

# Behind Vogue: Research on the Making Strategies of Gen Z Fashion Marketing

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**Abstract.** In 2022, Gen Z has become a strong potential fashion consumer group and is becoming a major player in fashion consumption. As the influential “fashion bible”, it would be valuable for Vogue to consider Gen Z as a new target group to maintain its market share and gain more advocates. In this paper, secondary data from multiple sources is used for analysis, and three problems in Vogue’s marketing were identified. It analyzes data such as Gen Z’s spending power and preferences and gives some suggestions for Vogue to target Gen Z in terms of its magazine content and promotion methods. Through the research, it is found that Vogue’s target market is a high-end luxury group that favors expensive fashion styles. It currently has an online version of magazines and a layout of online marketing channels such as Instagram. However, according to secondary data, Gen Z’s ability to consume fails to reach the high-end products, and they have a more diversified and unique pursuit of content and brand. In addition, Vogue has less brand awareness online among the Gen Z group than its competitors, such as Cosmopolitan and ELLE. Therefore, this paper proposes that Vogue focus on what Gen Z concerns in terms of content. For example, to reduce the influence of commercial ads on the content of the fashion magazine and slightly change the cover style to meet Gen Z’s tastes. Vogue can offer fashion courses on campus to increase the brand’s communication among Gen Z students in terms of marketing approach. This study is not only intended to improve the effectiveness of Vogue’s brand marketing but also to offer the marketing field a fashion industry perspective in the study of Gen Z.

**Keywords:** Gen Z; Fashion Marketing; Vogue, Strategy.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Especially after the digital revolution, communication has vastly changed in modern society. With the prevalence of the internet, a new generation emerged. The term “Generation Z” was first presented by Hunter S. Thompson in 1994. Researchers later categorized Generation Z as the people born between 1995 and 2020, “the first fully global generation that extensively used digital devices and engaged through social media which shaped their lives” [1]. Growing up under the influence of mobile digital devices, “Generation Z is the native generation wandering between the electronic virtual and real worlds” [2], which molded their consumption concept that remarkably differs from any previous generation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Gen Z Planet, “Generation Z accrues around \$229 billion annually in wages” [3].

Along with a population of 2 billion globally [4], it is obvious that this is a generation of great purchasing power. In addition, Generation Z’s emphasis on aesthetics and individuality has led to the soaring demand for beauty and fashion products. However, in the fashion industry, Gen Z can be easily overlooked. To dig deeper into this issue, the paper revolves around the fashion marketing of Gen Z based on the case of Vogue magazine. Vogue, considered the fashion bible publicly, is undoubtedly a predominant figure in the ever-growing fashion industry, especially for its trendy material screening and re-creating. While it used to cater to main millennials, Generation Z now

accounts for a considerable portion of its readership that can't be neglected. Therefore, it is empirical to study how Vogue adjusted its marketing strategies in the era of Gen Z.

## 1.2 Literature review

The previous study by Bhardwaj and Fairhurst proposed that "Today's fashion market uses the Fast Fashion as the marketing strategy to face the problem of the fast refresh, short-term popular, and low profit in Today's fashion market". If the fashion apparel retailers want to win a profit quickly, they need to take the "speed to market" strategy to join the market competition. Fast Fashion marketing focuses on understanding the real-time preference of customers, adding the preference into the design to improve the profit margins, and catering to the customers in the short term [5]. Valaei and Nikhashemi found that "The results indicate that brand and self-identity are the factors that most shape Gen-Y consumers' attitudes towards fashion apparel." The style, price, country of origin, and social identity is not related to purchasing attitude. "Because Generation Y consumer behavior is affected by their parents or peers", it is essential to build a good Word of Mouth, price, and style as marketing strategies for Fashion for Generation Y [6]. Moon and Bordi researched that "Millennials are interested in technology, media, cult-stamped retro Fashion, and culture". When they purchase stuff, they often compare price and quality before making a purchase decision. "Generation X is materialistically interested, price-sensitive and often purchases brand names that are not necessarily designer labels" [7]. Fromm and Read analyzed that "Generation Z will be the future customers who showed increasingly advanced device behaviors and digital expectations, who are good at seeking, evaluating, and sharing information, and who will take responsibility for themselves to ensure the best possible experience". Generation Z like special and unique. Their high bar turns into a new challenge for most traditional retailers and brands because Generation Z grows up in an extremely delightful customer environment. They will be a big challenge for future marketing [8]. Vogue Business posted that "Generation Z knows the best suits for them, and they shop everywhere. Are 56% of Gen Z prefer to buy fashion stuff in-store, and 38% prefer shopping online". They are willing to shop in different channels and buy higher quality products; they follow the fashion trend, but they also have some frugal tendencies. Generation Z loves Fashion, but they might also consider the healthy in Fashion; they love to buy fashion products in exercise design and will love to buy fashion sports outfits outdoors. Generation Z has special old fashion lovers, and they will spend money on second-hand products instead of new products [9].

## 1.3 Research gap

In contrast, most marketers prefer their study of fast fashion as the marketing strategy for today's fashion market. However, the fast-fashion strategy may not be able to keep up with fashion changes. The fashion market does need the prediction based on customers' need and want. Few scholars currently formulate the marketing strategy of the fashion market according to the demographic macro environment of marketing in different generations; even they have a few marketing strategy papers of different generations. Most marketers aim at generation Y, X, or millennials rather than generation Z. Therefore, marketers must have more marketing strategies for Generation Z about fashion in the coming years.

## 1.4 Research framework

This paper will focus on the data analysis of generation Z, including their behavioral habits such as social media used, apps used, hobbies, etc. Secondly, business model analysis and consumer analysis of Vogue and its marketing strategy will be displayed to identify current and potential problems. Lastly, there will be some solutions suggested for Vogue's marketing strategy based on the understanding of generation Z.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Literature analysis

The primary method to be used in this paper is literature analysis. This will help the authors to have an objective understanding of the Generation Z group and Vogue consumers. The data will be used to analyze the behavior and psychology of the Generation Z group and to characterize the core Vogue consumers. This article will use secondary data to find the unique differences between the Gen Z group and other generations, as well as the overlap between the characteristics of Vogue consumers and the Gen Z group, based on current research reports by scholars on the Gen Z group, to suggest optimizations for Vogue's marketing strategy on Gen Z.

### 2.2 Comparative analysis

Moreover, the paper has employed a comparative analysis approach that focuses on Vogue's marketing strategies for 20 years. It aims to study the changes and adjustments from 2002 to 2022. Back in the 2000s, millennials fashion was at a peak. However, as time changed, Gen Z is now a prominent purchasing force in the fashion industry. In Russia alone, out of 800,000 readers, people aged from 16 to 24 years old account for 35 percent, followed by the next largest age group of 25 to 34 years old [10]. Functioning as a trend producer and material integration medium, Vogue needs to constantly acclimate to the dynamic times in its content, advertising, and marketing. Hence, Vogue has demonstrated different characteristics in marketing strategies at different times. Through analyzing Vogue's inner accommodation, aside from printing a comprehensive marketing strategy of Vogue itself, it is hoped that more attention can be drawn to the fashion marketing of Generation Z to provide further enlightenment on the entire fashion industry.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Vogue prefers Big-name Fashion

Vogue claimed that its mission statement is to "whom can people trust to curate the conversation surrounding fashion and culture and positioning themselves as the ultimate authority and resource" [11]. Nevertheless, the most recommended fashion product on the official website is a big name brand. According to the official statistics, the most popular TOP5 brand vogue mentioned are Gucci, Nike, Dior, Balenciaga, and Moncler [11]. Expect for Nike, the average unit price of these recommended brands is \$1000; Nike's merchandise isn't cheap either, with an average price of \$150. Based on these data, Vogue seems to be more inclined to recommend big-name fashion than all kinds of fashion items. According to Smyth's researched "the regular page print of vogue readership is \$187,609, and the cover will cost \$197,007, \$225,156, and \$234,554" [12]. When the brand can pay for Vogue to win the publication, does Vogue still have authority over fashion? In addition, the main recommendation of big-name fashion seems to be inconsistent with their mission statement, which will mislead readers that big-name fashion is fashion. Hence, they only pursue the brand and ignore the design. Vogue's marketing strategy can also mislead Gen Z about the meaning of fashion. Gen Z might buy big names to follow the fashion. It is not wrong to recommend the big-name brand in Vogue, but when Vogue mainly recommends big names, Gen Z does not seem to consider Vogue's target customers. Gen Z is the children from 1995 to 2020[1]. These children are in the group that has just entered society, and the income is not high, or the group that is still using their parents' money. If Vogue only recommends big-name fashion products, gen z may not have enough financial strength to pay for these fashion items. Based on the Statista Research Department research, "Mean disposable household in the U.S. in 2020, Gen Z only have \$38635 each year; comparing with Millennial \$84,975 and Gen Z \$113,455, Gen Z has the lowest income compared with other generations in the U.S." [27]. However, Gen Z is a generation that likes to follow fashion trends. Gen Z might spend much of his money buying big-name products to satisfy his fashion pursuit. Or Gen Z will give up getting fashion

information from Vogue because Vogue's fashion recommendations do not suit their purchasing power. Suppose Vogue only focuses on big-name fashion recommendations. In that case, firstly, it will not match their mission statement, and secondly, they may lose the customer base of Gen Z, which is the main purchase in the future market. Moreover, Vogue may put financial pressure on Gen Z readers who keep following their fashion guide because if they spend their money on big names, they may not have enough savings left for living.

### 3.2 Vogue's fame-oriented strategy is challenged

Furthermore, the perspective of Gen Z consumers also offers strategic insight. According to a report carried out by McKinsey & Company, "Generation Z will represent 40% of global consumers in 2020" [13]. As Lindsay Peoples Wagner, editor-in-chief of Teen Vogue, says, "Gen Z audiences are continuously described as elusive. Still, they're influential because they're willing to make changes" [14]. Growing up in a relatively affluent society, Gen Z significantly differs from any generation before. As Wang states, Gen Z is no longer limited to meeting the basic needs of survival, but focuses more on leisure and entertainment, pursuing unique tastes and styles, seeking and having higher expectations for individual spiritual pursuit" [15]. In addition, emphasis on personal appearance is ever-growing in the digital age, which laid the foundation for fashion consumption. However, Vogue may have missed the customer pain point in recent years. When browsing Vogue's online website, it is not difficult to notice a front page filled with big brand names like Chanel, Saint Laurent, and Miu Miu. These brands are beneficial for Vogue as they are already well-established and self-advertising, contributing to selling more copies. This is also related to Vogue's brand positioning, aiming at high society and the "dreamer" [18]. Yet, such luxurious brands are challenged by vintage clothing in Gen Z's consumption. The reason is that "Gen Z has the highest desire to purchase sustainable products among all four generations, 28% of Gen X shoppers, compared to 32% of Boomers and 35% of Millennials" [16]. And "they are growing aware of the apparel industry's waste challenges, propelling them towards fashion re-commerce options such as the second-hand clothing market" [17]. Moreover, vintage shopping is no longer viewed as lower-class purchase behavior in the eyes of Gen Z. Instead, the vintage clothing price is not necessarily lower than that of the current luxury brands, even without a brand tag. The industry is growing rapidly and favored by Gen Z as it caters to their search for uniqueness, environmental-friendly. Therefore, Vogue needs to reconsider its fame-oriented fashion brand promotion strategy that neglects consumers' preferences to capture Gen Z's attention. There is a way to explore Gen Z's fashion marketing strategies while maintaining its high-class image.

### 3.3 Vogue needs higher brand awareness and influence power online

GCS's (Statista Global Consumer Survey) user survey of Decorative Cosmetics & Facial Care in 2021 [19] demonstrates that the two most frequently read online beauty magazines in the group of Gen Z were Cosmopolitan and ELLE. 22% and 19% of the 1032 respondents read them, while Vogue only ranked third, accounting for 17%.

By comparison, the respondents who have read Cosmopolitan and ELLE in the past 12 months are mainly Gen Y, respectively, accounting for 37% and 38% of the four generations. However, the age distribution of users who have read Vogue was more even than the two competitors. 33% of them were Gen Y, and 28% were Gen Z, the same percentage as Gen X. This suggests that Vogue has received some degree of attention from Gen Z. However, Vogue lacks more than Cosmopolitan and ELLE are brand awareness and influence power.

According to GCS, Vogue is not currently ranked high in the perspective of reading [20]. In the United States, vogue.com is the eighth most-read online magazine. Also, in terms of the age group of its current subscribers, vogue.com has a high share of 30 - 39-year-old readers compared to onliners. Therefore, there is still room for vogue.com to increase its reach to users under 26 years old.

For customers, the current way to reach Vogue is through the Vogue website and the \$12-per-year email subscription [21], and Vogue's advertisements and social media posts. Therefore, it is supposed

that Vogue's reach problem is not due to the low number of channels to reach the target audience but rather due to less content sharing by users. This can be supported by the GCS survey on the behavioral characteristics of vogue.com users on social media. Vogue users are more likely to like company posts than share them [20]. Among the respondents' social media activities in the last 4 months, 56% of users liked company posts, compared to only 38% who shared company posts, ranking last among social media activities. However, communication on online channels needs to be pushed by more user sharing. Therefore, Vogue can increase users' desire to share by changing the content posted on its social media accounts.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Stay true to the real fashion that attracts Gen Z**

This study addresses the new generation's influence on the fashion industry and examines how the industry has changed in the marketing aspect to accommodate them better. As discussed before, Vogue now attracts quite a considerable portion of Gen Z, yet it fails to cater to their best interests. The credibility and authority of Vogue have been challenged due to its brand-name-oriented promotion and abusive use of celebrity effects. From the findings of this study, several solutions are offered.

Firstly, it is essential that Vogue recognize real fashion rather than endorsing the luxurious brands that pay the highest advertising fees. If not, this could result in brand avoidance "due to the inability to fulfill one's symbolic identity requirements" [22]. Because of Vogue's predominance, "it has a profound impact on the standard globally from models' looks and new fashion trends to styles in photography, styling, and writing" [23]. For Gen Z, the trend is to follow individual uniqueness that best represents themselves. Therefore, Vogue should identify Gen Z's individual needs through more authentic interactions and credible fashion recommendations. However, it does not indicate that Vogue should abandon all luxury brands' marketing but calls for staying true to genuine fashion.

Secondly, attention should be paid to Vogue's choice of brand image. To keep up with its high-end brand positioning, Vogue has been using a mass of household-renowned celebrities and supermodels. In recent years, supermodels like Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner have been dominating Vogue's cover, with Bella featuring 27 cover pages and Kendall 20 pages. There have already been complaints about its lack of boldness and creativity. A study by quantile found that "76% of Gen Zers said they feel diversity and inclusion is an important topic for brands to address, compared to 72% of millennials, 63% of Gen Xers, and 46% of Baby Boomers who felt the same." [24]. It has become salient for Vogue to introduce new blood that is more relatable to Gen Z. For example, it can launch a monthly feature of Generation Z's best street shots instead of repetitive model faces.

Thirdly, Vogue advocates unrealistic body images, stereotypes of women, and racial bias similar to the overall fashion industry, which is not following Gen Z's view. Although an increasing focus on personal appearance drives fashion consumption up, Gen Z remains "principled about purchasing brands that address pressing social and environmental issues, with 94% in favor [25]. With the rise of feminism and the nobody shame movement, Gen Z is the generation that thrives on breaking social stereotypes. Vogue has carried out a reform in this area to some extent by casting plus-size models and featuring people of color. But consumers were not fully convinced due to its very low frequency, which appeared to be a politically correct scheme. Hence, Vogue needs a comprehensive reconstruction of its social awareness. It demands in-depth research and respect for the current issues that Gen Z cares about instead of showcasing them for commercial reasons.

### **4.2 Vogue should add experience for Gen Z customers and open courses on campus**

Based on Wang Yongtao's study, "Gen Z has unique style and taste, and they love to seek more stimulation and experience" [15]. However, Vogue's official website seems to lack stimulation and experience. When users open the Vogue website and choose the fashion option, there are only categories: celebrity style, street style, models, designers, and trends. If users pick any style, the entire

page is filled with many model photos and articles. These photos and articles seem to make Vogue's page less attractive, and it takes users a long time to read articles. Wang Yongtao also mentioned that "Gen Z focuses more on leisure and entertainment" [15]. Therefore, Vogue can add some tests to experience the products recommended by Vogue according to the characteristics of Gen Z's preference for experience and entertainment. For example, there is a famous personality test called "16 Personalities"; Vogue can learn from this test and create a fashion sense test. Users can be based on this test to learn more about their fashion preferences and taste. For Gen Z, the fashion sense test will also have an educated opportunity about fashion and fashion offerings. The education can emphasize and expand the overlap between Vogue's offered benefits and the benefits Gen Z consumers require. In addition, Vogue could also create a program for consumers to try online lipstick and beauty tests; the program could even try to get customers to try on clothes and bags online. These methods will stimulate consumers' interest in Vogue and increase the sense of experience and entertainment, and these methods could consider the new marketing strategies for Gen Z.

Moreover, compared with Cosmopolitan and ELLE, Vogue digital magazine and Vogue.com have poor spread and influence, especially among Gen Z customers. It is also tricky for Gen Z to understand Vogue from Vogue's social media, digital magazines, and Vogue. Com, which is full of models and articles. Vogue should reconsider its customer need and want and improve its brand awareness for Gen Z customers. A good way for Vogue to address these issues is to offer courses on campus.

Ohio State University Fisher College of Business has an "Industry Immersion Program"; students are separated into a specific industry and work on a hands-on project. This program is one year two semesters class, and the student will learn the class with real-world company executives [26]. Vogue could also consider the same way of cooperating with schools and offer classes to help the student learn more about the recent Fashion Market. Because most students in college were born in 2000-2003, they are also Generation Z; Vogue could let Gen Z learn more about today's fashion industry development by offering courses. Then Vogue can also learn about Gen Z's need and want by communicating with Gen Z and doing the project together. Open courses on campus can improve the offline awareness of the brand and improve the online spread and influence. Gen Z will be the leading consumer group of Vogue in the future. Knowing the consumption behavior, habits, and characteristics of Gen Z in advance can help Vogue to formulate a marketing strategy for Gen Z.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined three problems with Vogue if it were to target Gen Z and has given corresponding recommendations to each problem. First, there is a mismatch between Vogue's luxurious brand positioning and Gen Z's low spending power. It is recommended to focus on the current issues that Gen Z cares about rather than displaying them for commercial reasons. For example, reduce advertising about luxury brands while adding more interactive, unique, or customized fashion content or brand recommendations. Second, there is a difference between the high-end fashion displayed in Vogue magazine and the personalized style pursued by Gen Z. Take the cover as an example. And It is recommended to replace the day-to-day model faces with the best street photography features for Gen Z. Third, Vogue's online influence and sharing are not as strong as other competitors. It is suggested to offer fashion courses on campus to increase Gen Z students' brand awareness of Vogue offline, thus indirectly influencing online communication.

As Gen Z becomes the predominant consumer with a strong purchasing power, the fashion industry is challenged by their seemingly capricious group of fresh demands. This paper is dedicated to offering the fashion business a more in-depth insight into Gen's fashion preferences. Vogue is set as the research subject because of its significant role and impact on the fashion industry. This report is well researched with information and data supported by several previous pieces of literature, which provide Gen Zers prefer to be unique and on-trend, at the same time brand avoidant, when consuming fashion products. This also indicates that Vogue needs to enhance its engagement with Gen Z and

proposes potential strategies based on Gen Z's analysis. Furthermore, Vogue might be able to push the industry to solve some key issues of fashion marketing regarding Gen Z using its great impact.

Finally, this article focuses on Vogue's marketing strategy changes based on the Gen Z fashion market study, but it does have limitations. Most data in this article are secondary data, which is gathered from different websites with different research methods and cultural backgrounds. Thus, some deviation may occur in the result and conclusion. In addition, due to the lack of primary data, this paper lacks actual interactions with Gen Z, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. Nevertheless, there should not be a sharp difference because Gen Z possesses similarities that are granted by the era they live in, whether regionally or globally. It is hoped that based on this study, Vogue and the whole fashion market can consider creating new marketing strategies targeting Gen Z in the future. Vogue and the fashion industry could try to collect primary data and conduct more communication with Gen Z customers. To attract Gen Z's attention and produce marketing strategies closer to Gen Z's preferences and characteristics, they can consider exploring more online platforms and digital marketing. As for further studies, it is suggested that more light can be shed on the combination of new marketing techniques and psychological research on Gen Z.

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