IMPACT ANALYTICS

FASHION IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC EMPOWERED THROUGH AI

The pandemic has taken a particularly harsh toll on many fashion brands and retailers with rampant store closures and brands going bankrupt. At the same time, the global fashion industry is undergoing a major transformation with the rise of online shopping and E-commerce platforms - driving big opportunities for all.

With people being stuck indoors and spending more time browsing, fashion trends adoption influenced by social media has accelerated. Changes in fashion trends, that took a decade earlier, have happened in the last 1-2 years.

Fashion businesses that can identify and adapt to these changing trends and customer landscape, will emerge stronger. In today's fast-paced fashion market, as the move from traditional to digital accelerates, it is imperative to leverage technology and automation to remain competitive and relevant.

Fashion trends in 2021 and beyond

One segment of fashion retail that is becoming immensely popular is athleisure. The global athleisure market size is projected to touch **USD 517.5 billion** by the year 2025[1]. It is anticipated to grow at a **CAGR of 8.1%** through the forecast period of 2019-2025.

Leading consultancy firms[2] have also highlighted emerging casualization trends from 2020 to 2021 and their infusion across many fashion categories.

While the big shout is "less is more", understated outfits influenced by athleisure and **Gen Z trends** are what we see our consumers moving towards.

Envisioning possible future fashion macro trends - Impact of COVID-19

Self-care, fitness, awareness, and sustainability are more than just buzzwords. With a major shift in the mindset post-pandemic, casualization coupled with transparency & sustainable choices is the beginning of a fashion revolution. Being out now has a different undertone altogether, which emphasis being on gratification, satisfaction, optimism, and calmness. Social 'conformation' is no longer the goal of fashion.

With activewear and athleisure emerging as the love of pandemic dressing, there are many more neutralizers and subs in the row. Creators and influencers talk about a plethora of micro and macro trends ranging from comfy elegant fits to sexy cuts, return of the black to disco ball styles, tailored on tailored to transformative styles.

Key areas of change are trends infusing gender binary, minimalism, and capsule wardrobe.

Gender neutrals

Currently approx. **56% of Gen Z** consumers shop outside of their assigned gender area, ignoring clothing labels and gendered sections[3]. Styles include slouchy jeans, drawstring pants, oversized outerwear, anti-fit bottoms, oversized tailored suits, and shapeless top-wear. Relaxed and oversized silhouettes perfect for all body shapes fit in the definition of "genderless", knocking fitted styles out of the equation.

Focus on fitness and activewear

Surfing on the home-workout trend, many retailers had launched their activewear collections in the middle of the pandemic. Activewear for outdoor and indoor alternatives (from cycling shorts to yoga pants) will continue to be crowd favorites. Activewear market value is expected to reach **$547 billion** by 2024[4].

Softcore subculture

Think of **cozy, soft & fluffy textures** and tap into a trend without overcommitting.

Capsule wardrobe

It is all about a minimalist approach, seeking a break from chaos and confusion. Choosing monochromatic and muted shades, and comfort over seasonal trends.

Resort wear

With relaxation in the travel norms and vacation season approaching, a jump in demand is expected across resort wear casuals. Rising awareness regarding benefits of swimming is fuelling sales of women's swimwear.

Return of the minis

Micro-mini is back in trend. A few exciting skirt styles include tennis skirts and mini knit skirts, maxi or midi sheer skirts with mini linings.

Utility fashion

Multifunctional and transformative styles with utility elements like cargos, military jackets, utility button downs & boiler suits will be in trend.

Sustainable, localised & pre-loved

Quilted patchwork, tie-dye, upcrafted styles, upcycled denim and cozy materials like flannels and felts made with recycled fibers will continue to thrive.

Neutralizers to athleisure; sexy / bold dressing

Not the main trend yet but slowly infusing with other trends, adding an element; Subtle yet teasing cut-outs, corset styles, sheer layers, statement sleeves.

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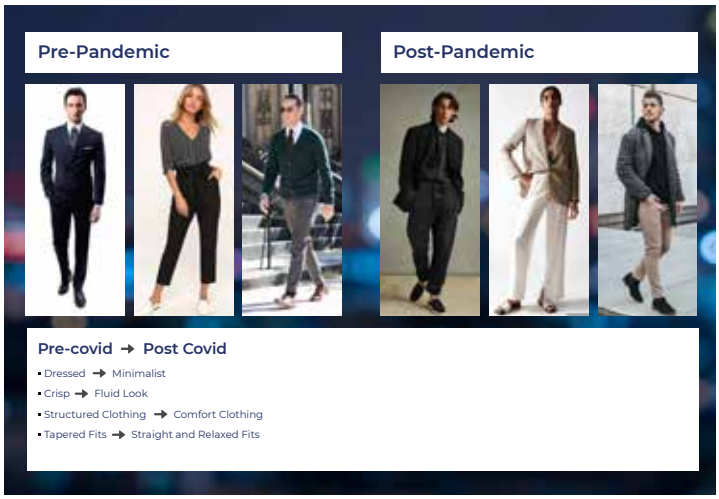
Emerging fashion trends changing the definition of conventional occasion wear

Example: Re-defining office wear

One of the major global fashion trends which are the direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic are 'stay home styles' and 'zoom casuals'. Moreover, the changing shift in work culture and careers has in turn led to the distinctive changes we see and will continue to see in office wear fashion trends. With the rise of alternative careers, the fine line between office wear and casual wear has blurred.

As comfort wear and casual attire find their way into the workplace, we evaluate the modern definitions of 'office wear'.

- Self-expression and empowerment have replaced traditional power dressing
- Relaxed tailoring, anti-fit, and fluidity have become the new norm. Reigning styles will include hoodies under blazer, oversized tailored, relaxed, and muted one-piece, anti-fit bottoms, bermudas and semi structured outerwear



As we see offices reopening post pandemic, we will continue to see elements of comfort infused dressing, and a trend of 'soft tailoring' and 'work-leisure' or 'hybrid wear' dictating our everyday office wear attire.

Fashion trends forecasting and predictions through the lens of social media

Trends do not emerge out of the blue. Trends used to come about in different ways, either trickling down from the runway or bubbling up from the street via print media, journals, magazines, or mass media. This is not entirely the scenario anymore. With social media taking over the conventional and traditional mass media, it is no longer just celebrities who influence tastes and trends; social media influencers play an increasingly larger role.

Social media has become a prominent and powerful platform for propagating new trends. It airs ideas and visuals and augments the psychology of “Fear of Missing Out”. If you are an active social media user then there is a good chance that you have spotted or followed a trend, albeit without knowing it. Influencers and influencees are leading and driving the current fashion trends.

Why have trends become more important than ever?

Rapid shift towards E-com & online shopping

The online fashion industry was worth over $439 billion in 2018[5] and is expected to reach over $758 billion in 2021 and $953 billion by 2024. By the end of 2021, online channel share is expected to amount to 22% of the fashion market sales worldwide and eCommerce penetration rate in the fashion industry is expected to hit 50%[5].

With retail businesses gravitating from a brick and mortar to an omni-channel focus, right product narration and detailing play a key role in success.

Companies need to adapt to this shift and change the way they do business by :

- Enhancing focus on reducing the return of items purchased online by improving the product detailing and attribution
- Utilising trend tagging and capturing taste transformation to provide a sense of personalisation
- Increasing share of active paying customers and simultaneously gaining new customers
- Growth in market redistribution.

Emergence of a new generation of customers

The Gen Z- consumer group currently accounts for 40 percent of global consumers and $150 billion in spending power in the United States alone[6].

As millennials and Gen Z have taken over the social media platforms, becoming both influencers and influencees, the same is reflected in the upending shopping behaviour. Social media have sped up acceptance of trends as of millennials' affinity with nostalgia and experimentation, which cannot be ignored. Learning how to articulate and incorporate these insights within the strategy without compromising on offering will become increasingly important in a crowded marketplace.

The challenge in predicting trends

Firstly, identifying rapidly changing trends requires data gathering and processing at speed, so as to not miss out on the potential customers and market share.

Secondly, product attribution (product tagging in terms of features, functionality, and trends), is typically incomplete and inaccurate leading to slow trend processing and erroneous results.

How can an automated product tagging solution help?

With product life cycles becoming shorter than ever and trends changing frequently, AI solutions can help in rapid automation of tasks like manual product tagging, leading to increased efficiency and saving time = money.

ATTRIBUTESMART

Attribute Tagging

AttributeSmart generates product attributes from product images, labels and descriptions, using AI models trained by retail experts, leading to significant improvements in catalog depth and accuracy. This leads to productivity gains, better decision making and improved product discovery.

Trends Tagging

With changing trend's definitions, it can be a huge task for the stakeholders to recategorize and tag thousands of SKUs and styles manually. Since trends and meta-tags are functions of micro attributes, AttributeSmart provides clients flexibility to create and have their own curated definition of meta-tags. Ex: Business casuals, Evening wear etc.

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Trend Forecasting & Predictions

With micro trends taking just a few weeks or months to be adopted by the consumers, it is important for the brands to identify trends before they translate to commercial success from sassy trends. Through AI algorithms, it is easier to gain insights formulated on real time fashion trends datasets and customer sentimentanalyses. Trend predictions based on social media can help brands to consistently renew themselves with capsule collections and exciting and new products.

Fashion is our chosen second skin in every aspect. The decision retailers make during this time will be crucial to their survival in the new era of retail.

Schedule a demo with us. Our dedicated customer success teams will get in touch with you.

https://www.impactanalytics.co/schedule-demo/

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info@impactanalytics.co