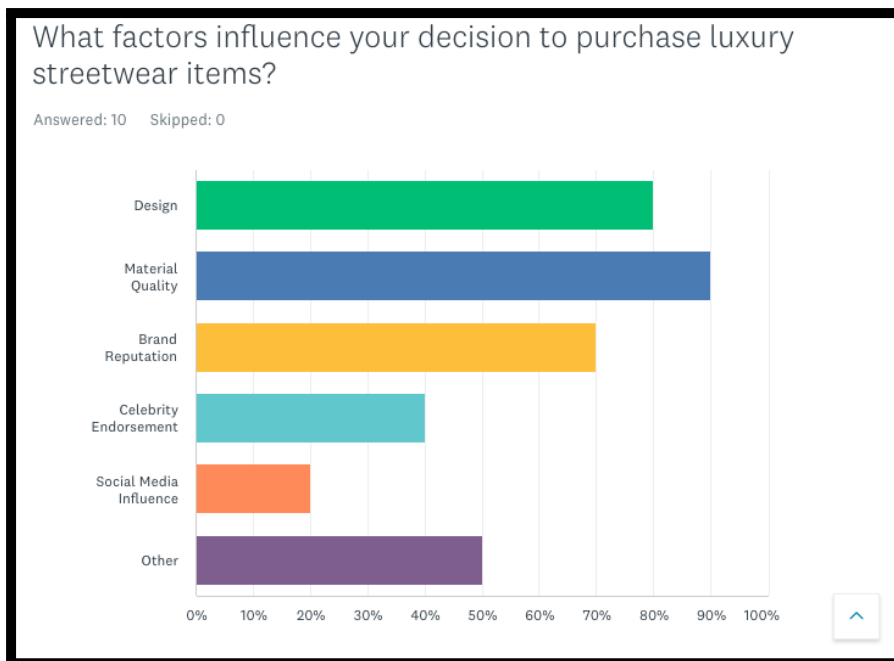
Since I've been working in retail we have gone through a pandemic and cost of living crisis and there have not been any major falls within luxury streetwear consumption. I think that people will only continue to thrive and consume luxury items mainly streetwear items because it allows them to obtain a level of status and popularity even in their small circles. I think this would generally have an effect on the way that people create and obtain fashion as it's now more about the popularity of items and money and less about the style and love for the designer.

Appendix 2: Survey data

5th January 2024 - I created this survey with the purpose of informing, reinforcing or challenging my prior assumptions regarding luxury streetwear consumer behaviour and spending habits

Key survey responses:





Appendix 3: Survey data

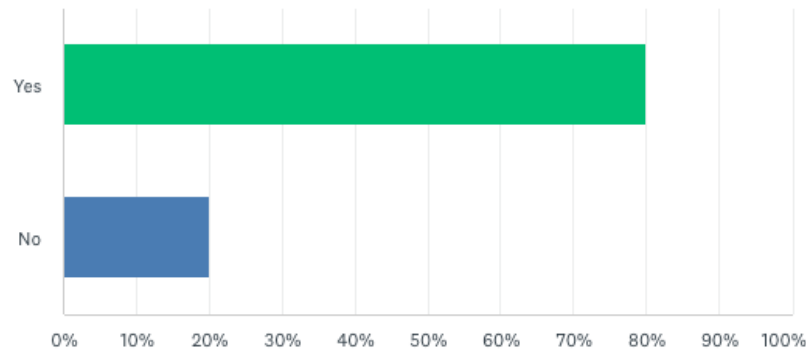
5th January 2024 - I created this survey with the purpose of reinforcing or challenging my prior assumptions regarding the environmental concern of luxury streetwear consumers

Key survey responses:



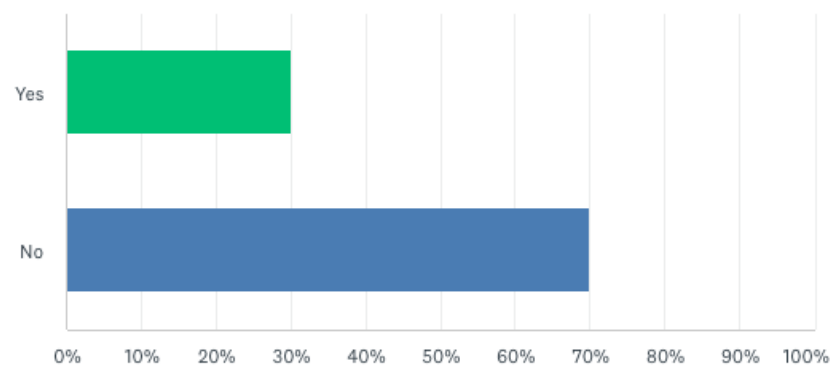
Have environmental concerns about luxury streetwear brands' production ever stopped you from purchasing one of their products?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



Would you entertain paying a premium for sustainable luxury streetwear?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



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