Study Design: How Does Streetwear Influence Identity Expression in Gen-Z Men?

Research Proposal: Streetwear holds a significant place in the lives of today's youth, particularly the men of Gen-Z. It has evolved from subcultures tracing back to hip-hop, skate, and athletic culture, which now represents a cultural language among young men. Despite plenty of journalism on the commercial rise of streetwear, research has yet to do a deep dive into how Gen Z men themselves use streetwear to express cultural identity, signal belonging, or communicate personal narratives. Therefore, this research is to investigate the relationship between streetwear and cultural identity expression in men aged 18-25 years, exploring how individuals understand, interpret, and deploy style as a communicative tool. The project will also connect personal style choices with their larger cultural contexts, such as music, sports, subcultural communities, and family background.

Hypothesis: Gen Z men intentionally use streetwear to express cultural identity, drawing from music, sports, and subcultural influences to communicate individuality and belonging.

Methodology:

Research Design- A focus on the mixed-method methodology, which gathers data on the subtlety and emotional tone that underpin individual style decisions while allowing statistical analysis of patterns across participants through the combination of a comprehensive quantitative survey and in-depth qualitative interviews. This study will be in a better position to determine how streetwear functions for Gen Z guys on a social and personal level by combining numerical trends with narrative descriptions.

Study- One hundred Gen-Z guys, ages 18 to 25, are recruited for the study from universities or fashion-related organizations around the nation. Participants must either buy or wear streetwear at least once a week.

Data Collection-

(Quantitative) The survey consists of approximately 35–45 questions. These questions will assess:

- Cultural expressions of clothing can refer to an outfit reflective of one's cultural heritage, say, traditional patterns at family festivals or streetwear born out of urban 1970s skate culture. It is through clothes that personal style connects with larger group identities.
- Apparel reflects identity: People choose to wear clothes to show their mood, values, or life stories; for example, meaningful symbols or quotations. These choices do so much to instill confidence and make an individual stand out.
- Brand Loyalty and Community: The consumer stays consistent with Nike, Supreme, Bape, or Carhartt because it reflects either lifestyle, memories, or social status. Brand loyalty gives one a sense of identity and belonging.
- Authenticity counts: many people like clothes that show respect for original designs or cultural origins and avoid knockoffs. Real fashion keeps the traditions alive and shows respect for creators, as in the hip-hop or punk communities.
- Influence of digital trends: The habit of regular browsing, social media habits, and the content provided by fashion bloggers create awareness that makes a difference in shopping behavior. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok hasten the process of trend adoption, connecting virtual hype to real-life fashion decisions.

The survey will also include multiple-choice and ranking questions that ask participants to sort which influences-music, sports, social media, upbringing, friends-have shaped their style the most.

(Qualitative) The interview component (12–15 participants) will explore themes in greater depth, including:

- Early style memories or influences
- Specific items that carry cultural or emotional significance
- The role of community (friends, online groups, teams, music scenes)
- Ideas of "authenticity" and cultural respect
- How they feel others interpret their outfits
- How their style shifts depending on location, context, or audience

Interviews will last a total of 30 minutes.

Data Analysis-

(Quantitative)

These data will be analyzed by using:

- Descriptive statistics, means, frequencies, correlations
- Comparison testing, such as comparing strong cultural identifiers with weak identifiers
- Relationship mapping between cultural affiliations and identity expression scores

These analyses show statistical links between cultural communities and clothing meaning.

(Qualitative)

Interviews will be coded using thematic analysis. Coding categories will likely include:

- Cultural roots: music, family, neighborhood
- Symbolism: what certain items represent
- Forms of masculinity

- Authenticity and respect for cultures
- Community belonging
- Digital fashion influence

These codes will produce a layered perspective on how streetwear functions as a cultural and personal language.

Literature Review:

A framework of interpretation for streetwear as a site of meaning-making is provided by scholars ranging across cultural studies, fashion theory, and youth identity research.

Subculture theory: As Dick Hebdige shows in Subculture: The Meaning of Style, youth use clothes as symbolic communication.[1] This tells one a lot about why items such as Jordans, Carhartt jackets, or graphic tees mean something in particular to young men throughout Generation Z.

Hip-Hop and Black Aesthetics: In her work, Monica L. Miller chronicles hip-hop style through the prism of Black cultural expression. She illustrates how fashion communicates authenticity, creativity, and resistance. [2] This analysis is essential since many Gen Z men cite hip-hop as their main influence.

Brand Identity and Youth Culture: According to Banet-Weiser, work on branding has shown that youth use brands to create stories about the self.[3] Thus, streetwear brands are at the core of this process of building identities, with their cultural histories and symbolic weight.

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[1] Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.

[2] Clark, Christopher. "Global Streetwear and the Politics of Authenticity." *Fashion Theory* 24, no. 3 (2020): 325–345.

[3] Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 1979.

Globalization and Authenticity: Christopher Clark examines the global commercialization of streetwear and how wearers negotiate between identity and authenticity within a market that mass-produces cultural symbols.[4] Most often, Gen Z men voice this tension articulately, making a distinction between "real" influences and trend-driven fashion.

Masculinity and Fashion Expression: Agnes Rocamora's work also refers to increasing flexibility in male self-presentation.[5] Streetwear, a blend of athleticism, creativity, and subcultural history, becomes a site where young men can express identity without violation of traditional masculine norms.

Put together, these scholars position streetwear not only as a fashion but also as an intricate practice of culture that communicates meaning, belonging, and identity both in visual language and in bodily presentation.

Primary Sources:

- Quantitative survey from 100 participants.
- Transcribed interviews from 15 participants.
- Participants' specific connections to clothing items.
- Photographs of participants' outfits.

Secondary Sources:

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.
- Clark, Christopher. “Global Streetwear and the Politics of Authenticity.” *Fashion Theory* 24, no. 3 (2020): 325–345.

[4] Miller, Monica L. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
[5] Rocamora, Agnès. “Masculinity, Fashion, and the Contemporary Wardrobe.” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* 8, no. 2 (2021): 145–162.

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