

Luxury sustainable design for Gen Z

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Abstract: The rise of Gen Z consumers has hit the luxury industry, placing new demands on sustainable design for luxury goods. This paper will discuss the rise and popularity of the concept of sustainable design in the consumer group of Generation Z. Through the analysis of the necessity of developing sustainable design in the luxury industry and the change of consumption concept of Generation Z consumers, it will propose new ways for the sustainable development of the luxury fashion industry for Generation Z consumers.

Keywords: Luxury; Sustainable; Generation Z; Fashion

1. Introduction

Sustainable design has been a hot topic in the luxury fashion world for years. The rise of Generation Z is rapidly changing the landscape of the entire luxury fashion industry, with sustainable design becoming a major selling point for luxury brands and attaching importance to the ethics and sustainability of luxury brands.

2. Sustainable luxury products are popular among Gen Z consumers

Generation Z refers to the generation born between 1995 and 2000, which grew up rapidly with the development of the Internet.^[1] Gen Z is becoming a major consumer in the luxury industry, with a passion for environmental protection, individuality and freedom, and Bain & Company notes that Gen Z consumers are having a significant impact on brands' efforts to promote sustainable design.

Sustainability is one of the major social trends in recent years. Henri Pinault, CEO of Kering Group, took the lead in putting forward that "the luxury industry and sustainable development are integrated", and CAI Jinqing, president of Greater China, also put forward that "sustainable development can create value for enterprises", subtly influencing the consumption concept of Generation Z consumers.

The concept of sustainable development has gradually entered the vision and life of Generation Z consumers. Firstly, the sales channels have shifted to online. For example, Versace opened its online shopping platform in July 2018, and Dior opened its online store^[4] in China in July 2019.^[5] Kering Group took the lead in researching and publishing the "Fashion Industry Environmental Protection Agreement" in 2019 to promote sustainable development.^[6] Finally, luxury brands are paying more attention to sustainable design in the production of their products. These changes are the result of the concept of sustainable development and the rapid upgrading of the Internet.

3. the necessity of sustainable design in the luxury industry

3.1. Sustainable design continues to flourish

The concept of "green design" has evolved from around 1980s to the latest period of sustainable design development.^[7] With the continuous evolution of social and economic development,^[8] sustainable design continues to be popular in the luxury industry, pursuing the sustainable social order, the fairness of economic growth and the harmonious coexistence of ecological environment and people.

At present, the luxury industry takes the 6R principle as the goal of sustainable design development, including reducing resource consumption, parts reuse, material recycling, material renewable, parts reprocessing and re-design, so as to truly achieve efficient and optimized use of energy and promote sustainable development.^[9] Under the trend of sustainable development, the British luxury brand Burberry has completely eliminated the use of polyethylene materials in backpacks and retail bags. In addition, the Burberry brand plans to replace all products containing plastic ingredients with environmentally friendly and biodegradable materials by 2025.

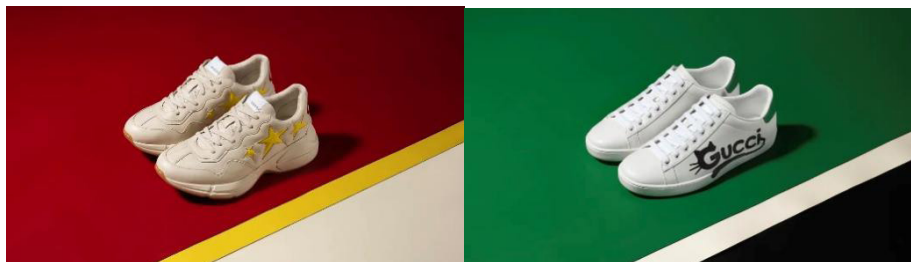


Burberry bags made with environmentally sustainable materials (photo credit: Burberry official website)

In response to the demands of sustainable design, luxury brands such as Gucci and Burberry have abandoned the use of rare animals as raw materials. ^[11]After giving up the use of fur, Gucci has won high recognition and praise from many consumers. For example, Gucci launched three sports shoes made of Demetra environmental protection materials, using plant raw materials instead of animal raw materials. “Sustainable development” has gradually become the strategy of the brand to enhance the core value of business.



GUCCI abandons the use of fur logo (photo source: GUCCI official website)



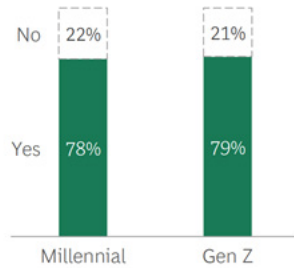
Gucci shoes made from Demetra materials (photo credit: Gucci official website)

3.2. The shift in consumption attitudes of Generation Z

According to a joint survey by BCG and Altagamma, 67 percent of Gen Z luxury consumers say that the topic of sustainability influences their luxury consumption behavior. Some 79 percent of Gen Z luxury consumers said they would stop buying if they found a luxury company using an unsustainable product.

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If you found out a luxury company from which you usually purchase is using unsustainable practices, would you stop purchasing from them?



Source: BCG X ALTAGAMMA True-Luxury Global Consumer Insights

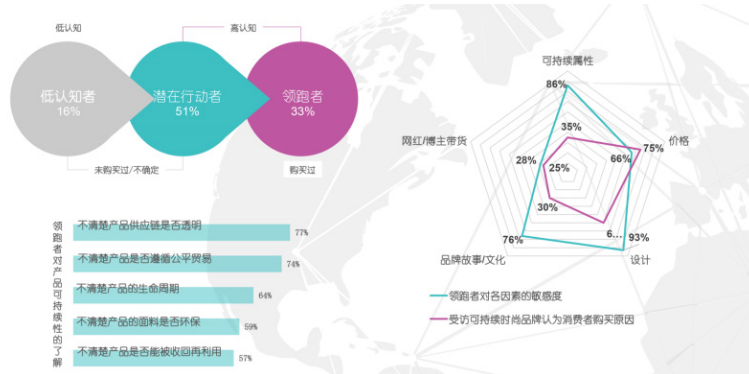
At the same time, the 2021 Consumption Insight Report on China’s second-hand Luxury e-commerce platform released by Hongblin, a second-hand luxury e-commerce platform, shows that in second-hand luxury consumption, Generation Z consumers have shifted from only buying in the past to both buying and selling, and tend to recycle luxury goods, so that many high-priced items realize resource recycling in constant circulation. In line with the concept of sustainable development advocated at present.

一件CHANEL CF的5次流转生命史图像



Data source: Hongblin

The reason Gen Z consumers buy luxury goods is no longer limited to the dimensions of luxury materials, craftsmanship and so on, R.I.S.E. Sustainable Fashion Lab conducted a sample survey of 2,251 Gen Z consumers and 20 brands this year, and found that 84% of consumers have a high awareness of environmental sustainability, of which more than 90% of the high awareness said that “the fashion industry producers should disclose the environmental impact of the production process. And be willing to learn about the fashion industry’s contribution to corporate social responsibility.”



Source: R.I.S.E. Sustainable Fashion Lab

4. A sustainable approach to luxury fashion for Gen Z

4.1. Recyclable production chain

In the era of sustainable and circular development of the global fashion industry, the luxury industry is still exploring effective ways to solve the problem of environmental pollution caused by long-term development.

In recent years, many big-name luxury designers advocate sustainable circular design^[16]. Through sustainable circular design strategy, combined with the concept of clothing life cycle, they strive to minimize resource consumption of products, so as to achieve environmental protection and form a recyclable production chain.



Data source: Circular Fashion: China's new textile economy Outlook

4.2. Biodegradable materials

The surest way to achieve sustainability in the luxury sector is to use environmentally friendly fabrics, such as recycled fabrics and plant-based leather, in textile and apparel projects. Currently, there is an over-reliance on fossil fuel-derived synthetic materials such as polyester and nylon in clothing production, which make up 65% of clothing.^[17]Not only are these garments of poor quality, they are also difficult to break down. French luxury brand Hermes is planning to launch a tote bag based on mushrooms, according to Bof.^[18]The leather-like material is made from mycelium, which is renewable, feeds on natural resources and can be simply replicated in the lab. With the exception of hardware and zippers, these eventually biodegrade.

5. Conclusion

At present, the consumer group of Generation Z is growing and expanding, and the young consumer group represented by Generation Z is rising strongly, and will have a huge impact on the entire luxury market. At the same time, combined with the concept of sustainable design, luxury brands must take social benefits and consumer demand into account when positioning product design and marketing strategies. For Generation Z, luxury consumption behavior is not only to meet their own needs, in the future, they will be more inclined to fashion personalized, green sustainable, technology virtualization.

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