What Am I going to Wear?!

The Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis, the Economic Crisis, and the Fashion Industry on the Way Gen Z Dresses

Student Name: Carmen van ‘t Zelfden

Student Number: 509716

Supervisor: A.S. Radermecker

Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the world has faced the Covid-19 pandemic where everyone's lives turned upside down. This could have an influence on the way individuals behave and feel. Since daily habits changed, all kinds of changes happened in the minds of people, such as rethinking the way they dress. Especially for Generation Z, whose lives were supposed to be vibrant and lively, but did not have the incentive to get dressed up anymore. Now that the Covid-19 crisis has passed, this could have an influence on the current fashion trends, and to how Generation Z would dress now. This research aims to fill these gaps by answering the following research question: "What is the effect of the Covid-19 crisis, the economic crisis and the fashion industry on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?".

Using a mixed method approach, a self-completion questionnaire, and focus groups, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, the economic crisis and the fashion industry on the way Generation Z dresses has been researched. It is found that there are statistically significant relationships between the consequences of crises, the segments of the fashion industry, the bandwagon effect, and purchase intention. This has been supported by the qualitative results, showing evidence of changing consumption behavior, the need to follow others, and perceptions on comfortable clothing have been discovered. A contribution has been made through the discovery on new insight on the effects of crises, the changing consumption behavior, the development of fashion trends, and the definition of comfortable clothes.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, Generation Z, clothing consumption behavior, social media, comfortable clothing.

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The end of my time as a student is near. From next year onward, I will start working. After five years of studying, I can say that I am proud of myself. I have completed a bachelor's in Business Administration, a master's in Media & Business, and hopefully soon another master's in Cultural Economics & Entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

Over the past three years, every individual has experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, where lockdown restrictions made it unable to live a normal life. By having social contacts, this virus could easily be spread. Therefore, social activities were restricted, schools were closed, jobs were cut, and hospitals were full of people who were infected by the virus (Bozdag, 2021; Msherghi et al., 2021). This means that a lot of people were sitting at home all day, especially Generation Z (Gen Z). Their lives should have been lively and vibrant, but during this crisis, this was not the case (Harari et al., 2022). There was no need to get dressed up and get ready anymore, since this generation had nowhere to go. Consequently, the fashion industry had to adapt to the circumstances of the Covid-19 crisis (Ozdamar Ertekin et al.,2019). It is likely that this has had an influence on what type of clothes they would wear every day. Additionally, new trends have emerged that changed the fashion landscape, such as the interest in wearing comfortable clothing (Harwood, 2022). While recent studies have already been investigating the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on Gen Z, this research aims to close a knowledge gap by studying the clothing consumption behavior of this generation, and focusing on comfortable clothes (Atalan, 2020; Gazzola et al., 2020; Serafini et al., 2020).

1.1. Problem background

It all started in December of 2019, where a new virus was detected in China (Serafini et al., 2020). Soon, it was found that this virus was spread through the social contact that people have. In a few months, the virus showed up all around the world. Hence, a world's crisis emerged, the Covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions were being made by the government, which made it impossible to continue life as it used to be (Gan et al., 2022). On the one hand, this was necessary because of the rapid spread of the virus. On the other hand, individuals have been experiencing negative effects of being in lockdown, and industries had to find innovative ways to keep their businesses alive (Wang et al., 2020). This also counts for the fashion industry. One might correctly state that everyone needs to wear clothes, which would not make this industry vulnerable. Nonetheless, when the lifestyles of individual change, the fashion industry must adopt to this (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020).

In the past century, a shift in the fashion industry has emerged. Before the industrial revolution, fashion was only available for the upper class because it was expensive and exclusive (Simmel, 1957). The revolution provided the opportunity to create clothing in a faster and more efficient way. Thus, the mass market fashion brands emerged, and people from all social classes were able to dress in a trendy way (Simmel, 1957; Vilaça, 2022). This is still applicable in today's day and age. However, there are still different segments of the fashion industry ranging from being affordable and produced in masses, to being very scarce, exclusive, and expensive (Bhardwaj & Fairhust, 2009; Jain et al., 2014; Leon, 2023). While clothes were usually shopped in stores, this was impossible during the Covid-19 pandemic, and clothes had to be bought online (Pang et al., 2021). This has had a significant impact on the segments of the fashion industries as innovative ways to still sell fashion items had to be discovered and implemented (Wang et al., 2020).

From the consumer perspective, being in a crisis has an influence on what to buy. Especially for Gen Z, as already stated, their lives changed drastically (Harari et al., 2022). Being stuck at home comes with positive and negative psychological effects (Bozdag, 2021; Msherghi et al., 2021; Serafini et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2021). It is likely that this influences the way Gen Z dresses. Be that as it may, not only do feelings influence the way Gen Z dresses, but it is likely that time spent on social media also has had an impact. This is due to the emergent social media marketing strategies, where a new type of celebrity, the influencer, creates a personal relationship with consumers. In time of the Covid-19 pandemic, where social contacts were restricted, it is likely that Gen Z looked up to the influencers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). The reason for this is that this generation might have a tendency to follow other individuals (Maxwell, 2014).

Due to all the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, a new type of trend has emerged, the comfortable clothing trend. While tight, neat, and uncomfortable clothes have been the standard for over decades, a recent shift towards comfortable clothing has been found (Hastings, 2018; Oaks, 2019). During the lockdowns, it was not necessary to dress up anymore. Additionally, it is shown that if an individual does not feel good, they tend to dress themselves in a way to feel better (Kamalha et al., 2013). This has sparked the interest of the fashion industry, where comfortable clothing trends have been developed (Harwood, 2022).

1.2. Research question

While the Covid-19 crisis has just passed, studying the effects of this crisis on the fashion industry and the consumption behavior of Gen Z is essential to research. Recent studies have already shed a light on the fashion industry and the effects of a crisis (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). Additionally, the effects of a crisis have also been studied, which show that the consumption behavior is affected by this (Ang, 2000). It is assumed that the Covid-19 crisis will also have an influence on the consumption behavior of Gen Z. Furthermore, it is shown that Gen Z counts for over 30% of the world's population, and they seem to be less resilient for a crisis than other generations (Flynn, 2023; Harari et al., 2022). This proves that it is important to study this generation. Regarding the fashion industry, it has been studied what the consumer behavior of people is in times of crisis (Liu et al., 2021; Ong et al., 2021; Seibel et al., 2021). This research aims to contribute to how the Covid-19 crisis effects the way Gen Z dresses and aims to dig deeper into the emergence of the comfortable clothing trend. This will be done by explaining the effects of this crisis, digging into the segments of the fashion industry, the consumption behavior of Gen Z, the social media marketing strategies, and influences on trends. Therefore, the following research question with sub research questions has been proposed.

RQ: "What is the effect of the Covid-19, the economic crisis and the fashion industry on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?".

- **SQ1**: What is the impact of crises on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ2**: What role does the fashion industry play in the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ3**: How do social media marketing strategies influence the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ3**: What is the impact of the comfortable clothing trend on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?

1.3. Academic and societal relevance

When a crisis occurs, negative effects often arise. This research sheds a light to the period after the Covid-19 crisis, which could bring new insights and directions for further research (Ong et al., 2021). A lot of studies have already focused on the fashion industry, for example by examining the shift to e-commerce instead of selling in a physical store, and how this influenced sales (Pang et al., 2021). Additionally, the combination of the role of the three segments of the fashion industry and the Covid-19 crisis on the way people dress is a topic that has not been considered as for today. Generation Z (Gen Z) has already come to the attention in studies about fashion (Amed et al., 2022; Gazzola et al., 2020). This research will contribute to the development of clothing trends during a pandemic as this has not been considered yet. In this way, fashion brands can be better prepared for when another crisis occurs. Moreover, this research focuses on comfortable clothing contributes to existing research papers about this type of clothing since comfort can be defined in multiple ways (Kamalha et al., 2013; Pamuk, 2007). This research will dig deeper into the perceptions of comfortable clothing after the Covid-19 crisis, which could contribute to a research gap, and it be a guidance for fashion brands regarding the development of new trends.

1.4. Chapter outline

This research is structured in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic of the impact of Covid-19 on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. Chapter two consists of the theoretical framework. First, the disturbances of crises are discussed. Second, the fashion industry is divided into three segments: the luxury, the ready-to-wear, and the mass market fashion industry. Third, the consumption behavior of Gen Z will be exploited with a focus on purchase intention and the bandwagon effect, followed by the impact of social media and influencers. Fourth, theories behind trends are explained with a focus on the comfortable clothing trend. Chapter three explains the methodology, where the self-completion questionnaire and the focus groups are discussed, and how the quantitative and qualitative analysis has been done. In the fourth chapter, the results of the research will be revealed. The quantitative results are combined with the qualitative results, and a discussion with the literature of chapter two is developed in this chapter. Lastly, the conclusion provides an answer to the research question, discusses the limitations, and explains the contributions.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, all concepts and theories that are relevant will be elaborated on to have a well-grounded framework for the whole research. To begin with, section 2.1 explains the disturbances of crises, focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. Next, section 2.2 will provide an overview of the fashion industry, creating a distinction between the fast fashion industry, the ready-to-wear industry, and the luxury fashion industry. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the consumption profile of Gen Z. Within this section, the bandwagon effect, and purchase intention will be central. Section 2.4 explains the emergence of trends and exploits the opportunities of digital and influencer marketing. Next, comfortable clothing will be defined in section 2.5. Lastly, the assumptions that will be testes are explained in the final section.

2.1. The disturbances of crises

When a crisis occurs, it is likely that it has significant impact on Gen Z's lives, and the way they feel. Academics have shown that this generation is less irrepressible when a crisis happens (Harari et al., 2022). Consequently, consumption behavior tends to change in line with circumstances that are taking place (Ang, 2000). This also influences industries as they need to adapt to the consequences of changing consumption patterns (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2019). Hence, it is important to dig deeper into researching crises, since the world's population just surpassed the Covid-19 crisis, and an economic crisis is around the corner. The Covid-19 crisis can be defined as a global pandemic, where the health of people was in danger (Michie, 2020). Currently, the pandemic is no longer a central matter in people's lives. This provides researchers the opportunity to research the consequences that this crisis has brought. According to Atalan (2020), psychological, environmental, and economic effects have occurred because of the lockdown. These three effects will be central throughout the research.

During the Covid-19 crisis, social activities have been prohibited to a point, where the world was in lockdown (Gan et al., 2022). Studies have found that this has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of Gen Z. It is shown that depression, emotional disturbance and exhaustion, stress, insomnia, and other negative psychological effects have come to light because of social distancing and being in lockdown (Atalan, 2020; Gan et al., 2022; Serafini et al., 2020). Furthermore, some reactions on the Covid-19 crisis are boredom, loneliness, frustrations, and the emergence of anxiety (Msherghi et al., 2021; Serafini et al., 2020). In other words, emotional distress is experienced, which means when an experience occurred, one can suffer from it emotionally (Cullen et al., 2020;). On the other hand, some positive psychological effects of the Covid-19 crisis are that lockdowns have created the possibility to have time for activities that people normally do not have the time for (Williams et al., 2021). In other words, according to Bozdag (2021), opportunities were created, where activities that were delayed could be fulfilled. Additionally, it is shown that there is a higher rate of self-reflection, and that more appreciation is shown compared to before the Covid-19 crisis (Williams et al., 2021).

The influence of the Covid-19 crisis on psychological wellbeing has an influence on the world's economy. First, due to the lack of economic activity and the ability to have a social life is one of the biggest economic effects of the lockdown (Koch et al., 2020). All stores had to be closed, travelling, and partaking in other leisure activities was not possible, and much more daily tasks were prohibited. Furthermore, due to the health threat of the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers' buying behavior changed because more essential goods were bought (Gazzola et al., 2020). In other words, as Laato et al. (2020) stated, the Covid-19 crisis caused unusual consumer behavior. There has been a great deal of hesitation to buy supplies because it has been restricted and people were afraid to get ill (Koch et al., 2020). Additionally, in times of crisis, disposable income is decreased, and often households are more careful with their money (Ang, 2000). Hence, there is more focus on product durability. During lockdown, the jobs of people were at stake, and people braced themselves for a difficult time.

Although the economic effects are alarming, the restrictions due to health risks resulted in positive and negative environmental effects which have also been found due to the Covid-19 crisis. Atalan (2020) discusses that water and air quality improved because of the restrictions during the lockdown. Cars, plains, and other transportation options were less frequently used because of the health risk that Covid-19 caused (Bashir et al., 2020; Nelson, 2020). Although crimes that happened on the streets significantly reduced during the lockdown, domestic violence increased (Nelson, 2020). This can be linked to the stress, confinement, and helplessness that is experienced because of the lockdown as not everyone experienced a healthy living environment (Atalan, 2020; Nelson, 2020). Be that as it may, medical waste occurred (Bashir et al., 2020). For example, sanitizers, face masks, medicines, vaccinations, and other medical products to ensure the health of people had to be used, which eventually went to waste.

2.2. Economic properties of the fashion industry

Fashion is a concept that can be broadly understood. According to Hemphill and Suk (2009), everyone is participating in fashion to some extent since everyone must wear clothes. Additionally, it is not just about the physical or material needs when new fashion styles come to light. According to Blaszcyk (2008), fashion can be split into four ways, mode, manners, mores, and markets. Mode is about how people dress, manners are about expressing oneself, mores contain how people live, and markets are about the definition of people on a demographical and psychological level. This definition will be central to this research, as it covers the most important properties of fashion is about. Additionally, according to Aspers & Godart (2013), fashion can be seen as the imitation, production, and consumption, the creation of personal and collective identity (Aspers & Godart, 2013). Additionally, Simmel (1957) also provides interesting insights about fashion. In this case, fashion derives from class distinction, where fashion unites, but also excludes all other groups that are not in the same class. This note is important while creating the distinction between luxury, ready-to-wear, and fast fashion, which will be explained in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1. The luxury fashion industry

In the past decades, the fashion industry has been growing extensively. To define the luxury fashion industry, it is important to provide an understanding of the word luxury. According to Kapferer (1997), luxury applies art to functional items, it offers more than just an object, and it is said to be a reference to good taste. Hence, the luxury fashion industry revolves around product designing, innovating, and aesthetic beauty, which can only be visible through the creation of a strong brand that is appealing in the eyes of the consumer (Onkonkwo, 2007). Luxury brands are trendsetters, and they are seen as exclusive. This is what typically distinguishes luxury goods from any other good as it brings more than just functionality. The good is about the esteem that arises for the person owning the good (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004). However, the downside of this fashion industry is that because the goods are exclusive, only contain specific sizes, and the products are expensive. This means that the products are available for a small group of people (Leon, 2023). Hence, the luxury fashion industry can be defined as the industry for luxury brands which is all about offering exclusivity, turning art into functional objects, creating a strong brand, and being the trendsetter (Kapferer, 1997; Onkonkwo, 2007; Vigneron & Johnson., 2004).

An important notion while defining the luxury fashion industry is branding. As mentioned before, fashion changes constantly due to multiple factors. One of the main factors is the history of fashion, whereas the different eras in history have had a great impact on the fashion industry. According to Simmel (1957), only the upper class was able to follow the latest fashion since they were the ones with money. Yet, later, this would be adopted by the lower classes, and a trend arose. When luxury fashion brands and the upper class noticed this, they would change their styles again to remain exclusive. For this reason, the branding strategy of luxury fashion brands evolved excellently over the past century, for which these brands developed great power over society (Okonkwo, 2007). Branding entails positioning the brand and influencing consumers in a way that is beneficial for the company, and the luxury fashion industry has been excellent in adopting this strategy over the last century. Therefore, it can be said that the luxury fashion industry is the most valuable and influential industry in the world (Okonkwo, 2007). This matter also explains why luxury brands have been trendsetters.

2.2.2. The ready-to-wear industry

In the middle of the luxury and the fast fashion industry, there is the ready-to-wear fashion industry. Although there is no clear definition of the ready-to-wear fashion industry, it cannot be ignored anymore since it is important on the economic, cultural, and social level of society (Dari, 2009). This type of fashion industry arose from the luxury fashion industry and is characterized by being accessible to a broader range of people (Munasinghe et al., 2022). As mentioned before, the luxury fashion products that are made are accessible to a small group of people. Thus, the ready-to-wear fashion industry uses different measure methods compared to the luxury fashion industry where standard sizes are being made rather than specific sizes. According to Dari (2009), this industry is still very unstable, but is emerging in today's day and age. Furthermore, this industry is characterized by offering a wide range of products, varying in prices, and available to a lot of consumers (Ferring, 2017). Additionally, unlike the luxury fashion industry, ready-to-wear products are more often made in a factory rather than it is hand made. The pieces are meant to be portrayed at fashion weeks and can be bought by the consumers in stores (Leon, 2023). Since these types of clothes do not resemble the luxury products, but are also not mass products, it can be concluded that this type of fashion industry can be placed in the middle of the hierarchical fashion industry ladder.

2.2.3. The fast fashion industry

The last fashion industry to be discussed is the fast fashion industry. Over the past decades, the dynamics in the fashion industry began to change, and fashion was not bound to four seasons anymore (Bhardwaj & Fairhust, 2009). Thus, the market speeded, and competition increased, which led to the rise of the fast fashion industry. This is due to the global demand, asking suppliers to create new collections in a fast way (Gazzola et al., 2020). Consequently, within the fast fashion industry, it is not about forecasting demand and trends anymore, it is about being fast, and competing with others in order to make a profit (Bhardwaj & Fairhust, 2009). Additionally, according to Pang et al. (2021), fast fashion can be defined as a fast production cycle, a low price, and selling it to consumers fast and efficiently. In other words, fast fashion entails that product lifecycles have become shorter because fashion items tend to change almost every week nowadays (Okonkwo, 2007). Because of the rise of the fast fashion industry, every individual has the opportunity to follow the latest trends, and it is not bound to the upper class or people who have the money anymore. In this way, younger generations, like Gen Z, also have the option to buy clothes they would like. Yet, Simmel (1957) is still right about one thing, when trends reach the lower classes, luxury fashion designers develop a new trend again to remain exclusive.

2.3. A consumption profile of Gen Z

This research focuses on Gen Z, young people from the year of 1996 until approximately 2012 (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020; Flynn, 2023; Özkan, 2017). Currently, this generation consists of approximately 30% of the world's population (Flynn, 2023). Regarding the consumption behavior of Gen Z, they consist of around 40% of all purchases in the world, which gives them a significant buying power (Thangavel et al., 2022). The characteristics of this generation regarding consumption behavior can be closely linked to the rise of the Internet, as Gen Z grew up with the rise of new technologies, social media, and digital marketing (Jain et al., 2014; Özkan, 2017). This makes this generation different from older generations. Because of the rise of the digital realm, this age group contain the most impulse buyers as this generation wants the newest items the fastest as they value innovation (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020; Kaihatu, 2020). Since Gen Z is more comfortable with buying online purchases than older generations, it is likely that they have different values that influence their purchase intention. For instance, this generation is less likely to be loyal to brands, and they want to consume fashion items in a fast way (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020; Thangavel et al., 2022).

2.3.1. Purchase intentions of Gen Z

According to Thangavel et al. (2022), Gen Z can be split into four types of buyers which will be central when discussing the purchase intention of Gen Z. First, a part of this generation is interested in retrieving affordable clothing, but also with a good quality. Because the Internet provides the opportunity to do research on products, Gen Z is likely to investigate the best price-quality ratio before buying new fashion items (Özkan, 2017). Second, Gen Z can be characterized as buyers who shop fashion items just because they run into them (Thangaval et al., 2022). Hence, this explains why this generation is less loyal compared to other generations (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020; Thangavel et al., 2022). The ease to buy products online according to this generation is what makes them convenience buyers who are less loyal. Third, Gen Z is very price conscious, which can be linked to the first segment. This generation often partakes in convenience shopping, but wants to receive the best deals, discounts, and get the best value for their money. A possible explanation is that a part of Gen Z may be hit by the increasing inflation rates that are happening nowadays (Amed et al., 2022). Therefore, fast fashion is increasingly popular among the younger generation as it is easily accessible and affordable, and sometimes even provides good quality (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). Fourth, a part of Gen Z shops consciously for a certain brand and quality which is the opposite of the third segment. This segment cares less about prices, and more about which brand they buy from and what the quality is (Thangavel et al., 2022). This can be supported by Jain et al. (2014) who show that Gen Z values quality, recognition, and fit when buying fashion items.

In this part, it has become clear that Gen Z cannot be characterized as one particular type of buyer, but that there are different segments that influence purchase intention. This research aims to figure out if one or more of these groups of buyers come to light when conducting the self-completion questionnaire and the focus groups.

2.3.2. The emergence of sustainability

Despite the different purchase intentions of Gen Z, this generation are widely known as caring more about environmental and social issues than other generations (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). This research found that there is a connection between the purchase intention of Gen Z and ethical values toward the protection of the environment. In other words, purchase intention is influenced by the need to be more sustainable. This is supported by Williams and Hodges (2022), where it is found that Gen Z wants brands to produce sustainable products, because this generation is concerned about the dangers of unsustainability. Moreover, the study of Gazzola et al. (2020) also found the increasing emergence of sustainability among Gen Z. Thus, it can be stated that the Gen Z can be characterized with the environmental and social concerns, which has an influence on purchase intention.

Nonetheless, not every person that falls under Gen Z has the resources to purchase more sustainable clothing. Hence, solutions have been found. McCoy et al. (2021) show that this generation is the leading way toward apparel rental services. In other words, Gen Z is making more use of preowned fashion instead of buying new clothes from the stores. This is also supported by Williams and Hodges (2022), who state that Gen Z is a group of people whose purchase intention is characterized by the willingness to recycle. For example, secondhand buying or trading clothing is done by this generation. Lastly, Amed et al. (2022) found that Gen Z is buying less fashion which is motivated by the sustainability issues. In these ways, this generation is trying to consume more responsibly.

2.3.3. The bandwagon effect

Since the rise of social media, Gen Z is heavily influenced by what is being pictured on all social media platforms since this is their inspiration source (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Gen Z values quality, affordable prices, good deals, while valuing sustainability. These differences in purchase intention can be described through the bandwagon effect. The definition can be drawn back to Leibenstein (1950), who defined the bandwagon effect as where an individual wants more or less of a product at a given price because other individuals in the market also want more or less of that product. In other words, the bandwagon effect can be defined as the tendency of individuals to follow the actions or attitudes of other people because they get information from them, or they prefer to conform (Maxwell, 2014). Thus, the bandwagon effect arises because people have the desire to buy to get a feeling of belonging to a certain group which can be linked to individuals wanting to belong to the upper class by following the trends that fashion brands develop (Simmel, 1957). Linking this to Gen Z, these young people often have the desire to feel like they matter, they want to feel confident, and they want to feel good (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

A core example where the bandwagon becomes evident is that Gen Z tends to be influenced by friends, and family. This statement is supported by multiple studies, such as Jain et al. (2014) who found that information gathering about fashion happens to family, friends, and blogs. Furthermore, according to Thangavel et al. (2022), before deciding what to buy, Gen Z asks for recommendations of friends and family first. Additionally, while this generation is less loyal to brands, they trust their friends with suggestions most about products and brands (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Lastly, Djafavrova & Bowes (2020) have also found that friends and family are the main resource to decide what to purchase in terms of fashion.

Another example where the bandwagon effect is visible is on social media, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.4. Trends

In the fashion industry, trends are constantly developed by fashion forecasters, which are then adopted by consumers by purchasing fashion items in the stores. A fashion trend can be defined as a style of dressing that represents the identity of a consumer (Saravanan & Nithyaprakash, 2015). According to Jackson (2007), it is about the construction of fashion items related to the four seasons of the year. In other words, it is about how the appearance of fashion is developed and how consumers identify with certain types of fashion. A fashion trend also represents a certain style that the population is interested in over a period (Barrera, 2021).

Trends change all the time. Nowadays, trends do not only change because of a season, but also when consumers' attitudes, buying behavior, or lifestyles are becoming different than before. This can be further explained from the perspective of fashion going through a cycle. According to the life cycle of a fashion product, when a new trend arises, the old trend will be rejected, and fashion brands must adopt to this (Jackson, 2007). Sproles (1981) state that fashion trends can be observed as being either a long-term or a short-term cycle. On the long term, it is visible that trends from decades ago tend to come back today (Sproles, 1981; Adhav & Griswold, 2022). An example can be found in trends from the 90s that are making a comeback, such as bucket hats, cargo pants, and high waist mom jeans (Adhav & Griswold, 2022). On the short term, one could think of micro trends that emerge from social media platforms, where consumers and influencers have a lot of purchasing power. First, the trend emerges in popularity, eventually reaching a peak, and in later stages will be forgotten again (Mollard, 2022). Since micro trends and social media platforms are increasingly significant, the next section will further elaborate on this.

2.4.1. Digital marketing and the role of influencers

Nowadays, the fashion trend life cycle becomes shorter than ever before because of the presence of the emergence of digital marketing on social media platforms. Moreover, because of the Covid-19 crisis, a lot of time was spent online which also caused fashion trend life cycles to be even shorter (Seibel et al., 2021). According to Okonkwo (2007), in the past century, luxury fashion brands have been setting fashion trends since the fashion weeks in different big cities were being held. Until the late 90s, fashion events, like shows and runways were restricted and only available to a few people (Okonkwo, 2007). Fashion managers and designers from luxury brands had the power to decide what would be the next thing people would want to wear. Nonetheless, in today's day and age, everyone can follow all fashion shows, runways, and events on social media platforms. This has emerged even more during the Covid-19 crisis when events could not take place as it was restricted.

During the period of the pandemic and before that, fashion brands have been developing new fashion trends by adopting a social media marketing strategy. Social media can be defined as the applications in the digital realm where consumers can interact with each other, share content, and collaborate with each other (Kim & Ko, 2012). Examples of social media where people share fashion insights are Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and much more. Social media marketing (SMM) entails that social media platforms are used to execute marketing matters (Mandal & Joshi, 2015). It is about listening to the consumer as social media marketing is about interacting. The goal of this type of marketing is to retrieve a two-way communication (Kim & Ko, 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2015). Regarding fashion trends, fashion brands can communicate new fashion trends, but consumers can also speak about fashion products that they would like to see. This is beneficial and effective as consumers' needs can be easily tracked (Mandal & Joshi, 2015; Seibel et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the growth of social media has sparked a new type of celebrity, the influencer. An influencer can be defined as a well-known individual who is able to reach a big number of consumers in a specific market and produce content that is effective for marketing purposes (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). This can be seen as a new type of marketing, where brands receive engagement and increasing sales. It is different from traditional marketing strategies because influencers have an overview of the comments, likes, and they get immediate feedback from viewers (Chetioui et al., 2020). The goal of this type of marketing is the creation of a personal relationship with consumers and to portray a level of authenticity (Francisco et al., 2021; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). In this way, consumers believe influencers are 'friends' of the influencers, and are being influenced on the latest fashion trends.

2.5. Comfortable clothing

In this research, one type of clothing is central, comfortable clothing. The concept consists of two parts, clothing, and comfort. Clothing can be seen as an essential human need since it is functional and is used to ensure that the body is protected from environmental or activity conditions (Kamalha et al., 2013; Uttam, 2021). According to Kamalha et al. (2013) and Pamuk (2008), comfort is the state where an individual does not experience pain or unpleasantness. In other words, an individual experiences a certain smell, smoothness, color, or consistency where there is no pain or discomfort.

Looking at the definition of comfortable clothing, there are three main types of clothing comfort: psychological, sensorial, and physiological. This thesis focuses on psychological and sensorial comfort. Psychological comfort revolves around the roles, the social being, and the values of an individual which consists of personal aspects (Kamalha et al., 2013). This type of comfort is linked to environmental attributes, like fashion preferences, consumers' modes and styles, and other social-cultural settings (Pamuk, 2007). In other words, this type of comfort is about acceptability from society, and does not focus on the fabrics. For this reason, this type of comfort suits this research because this research focuses on environmental settings, like crises and current fashion trends. Over and above that, sensorial comfort can be defined as how the clothing feels on the skin of a person (Kamalha et al., 2013). In comparison to psychological comfort, this type of comfort does focus on the fabrics and the mechanical attributes (Pamuk, 2007). The sensations that one feels when there is contact with the skin, are the most important aspect of this type of comfort. Tactile, moisture, and pressure sensations are the three types of sensations, which all have an influence on how an individual feels (Kamalha et al., 2013). This is relevant to this research because the better the clothing feels on the skin, the better a person feels (Hastings, 2018; Oaks, 2019). This is an important notion regarding the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis where people are feeling more stressed (Liu et al., 2021).

Based on the literature review, comfortable clothing can be defined as clothes that can be worn in everyday life, that feels loose and good on the skin, is not tight, and still makes the person feel good and trendy (Kamalha et al., 2013; Pamuk, 2007). The difference between this type of comfortable clothing and homeward clothing is that homeward clothing has not the function to make a person feel trendy, while comfortable clothing can also look good nowadays. Furthermore, it is important to state that there is also a difference with sports clothing, since sports clothing have a different type of fabric, and are more often used for sports purposes.

2.5.1. Comfortable clothing trends

It has become evident that the Covid-19 crisis caused several negative psychological effects. Everyone had to stay at home and did not need to dress up to go outside for a certain period. Consequently, since people did not feel good, they wanted to feel comfortable, which sparked the interest of fashion brands to develop comfortable clothing trends. A shift in fashion trends has been developing where there used to be a way of thinking where uncomfortable, but more appealing clothing was the standard practice (Hastings, 2018). For examples, wearing tight clothing and high heels to present oneself in a positive way has been the norm for years. Nevertheless, in today's day and age, comfortable clothing has made a shift from slouching to wearing pieces that makes a person feel better about themselves (Oaks, 2019). Thus, there is a rise of comfortable clothing where individuals can still feel good, but also look good. There have been multiple comfortable clothing trends that illustrate this, like the 'oversized everything' trend (La Jeunesse, 2022). Furthermore, Cheng (2019) already predicted before the Covid-19 crisis that the athleisure trend, the sportswear trend, would grow significantly. It is likely that this trend has shifted towards wearing types of clothing as that are comfortable clothing due to the Covid-19 crisis, since social contacts were restricted. Thus, people did not have to dress-up for other people, because they had to stay at home. As the peak of the Covid-19 crisis has already gone by, several fashion articles, like Harwood (2022), show examples of comfortable clothing that has been created in a fashionable way, such as soft shoes, loose dresses, and soft and loose pants and blouses that are portrayed in a trendy manner. In this way, it is shown that comfortable clothing has grown into a fashion trend.

2.6. Hypotheses

Now that the theories have been discussed, assumptions can be developed. In total, five hypotheses will be proposed. The first hypothesis revolves around the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis. Second, the three segments of the fashion industry will be distinguished in a hypothesis that contains three sub hypotheses. The third and fourth hypothesis revolve around the purchase intention and the bandwagon effect regarding the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. Lastly, an assumption will be made regarding the comfortable clothing trend.

2.6.1. The relationship between the crises and the way Gen Z dresses

The psychological, economic, and environmental effects of the Covid-19 crisis influence all industries around the world. In this research, the focus revolves around the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. It is expected that there is a relationship between the crises and the way Gen Z dresses. This generation will be studied, because it is found this generation is less resilient against a crisis (Harari et al., 2022). Therefore, it is likely that Gen Z is affected by the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis. It has also been shown that during the Covid-19 crisis, the demand for essential goods increased exponentially while the demand for nonessential goods decreased (Liu et al., 2021). This can be linked to the psychological effects, where people feel more anxiety because of the health risks that Covid-19 brought (Atalan, 2020; Gan et al., 2022; Serafini et al., 2020). This impacts the fashion industry since the products can be characterized as nonessential, which were bought less likely due to the crisis (Gazzola et al., 2020). This provides a link to the economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis, which is resulting in an economic crisis. Additionally, not only the demand of products has been changing due to psychological effects, Ozdamar Ertekin et al. (2020) found multiple changes in clothing consumption behavior due to the Covid-19 crisis. For instance, reusing fashion products, reducing, reconsidering, and relying on discounts are changes in clothing consumption behavior. Accordingly, Liu et al. (2021) also found changes in clothing consumption behavior, such as consumption disruption, transition, change and a pent-up demand. This study also found that the changes in clothing consumption behavior is a coping mechanism for the stress people endure because of the Covid-19 crisis.

Based on the aforementioned literature, it has become clear that all the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis are intertwined and connected. In this way, academics have shown that clothing consumption behavior changes due to a crisis. Nevertheless, the studies have not focused explicitly on Gen Z yet. This research expects the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis have an impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior. The following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: The Covid-19 pandemic and the recent economic crisis have an impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.

2.6.2. The relationship between the fashion industries and Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior

The three segments of the fashion industry differ significantly from each other. First, the luxury fashion industry values exclusivity and offers products to a small amount of people (Leon, 2023). Second, the ready-to-wear fashion industry offers expensive products, but for a larger group of people (Ferring, 2017; Leon, 2023). Third, the fast fashion industry is affordable, and is produced in masses, which makes it available for everyone (Gazzola et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2021). It is likely that these industries have a different impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. It has become evident that there are different types of consumers among Gen Z. It is expected that these profiles of purchase intention react differently to the three segments of the fashion industry.

People who shop for a brand and quality are more likely to be interested in the luxury fashion industry (Kapferer, 1997; Thangavel et al., 2022). It is proposed that the luxury fashion industry and the ready-to-wear industry have an impact on the consumption behavior of Gen Z. On the one hand, this might be a positive effect, because this generation is becoming increasingly interested in the luxury and ready-to-wear industry (Cho et al., 2022; Jain et al., 2014). On the other hand, with the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis, Gen Z have less income to spend (Amed et al., 2022; Ang, 2000). This could imply a negative effect between these fashion industries and the consumption behavior of Gen Z. When it comes to the fast fashion industry, a positive effect on the clothing consumption behavior of the generation is expected. A large part of Gen Z seeks for deals, discounts, and searches for products that resemble the best price quality (Thangavel et al., 2022). In addition, the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis caused Gen Z to spend less on fashion (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). Hence, it is more likely that this generation would search for bargains. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2: The fashion industry has an impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.

- **H2.1**: The luxury and the ready-to-wear fashion industry have an impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.
- **H2.2**: The fast fashion industry has a positive impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.

2.6.3. The relationship between the Covid-19 crisis, purchase intention and the bandwagon effect

In the theoretical framework it has been enlightened that the Covid-19 crisis influences the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. In this section, the consumption behavior is split into purchase intention and the bandwagon effect because it is expected that these concepts are essential regarding Gen Z. First, it is expected that the Covid-19 crisis has an impact on the purchase intention of Gen Z. Regarding the framework of Thangavel et al. (2022) with the four segments of buyers, it is expected that individuals change their perception on how they shop for clothing based on how they experienced the Covid-19 crisis. Additionally, since Gen Z is a diverse generation with multiple types of buyers, it is likely that the Covid-19 crisis has an influence on this. When a lifestyle changes, it is shown that purchase intention changes

(Ang, 2000). For these reasons, it is expected that the Covid-19 crisis influences the purchase intention of Gen Z.

For the bandwagon effect, it is expected that Gen Z is affected by this, and that this is enlarged through the Covid-19 crisis. According to Djafavrova & Bowes (2020), the source to get recommendations on purchase intention are friends and family. Due to the lockdown restrictions, this reliance has grown significantly since one could only connect through social media platforms. Nonetheless, on these platforms, influencers have also been active. They create a personal relationship with their audience, which could influence Gen Z (Francisco et al., 2021; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). In times of lockdown, this generation spent more time on social media than before the crisis (Francisco et al., 2021). The following hypotheses have been established.

H3: The Covid-19 crisis has an impact on the purchase intention of Gen Z.
H4: The Covid-19 crisis has an impact on the need to follow other individuals of Gen Z.

2.6.4. The relationship between the comfortable clothes trend and the way Gen Z dresses

During the Covid-19 crisis, several psychological negative effects from being in lockdown occurred, such as depression, stress, anxiety, loneliness, confinement, and more (Msherghi et al., 2021; Serafini et al., 2020). It is likely that this has created the desire to feel comfortable. Besides that, the people of Gen Z who did not get to go to school or work anymore had to sit home all day. This caused the feeling of not needing to dress up anymore. Consequently, fashion brands must adopt to the changing lifestyles of consumers (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2019). This has created the emergence of comfortable clothing trends. Regarding the life cycle of fashion trends, it is expected that this trend will disappear on the short-term as the comfortable trends are at its peak now, and a decline will follow afterward (Mollard, 2022). Nevertheless, looking at the long-term cycle of fashion trends, it is expected that the comfortable clothing trend will come back (Sproles, 1981). Moreover, it is expected that the trend, where one could feel comfortable, but still look appealing, will be present for the long-term. This can be drawn back to the definition of comfortable clothing, where comfort is not only about how good the fabric feels on the skin, but also that the person wearing it, feels better (Hastings, 2018; Oaks, 2019). After the Covid-19 crisis, the psychological effects do not disappear instantly, and it is likely that Gen Z will still feel the need to be comfortable in what they wear. Hence, it is unlikely that Gen Z would want to go back to unpleasant and uncomfortable clothing in the following years. The following hypothesis is developed.

H5: The comfortable clothing trends have a long-term impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.

3. Methodology

Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of this research. Section 3.1 will explain the research methods, a self-completion questionnaire, and focus groups. Second, the sample, the sampling method, and the sample size will be elaborated on. Furthermore, it is essential that the variables explained in the second chapter are operationalized which will be explained in paragraph 3.3. Over and above that, the following section will explain the steps of how the self-completion questionnaire and the focus group went. Lastly, how the data is being collected and analyzed will be explained in the last section.

3.1. Research design

This research aims to identify the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis and the fashion industry on the way Gen Z dresses. A mixed-method approach will be used because this topic contains complex and social aspects, (Malina et al., 2011). First, a quantitative method can be defined as retrieving numeric information and relying on the information that is received (Creswell, 1999). This is convenient for studying a large group of people (Holton & Burnett, 2005). It is easier to generalize conclusions, which means the conclusions could also be drawn for people outside the sample. Second, a qualitative method will be central throughout this research to gain a deeper understanding of the results of the self-completion questionnaire. This is a non-statistical way to retrieve data and has the advantage that the feelings, attitudes, and experiences of the participants can be described in a deeper way (Rahman, 2016). Here, the researcher collects the data and interprets it (Creswell, 1999). This method is used to better understand a social phenomenon in a subjective way (Malina et al., 2011). As this research revolves around the Covid-19 crisis, the economic crisis, and consumption behavior, a qualitative method can provide deeper understandings for these phenomena. Combining a quantitative and qualitative method, the research outcomes of the quantitative method can be deeply understood by the insights the qualitative method provides.

3.1.1. Self-completion questionnaire

The quantitative method that will be central in this research is an online self-completion questionnaire. According to Matthews & Ross (2010), a questionnaire can be defined as proposing multiple questions that participants have to answer, with the goal of retrieving structured data. An advantage of an online questionnaire is that many participants can be gathered within a relatively short time. Moreover, the target population, Gen Z, is knowledgeable about tools on the Internet, thus an online design would be convenient to use (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). It also contains low costs, and collecting the data can be done in an easy way (Jones et al., 2008). Furthermore, doing an online self-completion questionnaire, the opportunity to access parts of the population that could not be contacted without the use of online tools (Wright, 2017). Nonetheless, a self-completion questionnaire comes along with disadvantages. First, a low response rate is characteristic of a survey (Jones et al., 2008). When sending the questionnaire to the target population, the research cannot check whether it is actually done by the participant. Second, when a participant does not understand a question, it cannot be explained by the researcher. It is important that the questions are correctly formulated (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Third, the profile of the participants remains vague or unknown since it cannot be exactly traced who participated in the questionnaire (Wright, 2017).

An important aspect of a self-completion questionnaire is the design of the questionnaire. According to Van Selm and Jankowski (2006), questionnaires need to contain the correct length since this could influence the response rate. If participants find the survey too long, they might not finish answering the questions. Besides that, the order of the questions is crucial, where demographic questions need to be proposed at the end (Matthews & Ross, 2010). At the end of a questionnaire, participants lose interest, and filling in demographic questions is relatively easy to do. Lastly, since the questionnaire is online, the design needs to be clear, easily readable, and short (Regmi et al., 2016). In this way, misconceptions about the questions can be avoided.

3.1.2. Focus groups

The qualitative method that will be utilized for this research is a focus group. This method can be defined as a purposive group discussion, where the focus lies on a given topic (Raibee, 2004). In this research, the focus will be on the impacts of the fashion industry, the Covid-19 crisis, and the economic crisis. Acocella (2012) defined a focus group as a technique of retrieving information that is 'non-standard' as it revolves around an informal discussion among people. The goal of conducting a focus group is to develop interaction among participants and to retrieve high-quality information in a short amount of time (Acocella, 2012). In this research, unexpected aspects of a social phenomenon have occurred and will be investigated; the change in the way Gen Z dresses due to the fashion industry, Covid-19, and the economic crisis. With a focus group, the underlying detailed information can be gathered, which cannot be collected by a questionnaire. Furthermore, the advantages of focus groups are that it is easy to organize, and it is an inexpensive method (Acocella, 2012). Nevertheless, the group dynamic can cause people to develop certain opinions that they would not have if the atmosphere was different.

When organizing a focus group, it is important to follow a clear framework (Nyumba et al., 2017). First, the objectives of the research need to be established. Hence, the purpose, the discussion questions, and the ethics need to be handled. Second, participants need to be collected. According to Rabiee (2004), between six and ten participants is the ideal amount. Third, the location will be in an online environment. According to Nyumba et al. (2017), it creates an atmosphere of modernity, dynamism, and competitiveness which is not present with face-to-face focus groups. Nonetheless, the researcher must bear in mind that people might speak less because the focus group will be online, poor connection can prevent people from speaking. When this occurs, a possible solution is to ask a person more specifically about their opinion.

Before the focus group takes place, it is important that the researcher is prepared to take on the role of the moderator, set up all the equipment that is needed, and start the recording. During the focus group, there will be an introduction, discussions, track questions, and conclusions. The introduction will warm up the participants, whereas deeper discussions can take place. The goal of the track questions is to follow up on interesting insights. Lastly, conclusions will summarize the findings, and thank the participants. After the focus group is held, the focus group will be transcribed, and analyzed by coding.

3.2. Sample

When conducting a self-completion questionnaire, it is important to define the sample that must be investigated. A sample can be seen as a representative part of the population (Bartlett et al., 2001). This research focuses on individuals who are between the age of 18, and 27. Thus, minors are excluded because according to the law, they cannot provide consent (Lenhart, 2013). This would make the dissemination strategy more complicated and could include costs. Thus, the sample consists of people who are born between 1996 and 2005, who are called Generation Z (Gen Z) (Özkan, 2017). According to Djavarova & Bowes (2021), this generation is the most significant impulse buyer, which makes this group interesting to conduct research on. Moreover, Gen Z has had the opportunity to discuss their perceptions of the digital realm from a young age (Jain et al., 2014). For example, this generation grew up discussing the latest fashion trends, which makes it a key age category in the fashion industry. Lastly, as stated by Amed et al. (2022), Gen Z is maturing, which means that their purchasing power will grow in the future. Therefore, it is important to research consumer behavior for future purposes.

For the focus group, Gen Z has also been targeted. However, according to Raibee (2004), it is important that participants in the group have something to say about the topic of the discussions. Hence, they would feel more comfortable speaking. Over and above that, participants for the focus group must have some knowledge about the topic that will be discussed. For that reason, the following criteria have been developed. First, the participants must have a slight interest in fashion and trends. In other words, the researcher is not looking for people who are massively into fashion and trends, because these people might provide biased opinions. Second, the participants must care about the clothes they wear, in the sense that they think about what to buy and what to wear. Third, they must belong to the age category of Gen Z.

3.2.1. Sampling methods

The dissemination strategy for the self-completion questionnaire is of great importance because data must be collected in the right way to be able to retrieve the results that are wanted. First, non-probability and probability sampling need to be distinguished. With probability sampling, every individual has the same chance to be picked for the research (Vehovar et al., 2016). Non-probability sampling can be described as choosing participants based on non-random criteria (Elliot, 2020). In this research, this type of sampling will be used because the sample consists of a specific generation with a certain age category. If probability sampling would have been used, the data cleaning process would take longer as the individuals who do not fit in the age category have to be deleted. Furthermore, although there is no randomization of the participants this strategy is characterized as a straightforward way to gather participants in a relatively short period (Bartlett, 2005).

For the self-completion questionnaire, three types of non-probability sampling methods have been used to gather participants from Gen Z. First, purposive sampling can be described as the researcher seeks for a representative sample that fits the research the best, which is Gen Z in this case (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Verhovar et al., 2016). Second, network and snowball sampling have been used, where the individuals from the network were selected, and they were asked to further distribute the self-completion questionnaire (Rahi et al., 2019). Since this these last methods can have an ample bias, the three methods will be used interchangeably (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Lastly, voluntary, or accidental sampling might happen when the self-completion questionnaire is shared on the Internet when people representative of Gen Z come across the link and decide to participate (Vehovar et al., 2016). For the focus groups, purposive and expert sampling have been used because been used. Expert sampling is used when individuals need to be gathered that are experts or have experiences with the topic that needs to be researched (Etikan & Bala, 2017). In this research, participants in the focus groups required general knowledge about fashion trends to receive useful insights. Besides that, they had to be representative of Gen Z since this is the target population.

3.2.2. Sample size

Since the sample consists of Gen Z, a large sample size must be reached. According to Rahi et al. (2019), a minimum sample of 200 should be reached when doing an online survey. Given the fact that this research contains a mixed-method approach, the minimum sample size will be set at 150. This means that to be able to draw sufficient conclusions, this number must be reached. After distributing the self-completion questionnaire, a total of $N = 193$ is reached, which is a reasonable sample size (Comrey & Lee, 1992). Nevertheless, some participants failed to fill in more than 50 percent of the questions. When this was the case, they were deleted from the data set. After cleaning the data, the total sample size is $N = 186$, and the minimum sample size is achieved.

3.2.3. Ethics

The self-completion questionnaire can have some ethical issues. First, the questionnaire might be exclusive. The language of the questionnaire will be English. When an individual is unable to speak this language, this person cannot complete the questionnaire (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, since the questionnaire will only be available online, people who do not have the Internet cannot access the questionnaire. Nevertheless, since this research focuses on Gen Z, it is unlikely that a lot of people from this population will face this issue. Second, the confidentially of the data that is being collected may be questioned (Hamilton, 1999). This is because the Internet is used, and data will be stored. To ensure confidentiality, the participants had to click an arrow if they agreed to participate. Third, it is important that the questionnaire is anonymous (Matthews & Ross, 2010). In the survey software settings, anonymity has been turned on, which means the researcher does not gather personal information of the participants. Fourth, it will also be checked if underaged individuals have filled in the questionnaire. If this is the case, these people will be deleted from the data set immediately.

For the focus groups, ethical issues may also arise. First, not every individual wants their name revealed. It is crucial to ensure confidentially, which means that the purpose of the study is explicitly elaborated, and that the participants can stay anonymous is they wish to be that (Gibbs, 1997). This is achieved by sending the participants an informed consent form. In this form, an honest explanation of the purpose of the research has been explained, and individuals could sign to agree to participate. They could also indicate whether they wanted their name to be revealed. Additionally, it has been stated that the answers that participants provide will be used for this research only. These matters are important because the answers that respondents give might be sensitive, thus must be handled with care (Gibbs, 1997). Second, it must be considered that some participants may experiences stresses because of the group discussions or dynamics (Smith, 1995). To ensure that participants feel comfortable, the moderator tries to enlighten different perspectives where everyone can share their thoughts.

3.3. Operationalization

3.3.1. The consequences of crises

The first independent variable that will be measured is the consequences of crises. In the questionnaire, participants are asked about the impact of the crises, the price, and product adjustments. For example, one of the statements is: “I find it hard to make ends meet”. These statements are based on a seven-point Likert scale, including twelve statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, Ang, 2001). Since Ang (2001) research personality differences in times of a crisis, only the statements that are applicable to the scope of this research have been chosen. Furthermore, the consequences of the crises are measured by splitting up the questionnaire into a before Covid-19-part, a during, and an after Covid-19 part. In this way, the answers given in these parts can be compared, and it can be found out if this crisis has had an impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. Lastly, at the end of the questionnaire, self-reflective questions are proposed, such as: “The Covid-19 crisis has influenced my perception on comfortable clothing”.

3.3.2. Fast fashion vs. ready-to wear fashion vs. luxury fashion

The second independent variable are the three types of fashion: fast fashion, ready-to-wear fashion, and luxury fashion. During the three periods of time in the questionnaire, participants will read statements about three layers of the fashion industry. The researcher is aware that there are more types of fashion brands. However, these three main types of fashion are chosen to make distinctions in an easier way. The statements including these types of fashion also measure purchase intention of Gen Z and the bandwagon effect.

Additionally, participants perception on fashion has been asked by asking a few questions in the introductory part. For example, one question stated: “What is your favorite type of fashion brand?”, and “What is your favorite fashion style?”. These questions are proposed to gain deeper insights in the perception of fashion from Gen Z which will be interesting when gathering data.

3.3.3. Purchase intention

The first dependent variable that will be measured in the questionnaire is purchase intention. Respondents are asked about if they would buy a product if it were from a fast fashion, a ready-to-wear, or a luxury brand, including four statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, Cho et al., 2022). Hence, the same statements are proposed, but are asked about the three segments of the fashion industry.

3.3.4. Bandwagon effect

The clothing consumption behavior will also be measured by the dependent variable, the bandwagon effect. This variable is tested to see if Gen Z would follow the herd, rather than being unique. Three statements measure the bandwagon effect (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree, Cho et al., 2022). Nonetheless, just like the variable purchase intention, these three statements are asked for the three types of fashion, and over the three periods of time. For example: “Products fast fashion brands are very fashionable”, “Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands are very fashionable”, and “Products of luxury fashion brands are very fashionable”. The statements are inspired by Cho et al. (2022) but the wording is adapted for the sake of this research.

3.3.5. Attitudes towards comfortable clothing

To measure what the respondents think of the comfortable clothing trend, statements and questions have been asked where the attitude of the participants can be revealed. In the first part of the questionnaire, it is asked how the respondent would define comfortable clothing. Then, a definition will be provided. The reason for this is that there will be follow-up questions, and if all respondents have the same definition in mind by just reading it, the validity of the answers will be higher. After proposing the definition, participants are asked if they like to wear comfortable clothes, how much of their wardrobe consists of these clothes, and the reason for buying it. In the part before, during, and after Covid-19, participants were asked their opinion about comfortable clothing in that period of time. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents are also asked if they think this trend is long-term. In this way, the hypothesis can be tested, and it can be found out if it can be rejected or accepted.

3.3.6. Demographics

Finally, demographic information will be gathered from the respondents. The reason that these questions are being asked at the end of the questionnaire is because respondents might have lost interest, and these questions are relatively easy for them to answer (Matthews & Ross, 2010). First, an open question regarding age will be asked because it is important to check whether the participants who fill it in actually belong to generation Z. Second, the participants are asked about their gender, with the following options: 'Male', 'Female', 'Non-binary / third gender', 'Prefer not to say'. Third, the highest completed level of education is proposed, where the Dutch education system has been used. Thus, the options are 'high school', 'Vocational education (MBO)', 'Applied sciences (HBO)', 'Bachelor's degree (WO)', 'Master's degree (WO)', 'Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)', or 'I prefer not to specify'. Lastly, respondents are asked about their income. Since this research is about Gen Z, a range of low to middle incomes has been created, with the lowest possible answer being '< €500', and the highest '> €3,500'. The reason for this is that most of Gen Z is currently studying or just started working, which is why the income is expected to be in this range. After the demographic information questions, a final question will pop up, where participants can leave comments or suggestions to the researcher.

3.4. Data collection and procedure

3.4.1. The self-completion questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire was conducted on the Internet, by using the platform Qualtrics. In this way, the participants could fill in the questionnaire whenever they felt comfortable. An online link where participants could click on, has been distributed on several social media platforms. The link was usable for almost five weeks. First, the link was distributed on Whatsapp, Instagram, and Facebook to contact the researcher's network. A text message was created to easily text a lot of people in one time. Nonetheless, this was not enough to gain the minimum sample size. Then, two Survey platforms have been used to gather more participants. In this way, people outside the network of the researcher could also be reached, which makes the research more reliable. Moreover, it is an inexpensive way to retrieve participants for the study. Since multiple platforms have been used to distribute the questionnaire, the required sample size has been reached.

By clicking on the online link, participants could read the introduction of the research and the researcher. The online self-completion questionnaire consists of five parts. In the first part, people are asked about what kind of fashion, and what kind of style they like the most. Moreover, they are asked questions about comfortable clothing. Then, parts two and three represent a timeline. Part two is characterized as the time before the Covid-19 crisis, and part four is after the Covid-19 crisis. In these parts, participants are asked the same questions. Some statements or questions are rephrased based on the period. In this way, the researcher aims to find out if the Covid-19 crisis has had an impact on the way people think about fashion, and thus dress differently. In part four, participants reflect on their answers, by asking them if they think the fashion industry or the crises have affected the way they dressed. Finally, some demographic questions will be gathered in part five.

3.4.2. The focus groups

After the first results of the self-completion questionnaire were visible, it would be interesting to conduct a focus group to gain deeper insights in the quantitative results. Two focus groups have been conducted on the platform Zoom. The reason for this is that the groups had to be established in a short period of time. Furthermore, according to Nyumba et al. (2017), an online environment creates dynamism which is beneficial for a focus group. In the first focus group, seven people were present, and in the second focus group five people were present. Both focus groups started with an introduction of the researcher, and an explanation of the rules. Then, discussion questions were proposed. When a participant provided an interesting answer, follow-up questions were asked. The first focus group was one and a half hour, and the second group was one hour. Both focus groups were successful, as they provided interesting and deeper insights to the results that were already present from the questionnaire. After conducting two focus groups, the recordings had to be transcribed. By using a transcribing tool, the researcher could precisely transcribe everything that was said during the focus groups. To make sure there were no mistakes, the script has been checked and the tapes have been relistened, In Appendix D, an overview of the profile of the participants is visible, and in a separate document the transcripts can be found.

3.5. Data analysis

For the self-completion questionnaire, when the required sample size was reached, the data was downloaded into SPSS. To correctly use the data, it must be prepared and cleaned. This has been done by deleting irrelevant columns, conducting a reliability analysis through Cronbach's alpha, and computing new variables. The reason that Cronbach's alpha has been used is because it measures the internal consistency of a scale. This means that it is investigated if there is a correlation between the variables that are measured (Adamson & Prion, 2013). Additionally, for the quantitative data, multiple analyses have been conducted. Paired t-tests have been used to reveal the differences in means when before the Covid-19 crisis was compared to after the Covid-19 crisis (Xu et al., 2017). Moreover, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) have been conducted to notice the differences between the different segments of the fashion industry that have been discussed in the theoretical framework. Lastly, a one sample t-test have been conducted to measure the relationship between the comfortable clothing trend and the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z.

For the analysis of qualitative data, two types of coding have been utilized to find the main themes. Coding can be defined as identifying patterns in the data set and giving a code to certain sentences or pieces of text (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). First, open coding was used. This means that every line of the data set is read, and codes have been added with no guidance (Holton, 2010). To provide structure in these codes, the open codes have been followed by axial coding. In this way, connections from the open codes have been made, and have been put into categories (Kendall, 1999). In Appendix E and F, an overview of the codes and the coding tree is visible.

3.6. Limitations

This research is unable to control for every variable within the scope of the topic, which can be perceived as a limitation. For example, not all aspects that influence the purchase intention of Gen Z can be measured. It must be considered that there are variables outside of the scope of this research that may have an influence on the purchase intention. Accordingly, not all consequences of the crises have been measured which is crucial to mention. In the self-completion questionnaire, scenarios before and after the Covid-19 crisis were asked. Participants may not remember their way of thinking before the Covid-19 crisis, since it has been three years. This can be seen as a limitation because the answers may not be reliable if participants do not remember how they used to think. Additionally, it must be taken into account that the participants in the focus groups are not representative for the whole generation. Hence, the findings of the qualitative data cannot be generalized for the whole population. Lastly, it is essential to crucially perceive dressing habits because this differs per person, and it also differs per geological location, and per culture. It must be considered that dressing habits could be different for people living in different countries or people with a different cultural background.

4. Results and discussion

In this chapter, the results of the research will be disclosed and discussed. Section 4.1 explains the data preparation of the quantitative and qualitative data. Then, section 4.2 and 4.3 summarize the demographic information and the descriptive results from the questionnaire. Section 4.4 until 4.8 elaborate on the results of the self-completion questionnaire and on the results of the focus groups. Within these sections, it is important to mention that the findings of the two research methods have been compared with the literature that has been discussed in the theoretical framework. In other words, a discussion between the findings and the literature is visible in section 4.4 until 4.8.

4.1. Data preparation

The qualitative and quantitative data must be prepared and cleaned. First, the columns in the SPSS data set that did not contain relevant information have been cut. For example, the duration time, the date, and the language of the survey are not applicable to the research. Furthermore, missing values have been adjusted to the value of '99'. In this way, the missing values will not be considered for the analyses. In addition, it is examined whether all variables had the correct measures and values. For the focus groups, transcripts have been developed by listening to the recordings, writing all the sentences down, and using a transcript program. This has been done to ensure the correctness of the transcriptions.

4.1.1. Cleaning the data

After preparing the data, the sample size for the quantitative data set is N = 186. For the questionnaire, it is explored whether the respondents filled in all the questions. The participants who failed to fill in more than 50% of the questions have been excluded from the data set. It is likely that these individuals were not actively filling in the questionnaire which makes keeping them in the data set unreliable. Moreover, it is checked whether every participant matched the target group, Gen Z. It is found that two respondents were too old to fit into this group. It is decided not to exclude them from the research because they could still provide valuable results for the research. After cleaning the data, the sample size was reduced from N = 193 to N = 186. For the focus groups, the total is N = 12 distributed over two groups. In the first focus group, the total was N = 7, and for the second focus group N = 5. It has been chosen to not have the same amount of people per group to research if different group dynamics would arise, which would lead to different outcomes.

4.1.2. *Reliability test and computing new variables*

In the self-completion questionnaire, multiple scales for variables have been used. Thus, a reliability analysis will be conducted by using Cronbach's alpha, measuring the internal consistency. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), it is concluded that Cronbach's alpha between .70 and .95 is acceptable. For the bandwagon effect and purchase intention, the internal consistency of the scales was found to be reliable (α = .89 and α = .96) (Cho et al., 2022). In this research, the scales of the bandwagon effect before and after the Covid-19 crisis have found to be reliable (α = .70 and α = .74). In addition, the scale of purchase intention, also measured before and after Covid-19, are moderate and acceptable (α = .69 and α = .70). For the consequences of a crisis, the scales used by Ang (2000) are reliable (α = .82, α = .79, α = .85). In this research, these scales have been merged into one variable, the consequences of a crisis, but comparing before and after the Covid-19 crisis. This is found to be moderate and acceptable (α = .69 and $\alpha = .77$). For all variables, it has been investigated if Cronbach's alpha would increase significantly by deleting an item. Since this is not the case, items have not been deleted. After conducting a reliability analysis, the statements of the scales have been computed into one variable. Hence, new variables have been created. In this way, the analysis can be done in an efficient manner.

4.2. Demographic information

Several demographic information from Gen Z has been collected for the research, age, gender, highest completed level of education according to the Dutch education system, and income. From the answers of the respondents, 133 people identified themselves as women (71.5%), 50 people as men (26.9%), and 2 identified themselves as non-binary/third gender (1.1%). The age ranged from 18 to 34 years, where two individuals did not meet the sample criterion. The average age is 23 years (*SD* = 2.08), and the most frequent ages were 22 years (20.4%), 23 years (20.4%), 21 years (16.1%), and 25 years (12.9%). Additionally, there were outliers, such as 18 years (0.5%), 19 years (1.1%), 32 years (0.5%), and 34 years (0.5%). The highest completed level of education for most of Gen Z is a Bachelor's degree (WO) (45.7%), followed by a Master's degree (WO) (19.4%). This distribution can be explained through the sample criteria since the age of Gen Z is between 18 and 27 years old and are most likely to be studying or recently started working. Lastly, the income of individuals has been proposed. The most frequent income is < €500 (31.2%), followed by €501 – €1,000 (26.3%), and €1,501 – €2,000 (15.6%). This can also be explained through the lens of the respondents being Gen

Z, as most people who are in this age range and are studying at a university do not have full-time jobs yet. In Appendix B, an overview of the descriptive results is visible.

Demographic information has also been gathered from the focus group participants. The first focus group consisted of six females, and one male, in which the ages ranged from 21 until 25. Three out of the seven people have just started working, and four people are currently studying at a university. In the second focus group, five females participate, all from the ages of 21 until 23 years. Four of the five participants are studying at a university, and one of the participants studies applied sciences according to the Dutch educational system. In Appendix D, there is an of the profile of the focus group participants.

4.3. Descriptive statistics of the self-completion questionnaire

In the self-completion questionnaire, the consequences of crises have been tested by proposing items about the economic crisis, and by comparing before and after the Covid-19 crisis. The average mean before the Covid-19 crisis is the lowest (M = 3.67, SD = .83), and the average mean after the Covid-19 crisis is the highest (M = 4.30, SD = .99). Presumably, this could entail that the two crises have had an impact on the way Gen Z dresses. For the bandwagon effect, the average mean after the Covid-19 crisis is higher than before the crisis (M = 4.92, SD = .77). This could entail that there is an increased need to follow other individuals after the Covid-19 crisis happened. Furthermore, there is almost no difference in purchase intention before and after Covid-19, which could mean that this did not change. When looking at the three types of fashion industry, only the mass market fashion industry has a visible difference in the means, where the average mean after the Covid-19 crisis is the highest (M = 4.68, SD = 1.07). The ready-to-wear fashion industry does not provide a difference in the means, and for the luxury fashion industry there is a minor difference. It is likely that there will not be an effect before and after Covid-19. Nonetheless, no actual conclusions can be drawn at this point. For this, further analysis will be conducted. Table 4.3.1. provides a full overview of all means and standard deviations.

Table 4.3.1. Descriptive statistics of the self-completion questionnaire

Variable	**Mean**	**Std.**	**N**
Before Covid-19: economic impact	3.67	.83	186
After Covid-19: economic impact	4.30	.99	185
Before Covid-19: bandwagon effect	4.83	.69	186
After Covid-19: bandwagon effect	4.92	.77	184
Before Covid-19: purchase intention	3.69	.83	186
After Covid-19: purchase intention	3.67	.88	184
Before Covid-19: mass market	4.55	.86	186
After Covid-19: mass market	4.68	1.07	184
Before Covid-19: ready-to-wear	4.18	.89	185
After Covid-19: ready-to-wear	4.18	.94	184
Before Covid-19: luxury	4.06	.88	186
After Covid-19: luxury	4.03	.83	184
Reflection	3.90	.75	185

4.4. The effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis

This section will test if the consequences of the two mentioned crises have an influence on the way Gen Z dresses. In the theoretical framework, the following hypothesis was central: *The economic crisis and the Covid-19 crisis have an impact on the way Gen Z dresses.* A paired samples t-test has been conducted, because it is interesting to compare the results from before the Covid-19 crisis with the results from after the Covid-19 crisis. After conducting this analysis, it has been found that there is a relationship between the consequences of crises and the way Gen Z dresses, $t(184) = -9.35$, $p < .001$. Thus, the mean after the Covid-19 crisis is statistically higher than the mean before the Covid-19 crisis. In addition, Cohen's d is estimated at .92 with a Hedges' correction. This can be seen as a large effect according to Fritz et al. (2012).

During the two focus groups, three effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis have become central. First, it is found that several financial constraints, which are derived from the crises, influence the way Gen Z dresses. Codes that emerged are budgeting, money management, and selective consumption. This implies that the participants struggled in terms of buying new fashion items. In these quotations, it becomes visible that the participants do not have a lot to spend on fashion.

"I didn't have a lot of money to spend. So, I usually looked at the sale items and chose what I liked the most" (Participant 2.2, Female, 22 years of age).

"I obviously was just looking at the like, what's in sale? What's like, a bit cheaper" (Participant 2.1, Female, 21 years of age).

"Living in Rotterdam is expensive and studying […] So, I buy more sale clothes (Participant 2.4, Female, 22 years of age).

The findings of the self-completion questionnaire and the focus group resemble with the literature about crises and consumption behavior. It was found that disposable income is decreased in times of crisis, and that people tend to buy more essential goods instead of nonessential goods (Ang, 2000; Gazzola et al., 2020). This is in line with what has been found in the focus groups, where it has become clear that the participants do not have a lot of money to spend on expensive clothes. Moreover, the emerging economic crisis have led to a higher inflation rate. This has caused Gen Z to use more savings to be able to manage their lives (Amed et al., 2022). Comparing this to the quantitative and qualitative results, it can be concluded that the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis have an impact on the way Gen Z dresses. Additionally, it can be stated that financial constraints are one of these impacts.

The second finding is found in both focus group, where it is shown that Gen Z had a lot of time for themselves during the Covid-19 crisis, because a lot of activities that they used to do were prohibited. The participants agreed that they had time to think about different styles, do research, reflect on themselves, and search on social media for new styles. This created more consciousness about what they liked to wear, how they would like to be perceived by others, or finding out a style that they liked.

"You also had a lot of time to research, fashion styles, things you like" (Participant 2.2, Female, 22 years of age).

"I had the time to focus on something I enjoy. I really did my research, research about brands and fashion magazines [...] And the fact that I had the time to learn how to sew really impacted the way I dress right now" (Participant 2.5, Female, 23 years of age).

"You see like you have a lot of different types of clothing, different types of colors, you can experiment really experiment with that what you think fits your style and your personality" (Participant 1.3, Female, 22 years of age).

Through these examples, the period of the Covid-19 crisis, where everyone had to stay at home, provided the opportunity to experiment with different types of clothing styles. For example, one participant started sewing, the other participant reflected on their identity, and one other participant got influenced by social media. This can be linked to the positive psychological effects of the lockdown restrictions, where the participants expressed that having time made them create new opportunities (Bozdag, 2021). Accordingly, it was found that there was more time to partake in activities because there was more free time (Williams et al., 2021). It has become clear that every participant experienced the Covid-19 crisis differently, which resulted in different experiences and different outcomes when it comes to rethinking the way one should dress.

The quantitative data proves that the results are statistically significant, the qualitative data provides a deeper insight in the effects of the crisis, and the literature is in line with these findings. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis can be accepted, which means that the Covid-19 crisis and the economy crisis have an impact on the way Gen Z dresses, where financial constraints and having more time to do other activities are the main impacts. Nonetheless, it must be stated the negative psychological effects of these crises have not been found. A possible explanation is that this might have been sensitive information.

4.5. The impact of the three segments in the fashion industry

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, three types of fashion industries are central, where the following hypothesis was proposed: *The types of fashion industry have an impact on the way Gen Z dresses.* Two one-way ANOVAs have been conducted to compare before with after the Covid-19 crisis. This section will be followed by the preferred clothing styles of Gen Z, and all the findings will be interpreted with literature.

4.5.1. Before the Covid-19 crisis

After conducting the one-way ANOVA for the period before Covid-19, it is found that the relationship between the segments of the fashion industry and the way Gen Z dresses is statistically significant. The mass market has the following results, $F(68, 117) = 2.14$, $p < .001$, the ready-to-wear industry, $F(68, 117) = 6.40$, $p < .001$, and the luxury fashion industry, $F(68, 117) = 2.53$, $p < .001$. This means that there are differences in the means of the three fashion industries, which influences the way Gen Z would dress. In other words, the mass market, the ready-to-wear and the luxury fashion industry all have a different impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. In the table below, an overview of the statistics is provided.

Table 4.5.1. The three segments of the fashion industry before the Covid-19 crisis (N = 185)

Industry	**Sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**p**
BC_Massmarket	74.982	68	1.103	2.139	<.001
	60.327	117	.516		
Total	**135.309**	**185**			
BC_Ready	115.687	67	1.727	6.396	<.001
	31.587	117	.270		
Total	**147.274**	**184**			
BC_Luxury	86.053	68	1.265	2.533	<.001
	58.459	117	.500		
Total	**144.512**	**185**			

4.5.2. After the Covid-19 crisis

The results for after the Covid-19 crisis have found that there is a relationship between the three types of fashion industry and the way Gen Z dresses. The results are statistically significant, for the mass market fashion industry the results are, $F(60, 123) = 2.37$, $p < .001$. For the ready-to-wear industry, $F(60, 123) = 4.94$, $p < .001$, and for the luxury fashion industry, $F(60, 123) = 2.31$, $p < .001$. This entails that differences in the means of the industries have been found regarding the period after the Covid-19 crisis. In other words, all industries have a different impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. Table 4.5.2. shows an overview of the statistics.

4.5.2. The three segments of the fashion industry after the Covid-19 crisis (N = 183)

Industry	**Sum of squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**p**
BC_Massmarket	113.034	60	1.884	2.377	<.001
	97.479	123	.793		
Total	**210.513**	**183**			
BC_Ready	114.978	60	1.916	4.943	<.001
	47.685	123	.388		
Total	**162.663**	**183**			
BC_Luxury	67.049	60	1.117	2.314	<.001
	59.391	123	.483		
Total	**126.440**	**183**			

In both periods, it is found that the three segments of the fashion industry all have an impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. This aligns with the literature about the three fashion industries and consumption behavior of Gen Z. It was found that the three fashion industries differ significantly from each other (Leon, 2023; Ferring, 2017; Thangavel et al., 2022). For example, luxury products offer exclusivity and fit more with buyers from Gen Z who value brands and quality. Moreover, mass market brands are affordable, and fit more with types of buyers that shop for deals (Pang et al., 2021; Thangavel et al., 2022). For these reasons, it was proposed that the different segments of the fashion industry would change the perceptions of consumption behavior of Gen Z. Combining the literature with the results, it can be concluded that the hypotheses may be accepted.

4.5.3. Clothing styles

Not only is it interesting to retrieve the results from before and after the Covid-19 crisis, but it is intriguing to find out what the favorite brand is of Gen Z. This can provide a deeper insight on the framework of Thangavel et al. (2022) which was proposed in the theoretical framework. It is found that 126 participants (67.7%) prefer mass market fashion brands, followed by 30 participants choosing bridge fashion brands (16.1%). In the table below, an overview of the favorite fashion brands is provided. Regarding Gen Z’s favorite clothing style, most participants would wear the casual style (75.3%), the comfortable style (51.6%) and the formal/classic style (46.2%).

Table 4.5.3. Favorite fashion brands of Gen Z

Favorite fashion brand	**Frequency**	**Percentage of participants**
Mass market fashion brands	126	67.7%
Bridge fashion brands	30	16.1%
Accessible luxury fashion brands	22	11.8%
Ready-to-wear fashion brands	2	1.1%
Haute couture fashion brands	6	3.2%
Total	**186**	**100%**

It is found that the most significant part of Gen Z consists of either economic-quality seekers or deal hunting seekers (Thangavel et al., 2022). This is because most people's favorite brand is either a mass market brand or a bridge fashion brand. These brands are the most affordable and are made in masses (Gazzola et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2021). Additionally, it can be concluded that only a small part of Gen Z's favorite fashion brand is ready-to-wear or luxury fashion brands. This means that the group within Gen Z that prefers a certain brand and quality is relatively small (Thangavel et al., 2022). This contradicts the findings of Jain et al. (2014) and Cho et al. (2022), who proposed there was a growing interest in the luxury fashion industry among Gen Z. A possible explanation can be linked to the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis, where Gen Z has less income to spend on fashion (Amed et al., 2022; Ang, 200).

4.6. Consumption behavior of Gen Z

This section will focus more deeply on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z, by distinguishing the purchase intention with the bandwagon effect. A paired samples t-test has been conducted for the bandwagon effect and the purchase intention of Gen Z. This will provide an answer to the following hypotheses: *The Covid-19 crisis has an impact on the purchase intention of Gen Z* and *the Covid-19 crisis has an impact on the need to follow other individuals of Gen Z.* It is found that there is a statistically significant difference between before the Covid-19 crisis and after the Covid-19 crisis, $t(185) = -15.84$, $p < .001$ and $t(183) = -14.86$, $p < .001$. A two-sided p has been used, and this implies that there is a difference in the means of the bandwagon effect and purchase intention comparing before and after the Covid-19 crisis. Lastly, Cohen's d is found to be .99 for before the Covid-19 crisis and 1.15 for after the Covid-19 crisis, which is a large effect (Fritz & Morris, 2012).

4.6.1. Purchase intention and sustainability

In the focus groups, more evidence has been found that Gen Z has been rethinking their clothing consumption behavior. In the following examples, it is shown that the participants are more conscious about what brand to wear, and whether they actually need the product.

> "Because before Covid, it was a lot of fast fashion brands that I shopped and got my clothes there [...] and especially now I feel like a closet for me that with staples that I can wear for the next five years with something that would be great [...] So it's more for me the trends and clothes that I wore during Covid mixed with some timeless pieces" (Participant 1.7, female, 23 years of age).

> "I used to get my pants out like Primark or H&M, and they like would rip within maybe three months [...] I think like right around the start of Covid I started just buying from Levi's. And then I think I still have the same jeans from them, like three years [...] You just started appreciating quality, so much more over quantity" (Participant 1.4, female, 22 years of age).

> "I kind of look at whether the clothes that I'm buying are more of a bringing added value actually to what I already have" (Participant 1.6, female, 22 years of age).

> "I really still try to be conscious. Like do I really need it? What I'm going to buy?" (Participant 1.2, female, 23 years of age).

In the first mentioned quotations, two of the participants show that they went from being an economic-quality seeker to being a shopper that values brand and quality (Thangavel et al., 2022). The participant state that they moved from buying from mass market fashion brands to more expensive brands that have a better quality. This indicates that clothing consumption behavior has changed when comparing before and after Covid-19 crisis. Nonetheless, the participants were unsure whether this was caused by the crisis or if this might have had other reasons. Furthermore, it is found that Gen Z shops more consciously, which means that they rethink their need to buy new fashion products. This contradicts the framework of Thangavel et al. (2022) who speak of Gen Z being convenience buyers.

Gen Z does not only express their consciousness, but also speaks about sustainability. The participants speak about the fact that they have become more aware of sustainability because of Covid-19, and that they are more conscious about their shopping behavior. An example from a participant (Participant 1.4, Female, 22 years of age): "Like back then I used to go to Primark every couple month and just like buy a whole bag of clothes, which obviously were horrible and mass market and bad for the environment". Another participant (Participant 1.2, Female, 22 years of age) explained to only buy secondhand clothing because of social and environmental matters. Nonetheless, in the second focus group, not all participants were rethinking their fashion choices because of sustainability issues. The reason for this is that not all participants are able to afford a more expensive wardrobe, which became visible in the second focus group.

On top of that, the findings about sustainability can also be linked to the theoretical framework. Here, it was found that Gen Z is a generation that is concerned about environmental and social issues (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). Furthermore, McCoy et al. (2021) show that Gen Z is open to make use of sustainable alternatives, which has become clear in the focus groups where participants buy secondhand clothing (Participant 1.2, Female, 22 years of age; Participant 2.5, female, 23 years of age). Combining the findings of the questionnaire, the focus groups, and the literature, it can be concluded that the hypothesis regarding purchase intention may be accepted.

4.6.2. The bandwagon effect

In the focus groups, it became evident that friends and family have an influence on what this generation would wear. For friends, multiple participants agree that there is a difference in going to high school or going to a university. In high school, the bandwagon effect is likely to be visible:

> "But yeah, I agree that maybe in high school, you're tend to look more at people from your own age, people in the same class as you [...] and university that is obviously different because you van meet so many different people from different backgrounds, different ages" (Participant 1.7, Female, 23 years of age).

> "And when I'm looking at the campus, everyone is dressed really different and nobody's even thinking about how the others are dressed" (Participant 1.1, Female, 22 years of age).

As stated above, at university, there seems to be less evidence of a possible bandwagon effect. In the first focus group, people have an agreement that at university everyone dresses differently compared to high school where everyone dresses the same. These are examples of how different types of surroundings can have an influence how Gen Z dresses. Especially for these ages this is important since people go from high school to university to starting a job, where surroundings influence how one should dress.

Another mentioned influence on the way Gen Z dresses is family. Two participants concluded that their mother has an influence on the way they dress. Moreover, one participant addressed the differences in cultures around the world, which is an interesting finding. The participant explained that people with a different cultural background, who grew up in a collectivist surrounding rather than an individualistic one, are more likely to dress up to impress their family. It is important to bear in mind that culture when speaking about how family can influence a person's way of dressing.

These findings and the results of the questionnaire support the literature, where it was shown that friends and family have a significant influence on the consumption behavior of Gen Z (Djafavrova & Bowes, 2020; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). A possible explanation for these findings is that young individuals tend to follow other individuals more easily. Moreover, during and after the Covid-19 crisis, Gen Z is more exposed to visuals on social media platforms. Hence, this explains the fact that the result is statistically significant. In conclusion, the hypothesis about the need to follow other individuals may be accepted.

4.7. The impact of social influences

During the focus groups, it has been found that social influences impact the way Gen Z dresses. One finding, social media and influencers, is in line with the theoretical framework. Nonetheless, a second phenomenon has been found, social norms.

4.7.1. Social media and influencers

It is found that a part of the participants is influenced by social media and social media influencers. They explained that the Covid-19 crisis caused more time being spent on platforms. In this period, influencers posted a lot of content. In both focus groups, it is stated that participants felt influenced during the Covid-19 crisis.

"During the Covid pandemic, it was really social media was for me really coming up like Tiktok began to grow, and Instagram became really a platform for influencers. So that really inspired a lot of my fashion choices" (Participant 2.2, Female, 22 years of age).

"During Covid I kind of watched a lot of like YouTube videos and Tiktoks and got a little bit more inspired [...] Especially also our age and younger ages, they do tend to get influenced quite easily, especially with social media nowadays" (Participant 1.7, Female, 23 years of age).

"I follow so many fashion influencers [...] I saw a dress and I thought oh I want that and then I went on to Vinted and found it and bought it" (Participant 1.4, Female, 22 years of age).

Fashion brands have been developing social media marketing strategies, which is an effective marketing strategy. Unlike traditional marketing, with social media, a two-way communication is achieved, where brands and consumers can interact with each other (Kim & Ko, 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2015). This provides the opportunity for fashion brands to make campaigns that is appealing for the consumer because they receive feedback. Moreover, the consumer needs are easily tracked (Mandal & Joshi, 2015; Seibel et al., 2021). In this way, Gen Z is influenced by social media which is visible in the findings of the focus groups. Nonetheless, only two participants expressed that they were influenced by influencers on social media. According to Sudha and Sheena (2017), this type of celebrity creates a personal relationship. As Gen Z tends to follow the opinions of friends and family, it was expected that the role of influencers would be more significant. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that they might have been unconsciously influenced, or they did not want to reveal to be following influencers.

4.7.2. Social norms

A more significant impact of the clothing consumption can be expressed in social norms. It has been found that Gen Z still values sticking to dress code etiquettes that are expected from society. Among the participants, several places where dress codes are still visible have been mentioned, such as going to work, going to university, hanging out with certain friends, or going to a restaurant. They agreed that one should dress depending on the social context that they were in.

"I do feel like at uni or like personally, I still like to dress up a little bit more professionally" (Participant 1.1, Female, 23 years of age).

"It also depends on which friends I'm going to meet [...] So it's also the kind of friends but also on occasion" (Participant 2.3, Female, 22 years of age).

"Before the pandemic, I worked at a jewelry store, so I always made sure that I looked clean and my nails are done. But then when I went to like a skate park, I just changed my clothes" (Participant 2.3, Female, 23 years of age).

These quotations highlight a new topic that has not been explicitly studied in the theoretical framework. It has been found that Gen Z listens to the social norms that are present. Furthermore, Gen Z values the way they express themselves to others. Although it is not mentioned in the theoretical framework, studies show that self-expression is an important aspect when dressing up (Amed et al., 2022; Cho et al., 2022; Jain et al., 2014). This might also have a connection with the bandwagon effect, where individuals feel the need to follow other individuals (Leibenstein, 1950). A possible explanation is that Gen Z wants to follow the norms of certain social contexts. In conclusion, the focus groups have sparked a new topic, which could be a further direction to research.

4.8. Perceptions on comfortable clothing

The last section will focus specifically on comfortable clothing, and the perceptions that have come to light during the focus groups. First, a t-test will be conducted to test the relationship between the comfortable clothing trend and the way Gen Z dresses. Hence, in the theoretical framework, the following hypothesis was illustrated: *The comfortable clothing trend has a long-term impact on Gen Z's clothing consumption behavior.* It is found that the relationship is statistically significant, $t(184) = 52.24$, $p < .001$, where a two-sided p-value is used. This entails that the hypothesis is accepted, and that the comfortable clothing trend has a long-term impact on the way Gen Z dresses. Regarding Cohen's d, the effect size is 1.17, which means the effect is large (Fritz et al., 2012). In section 4.4.4., the perceptions of comfortable clothing will be further researched with the qualitative results.

Additionally, in the self-completion questionnaire, an open-ended question has been asked regarding the definition of comfortable. This has been analyzed together with the findings of the focus groups. It has been found that the use of comfortable clothing can be split into two categories: being comfortable and feeling comfortable.

4.8.1. Being comfortable

The first perception on comfortable clothing that emerged from the focus groups and the self-completion questionnaire is being comfortable. In the questionnaire, the words sweatshirts, joggers, sweatpants, hoodies, big t-shirts, and pants have been used often to describe the comfortable clothing. What became clear during the thematic analysis of the data sets is that this type of comfortable clothing is only worn at home or should only be worn there. Additionally, respondents value the fact that the fabric feels comfortable, and that it is warm enough. The clothing being trendy is less valuable for the people who perceive comfortable clothing in this way.

> "For me it's like at home comfortable is a really big sweater with joggers [...] when I go outside to like the supermarket, I wouldn't wear jogging pants [...] and whenever I go to school like comfortable clothing it's just a bit altered to the nice fitting type" (Participant 2.2, Female, 22 years of age).

> "I think like bigger sweaters, big t-shirts. At home, yeah, I'll wear my joggers. When I go outside, I'll wear my normal pants. And I'm very much against buying pants I can't move in because that's for me so uncomfortable" (Participant 2.1, Female, 21 years of age).

In these examples, it is found that the respondents think comfortable clothing revolves around being comfortable and wearing bigger sweaters and joggers. However, when going outside, they would still wear comfortable clothing, but a different type of comfortable clothing. This finding has also come to light with the open-ended question of the questionnaire, where many respondents view comfortable clothing as clothing to wear at home. This can be linked to the sensorial aspects of comfortable clothing, which revolves around the fabrics and the mechanical attributes (Pamuk, 2007). During the Covid-19 crisis, it is shown that Gen Z experienced negative psychological feelings, such as stress, depression, and anxiety. (Msherghi et al., 2021; Serafini et al., 2020). The need to feel comfortable was increased, and this is where this type of comfortable clothing is for. The sensations of clothing can influence how one feels (Kamalha et al., 2013). In conclusion, being comfortable can be linked to the psychological effects of the Covid-19 crisis.

4.8.2. Feeling comfortable

The second perception of comfortable revolves around feeling comfortable. This entails that a lot of respondents answered that comfortable clothing could be defined as clothing that feels good, but also fits well around the body. Respondents also value the fact that the clothing could be worn the whole day. Additionally, the clothing should not be too tight, as participants expressed their feelings of not wanting to wear tight clothing. Multiple respondents have also linked feeling comfortable to feeling more confident as they see comfortable clothing as fitting well, but not being too tight.

This could be further explained through the first focus group, where different aspects of comfortable clothing have come to light compared to the other focus group. It has been discovered that participants agreed that formal clothing has become more comfortable. For example, a blazer is a formal piece of clothing, but a softer fabric or an oversized version makes it more comfortable. This entails that people would still like to feel comfortable, but also look formal.

> "Comfortable is not just your sweatpants, and your sweater, but also like: Does it feel good on your skin? Like, do you feel good in it?" and if you feel good in it, you are comfortable [...] Like now I'm wearing a blouse [...] And it's not like my lazy outfit [...] Formal clothing can also be comfortable" (Participant 1.3, Female, 21 years of age).

> "What we considered comfortable clothes before Covid has changed because of Covid [...] like the flared jeans, I would before Covid always think like, oh, that's a little bit too fancy or something [...] they turn into other kinds of fabric that's more comfortable" (Participant 1.7, Female, 23 years of age).

These findings of feeling comfortable can be linked to the psychological comfort of clothing (Pamuk, 2007). This type of comfortable clothing is linked to fashion preferences, styles, and trends. It is also related to the recent trend around this type of clothing. In the focus groups, it has become evident that clothing that used to be tight, formal, and did not feel nice, are becoming more comfortable. This can be related to the shift from thinking appealing clothing has to be tight, and neat, to clothing that makes one feel better about themselves (Hastings, 2018; Oaks, 2019). In conclusion, the comfortable clothing trend is here for the long-term, which entails that the hypothesis may be accepted. Additionally, comfortable clothing can be defined from two perspectives: being and feeling comfortable.

5. Conclusion

This final chapter concludes what concepts have been studied in this research. First, the main goal of this research will be stated followed by providing an answer to the research and sub questions based on the theoretical framework and the findings. Second, the limitations will be explained because this is an important part to conclude the research. Additionally, the academic and societal contributions will be illustrated. Lastly, the directions for further research will be examined. In this way, concluding remarks on this research can be provided.

5.1. Answering the research question

The aim of this study was to find out if the Covid-19 crisis, the economic crisis, and the fashion industry have an influence on the way Gen Z dresses. This has been established in the formulation of one main research questions and four sub questions. After digging into the theory and conducting a self-completion questionnaire and two focus groups, answers to the questions have been found. In the introduction, the following questions were proposed.

RQ: "What is the effect of the Covid-19, the economic crisis and the fashion industry on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?".

- **SQ1**: What is the impact of crises on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ2**: What role does the fashion industry play in the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ3**: How do social media marketing strategies influence the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?
- **SQ3**: What is the impact of the comfortable clothing trend on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z?

For the first sub question, it was proposed that there is an impact of the crises on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. According to multiple studies, a crisis should have an influence on what is bought by individuals (Laato et al., 2020; Gazzola et al., 2020). In this research, this assumption is accepted because it is found that the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis have an impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. Financial constraints and being able to spend more time on activities that were delayed are the main impacts of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis. The second sub question proposed that the fashion industry plays a role in the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. In the theoretical framework, it was assumed that the three segments of the fashion industry, the mass market, ready-to-wear, and the luxury fashion industry all have an impact on this behavior, but that they differ from each other. This assumption may be accepted, because through the self-completion questionnaire, it has been found that these industries have an impact on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. It is also found that it depends on what type of buyer an individual from this generation is (Thangavel et al., 2022). An additional interesting finding that Gen Z's favorite brand are still mass-market brands, even though many studies prove that this generation is worried about environmental and social issues (Amed et al., 2022; McCoy et al., 2021; Williams & Hodges, 2022). The third sub question revolves around social media marketing and influencer marketing. It is found that Gen Z tends to follow what is being portrayed on social media. Nonetheless, during the focus groups, this is not admitted by everyone, while studies show that this generation is heavily influenced (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). On the contrary, a new finding has come to light. From the focus group, social media has not been the main influence of the way Gen Z dresses, but social norms are. This is an interesting finding that needs more research to be able to draw sufficient conclusions. Lastly, it is studied what the impact of the comfortable clothing trend is on the way Gen Z dresses. It is found that comfortable can be divided into two categories: being and feeling comfortable. The comfortable clothing trend has made it possible for Gen Z to look trendy, but also feel comfortable.

5.2. Limitations

It is essential that the limitations of the study are mentioned because research can never take into account all the variables that come across the theoretical concepts. First, the Covid-19 pandemic is a unique type of crisis. This must be remembered while reading the conclusions of the research as the outcomes of the study does not have to be applicable for other types of crises. For example, it may happen that when only the economic crisis has been studied, the results would have been different. Accordingly, because this research is about the Covid-19 crisis, it focuses on a specific time period which can be seen as a limitation. In other words, when this pandemic would have happened ten years later or ten years earlier, the results would have been different.

A second limitation can be found in the conclusions of this research. Since a mixed-method approach have been used, qualitative and quantitative data has been gathered. It is important to mention that the qualitative results of the study cannot be generalized for the whole population, since only two focus groups have been conducted. This can also be seen as a third limitation. As a mixed method has been utilized, there has been a mixed focus on the results. Hence, it could have happened that underlying deeper findings have not been established because there were two focus groups. Moreover, if the sample size of the questionnaire was larger, this might have also resulted in different outcomes. Hence, the quantitative results could be generalized, but this needs to be done with careful consideration.

The last two limitations revolve around the characteristics of Gen Z. When implying the conclusions, it must be taken into account that it is only about this generation. In other words, the conclusions cannot be drawn to other generations as Gen Z is significantly different from other generations. For example, when millennials would have been studied, social media would have played a less important role on what influences the way they dress. In addition, this research has not considered demographic differences within Gen Z. For example, the differences in gender or education have not been studied. This might be an interesting direction for further research.

5.3. Scientific and social contributions

This research has contributed to further investigate the effects of a new crisis, the Covid-19 crisis. These new effects contain a scientific and a social contribution. Academically speaking, this research can spark other researchers to further investigate in the found effects. The social contribution derives from a better understanding of the effects of a crisis, which could help individuals when another crisis hits. Additionally, a contribution has been made to the developments of trends in times of crisis as it has been found that trends change when a crisis, like the Covid-19 pandemic, has occurred. Additionally, new perceptions of comfortable clothing has been found, which contributes to a new development of the definition of this type of clothing. Another contribution can be found by researching the three segments of the fashion industry, which all influenced the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z. It is found that different types of buyers react differently on the three types of fashion industry. This can be seen as a social contribution for fashion brands in which they can adapt to the needs of the consumers. Moreover, this research contributes to the influence social media and influencers can have on Gen Z. This study has shown that this impact is relatively small, but this may be questionable. It is proven that social norms are exceedingly important for Gen Z, and that this influences the way they dress. This is not only a social contribution, but it can also spark a direction for further research.

5.4. Directions for further research

During this research, multiple directions for further research have been established. First, it is suggested that this study could be replicated and tested on other target populations. An example could be to research another generation. This makes it possible to compare the results of the generations with each other, which provides new insights about generational differences. In addition, it is recommended to further investigate the demographics of Gen Z as this could also be influential when studying the clothing consumption behavior. For example, different levels of education or genders could be compared with one another, which gives fashion brands deeper insights in what type of people would want to buy from them. Second, it is intriguing to dig deeper into the business side of fashion. For instance, interviews with fashion brands could be conducted to further examine the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis on the development of trends. In this way, the way that trends are being established can be understood from the side of the fashion brands. Third, a suggestion for further research would be to conduct an experiment and find out to what extent Gen Z is influenced by social media platforms and influencers. This is an important topic to research because these platforms and these types of celebrities are becoming more relevant every day. Lastly, in this research, it has become clear that among other effects, psychological effects have emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to research what other effects this could have sparked among Gen Z regarding behavior. This could be done with interviews, focus groups, or a survey could be distributed.

5.5. Final remarks

The goal of this research was to find out if the Covid-19 crisis, the economic crisis, and the fashion industry have an influence on the way Gen Z dresses. The answer to this question has been found, and it can be concluded that the researcher is satisfied with the results. New findings contribute to existing research and could inspire new studies to be developed. In the following years, it is important that research of the effects of crises is being continued as one might never know when the next crisis arrives.

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Appendix A: The self-completion questionnaire

INTRODUCTION TEXT

Dear participant,

My name is Carmen van ‘t Zelfden, and I am a 23-year-old Master student. I study Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at Erasmus University Rotterdam. For my thesis, I am conducting research about the impact of crises and the fashion industry on the clothing consumption behavior of Gen Z.

Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire. Please read the following instructions carefully.

The questionnaire consists of six parts. First, the researcher will ask preliminary questions which revolve around your taste in fashion. Second, parts 2, 3, and 4 are three scenarios; part 2 is a scenario before Covid-19, part 3 is a scenario during Covid-19, and part 4 is a scenario after Covid-19. In these parts, the same questions will be asked, but you will have to imagine you are in that given time period. In part 5, you will be asked to reflect on your answers. Lastly, some demographic questions will be proposed. Answering these questions will take approximately 10 minutes, and you can pause or stop the questionnaire at any time.

Your answers will be treated anonymously and confidentially. If you have any questions, you can email them to: 509716cz@student.eur.nl

If you agree to participate in this questionnaire, please click on the arrow at the bottom on the right.

<u>PART 1: INTRODUCTION</u>

1.1. What is your favorite type of fashion brand?

- Mass market fashion brands (Zara, H&M, Mango, Bershka, Stradivarius) (1)
- Bridge fashion brands (Guess, Calvin Klein, Michael Kors) (2)
- Accessible luxury fashion brands (Ralph Lauren, Stella McCartney, Dssquared2) (3)
- Ready-to-wear fashion brands (Louis Vuitton, Versace, YSL) (4)
- Haute couture fashion brands (Chanel, Hermès, Dior, Prada) (5)

1.2. What is your favorite fashion style? (You can choose more than one option)

- [ ] Formal/classic style (1)
- [ ] Comfortable style (2)
- [ ] Casual style (3)
- [ ] Sporty style (4)
- [ ] Preppy style (5)
- [ ] Bohemian style (6)
- [ ] Grunge style (7)

1.3. What types of clothing do you buy most often? (You can choose more than one option)

- [ ] Sweatshirts and hoodies (1)
- [ ] T-shirts (2)
- [ ] Tops (3)
- [ ] Knitwear (4)
- [ ] Trousers (5)
- [ ] Jeans (6)
- [ ] Skirts and dresses (7)
- [ ] Jackets and coats (8)

▢ Accessories (9)

▢ Other, (10) ________________________________

1.4. What is the maximum price you can afford for a piece of clothing?

- ○ €0 – €50 (1)
- ○ €51 – €100 (4)
- ○ €101 – €150 (5)
- ○ €151 – €200 (6)
- ○ €201 – €250 (7)
- ○ €251 – €300 (8)
- ○ €300 – €350 (9)
- ○ > €350 (10)
- ○ Other, (11) ________________________________

1.5. The following statements are about fashion trends. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Now, the researcher would like to focus on the comfortable clothing fashion style.

1.6. How would you define comfortable clothing?

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Comfortable clothing can be defined as the type of clothes where you experience positive sensations from the fabrics, like smoothness, softness and looseness. This can have an influence on how you feel.

Please remember this definition as you answer the following questions.

1.7. Do you like wearing comfortable clothing?

- o Definitely not (1)
- o Probably not (2)
- o Might or might not (3)
- o Probably yes (4)
- o Definitely yes (5)

1.8. How much of your whole wardrobe can be described as comfortable clothing?

- o None at all (1)
- o A little (2)
- o A moderate amount (3)
- o A lot (4)
- o A great deal (5)

1.9. What is your reason to buy comfortable clothing? (You can choose more than one option)

- ▢ I do not buy comfortable clothing (1)
- ▢ Because it feels good on the skin (2)
- ▢ Because it is trendy (3)
- ▢ Because it makes me feel good (4)
- ▢ Because it looks nice (5)
- ▢ Other, (6) ____

1.10. When do you wear comfortable clothing? (You can choose more than one option)

- ▢ When I go to school (2)
- ▢ When I am home (6)
- ▢ When I work from home (3)
- ▢ When I work in the office (5)
- ▢ When I am doing leisure activities (4)
- ▢ Other, (7) ____

PART 2: BEFORE COVID-19

Imagine that you are in the middle of 2019. The Covid-19 crisis did not exist yet, and the economy is doing well. Please answer the following questions as if you are living in this period of time.

2.1. Before the Covid-19 crisis happened…

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I argued about financial matters (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I was insecure about my job (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I found it hard to make ends meet (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I had to work hard to be able to afford my way of life (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I was careful with money (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I often shopped for "sales" (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I bargained for lower prices (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I found that I did not save	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

much money (8)							
Product durability was important to me (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The following questions are about mass market fashion brands (H&M, Zara), ready-to-wear fashion brands (Michael Kors, Gucci), and luxury (haute-couture) fashion brands (Chanel, Hermès).

2.2. In 2019, I used to think that...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of mass market fashion brands were worn by many celebrities (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of mass market brands were very fashionable (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of mass market fashion brands were recognized	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

by many people (3)							
If I bought a new piece of clothing, it would be a mass market fashion product (4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
My willingness to buy a mass market fashion product would have been high if I was shopping for a fashion brand (5)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
The probability I would have considered a mass market fashion brand is high (6)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

2.3. In 2019, I used to think that…

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands were worn by many celebrities (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands were very fashionable (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands were recognized by many people (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I bought a new piece of clothing, it would be a ready-to-wear product (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My willingness to buy a ready-to-wear fashion	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

product would have been high if I was shopping for a fashion brand (5)							
The probability I would have considered a ready-to-wear fashion brand is high (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2.4. In 2019, I used to think that…

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of luxury fashion brands were worn by many celebrities (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of luxury fashion brands were very fashionable (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of luxury fashion brands were	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

recognized by many people (3)							
If I bought a new piece of clothing, it would be a luxury fashion product (4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
My willingness to buy a luxury fashion product would have been high if I was shopping for a fashion brand (5)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
The probability I would have considered a luxury fashion brand is high (6)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

The last few questions revolve around your attitude around comfortable clothing in 2019.

Please be aware that you have to think about your attitude at that period in time, and NOT how you think about this type of clothing now.

2.5. In 2019, I found that...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I usually wore clothes that I considered as comfortable (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes could also be worn to school/work (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes are sloppy (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People should wear classic/formal clothing when going to work (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I never wore clothes that I considered as comfortable (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes have	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

become more trendy (6)							
I only wear comfortable clothes at home (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

PART 3: AFTER COVID-19

It is today, Covid-19 is no longer a pandemic, but the economy is not doing well (inflation and high energy prices).

Please answer the following questions thinking about your life right now.

3.1. After the Covid-19 crisis and with the current economic crisis...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I argue about financial matters (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am insecure about my job (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find it hard to make ends meet (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have to work hard to be able	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

to afford my way of life (4)							
I am careful with money (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I often shop for “sales” (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I bargain for lower prices (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find that I do not save much money (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Product durability is important to me (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The following questions are about mass market fashion brands (H&M, Zara), ready-to-wear fashion brands (Michael Kors, Gucci), and luxury (haute-couture) fashion brands (Chanel, Hermès). For the sake of this research, please answer the questions honestly.

3.2. In today's day and age, I think that...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of mass market	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

fashion brands are worn by many celebrities (1)							
Products of mass market brands are very fashionable (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of mass market fashion brands are recognized by many people (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I buy a new piece of clothing, it would be a mass market fashion product (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My willingness to buy a mass market fashion product would have been high if I were shopping for a fashion brand (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The probability I consider a mass market fashion brand is high (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3.3. In today's day and age...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands are worn by many celebrities (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands are very fashionable (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of ready-to-wear fashion brands are recognized by many people (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I buy a new piece of	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

clothing, it would be a ready-to-wear product (4)							
My willingness to buy a ready-to-wear fashion product would have been high if I was shopping for a fashion brand (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The probability I will consider a ready-to-wear fashion brand is high (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3.4. In today's day and age, I think that...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Products of luxury fashion brands are worn by many celebrities (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Products of luxury fashion	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

brands are very fashionable (2)							
Products of luxury fashion brands are recognized by many people (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I buy a new piece of clothing, it would be a luxury fashion product (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My willingness to buy a luxury fashion product would be high if I am shopping for a fashion brand (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The probability I will consider a luxury fashion brand is high (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The last few questions revolve around your attitude around comfortable clothing as it is now.

3.5. Right now, I find that...

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I usually wear clothes that I consider as comfortable (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes can also be worn to school/work (from home) (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes are sloppy (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People should wear classic/formal clothing when going to school or work (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I never wear clothes that I considered as comfortable (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Comfortable clothes have become more trendy (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I only wear comfortable clothes at home (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

PART 4: REFLECTION ON THE CRISES AND THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

4.1. Please reflect on the answers you have given before, during, and after Covid-19.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The Covid-19 crisis has influenced my perception on comfortable clothing (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Due to the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis, I wear more comfortable clothing (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think these types of crises	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

have nothing to do with how people dress (3)							
If the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis did not happen, fashion trends would have been different (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Comfortable clothes are more acceptable because of the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

4.2. Please reflect on the answers you have given before, during, and after Covid-19 regarding the three types of fashion industries.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neutral (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The fashion industry made the comfortable clothing style a long-term trend (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

The Covid-19 crisis has influenced my perception of the mass market, the ready-to-wear, and the luxury fashion industry (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Since the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis, I spend more money on mass market fashion brands (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Since the Covid-19 crisis and the economic crisis, I spend more money on ready-to-wear fashion brands (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Since the Covid-19 crisis and the	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

economic crisis, I spend more money on luxury fashion brands (10)	

PART 5: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

5.1. What is your age?

____

5.2. What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

5.3. What is your highest completed level of education?

- High school (1)
- Vocational education (MBO) (2)
- Applied sciences (HBO) (3)
- Bachelor's degree (WO) (4)
- Master's degree (WO) (5)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (6)

- I prefer not to specify (7)
- Other, (8) ____

5.4. What is your income at this moment?

- < €500 (1)
- €501 - €1,000 (2)
- €1001 - €1,500 (3)
- €1,501 - €2,000 (4)
- €2,001 - €2,500 (5)
- €2,501 - €3,000 (6)
- > €3,000 (7)
- I prefer not to specify (8)

Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the researcher that you would like to share?

____

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If you want to submit your answers, please click on the arrow on the bottom at the right.

Appendix B: Tables of the quantitative data

a) Highest completed level of education

Highest completed level of education	Frequency	Percentage of participants
High school	35	18.8%
Vocational education (MBO)	7	3.8%
Applied sciences (HBO)	22	11.8%
Bachelor’s degree (WO)	85	45.7%
Master’s degree (WO)	36	19.4%
Missing	1	0.5%
Total	**186**	**100%**

b) Income of the participants

Income	Frequency	Percentage of participants
<€500	58	31.2%
€501 – €1,000	49	26.3%
€1,001 – €1,500	29	15.6%
€1,501 – €2,000	15	8.1%
€2,001 – €2,500	11	5.9%
€2,501 – €3,000	5	2.7%
>€3,000	5	2.7%
I prefer not to specify	14	7.5%
Total	**186**	**100%**

c) Age of the participants

	Frequency	Percentage of participants
18	1	0.5%
19	2	1.1%
20	10	5.4%
21	30	16.1%
22	38	20.4%
23	38	20.4%
24	23	12.4%
25	24	12.9%
26	6	3.2%
27	6	3.2%
32	1	0.5%
34	1	0.5%
Missing ‘99’	6	3.2%
Total	**186**	**100%**

Appendix C: Questions guide focus group

a) *Introduction*

Welcome everyone

- My name
- Study
- Purpose of the focus group:
- Thank everyone for participating

Consent and confidentiality

- Ask if everyone read and filled in the consent form
- All answers you provide will be treated confidentially and will be only used for the purpose of this research. If you do not wish to answer a question, you do not have to. You may stop your participation at any time.
- If you have a question about the research during the focus group, you may ask this at any time.
- If you have questions after the focus group, you can contact me via the details on the consent form.

Rules

- I will provide several discussions questions
- If multiple people want to speak at the same time, raise your hand by using the emoji and I will let everyone speak one by one
- You are allowed to follow up on each other's answers and create a discussion
- Be respectful, do not cuss, and let everyone finish their sentences

Introduction all participants

- Name, age, and study/job

b) *Discussion and track questions – Focus group 1 – 17/04/2023*

Before/after Covid-19 → styles and trends → disturbances/changes in consumption behavior

1. What kind of clothing styles did you wear before the pandemic happened?
    - Why did you wear this? Find deeper thoughts about why people wore certain styles.

- Ask about mass market or more expensive fashion → ask why they would choose this.

2. What kind of fashion trends do you remember from before the pandemic?

- Did you follow these fashion trends? If yes/no, why?
- Ask where the participants think these trends come from → because everyone likes it? or because of the fashion industry? or because of celebrities → if yes, what type of fashion industry?
- Find out is they show symptoms of herd behavior/bandwagon effect

3. What kind of clothing styles do you wear now? (After the pandemic)

- Do you think your style has changed because the pandemic happened? If yes/no, why?
- Ask about mass market or more expensive fashion → ask why they would choose this → do they think their perception on these types of fashion has changed.
- Do you think that the Covid-19 has affected the way you dress?
- Ask participants if there might be other reasons why there clothing style has changed.

4. What kind of fashion trends do you see now?

- Do you think fashion trends are different because of the pandemic? Do you think that if the pandemic did not happen, there would be other fashion trends?
- Let the participants explain this and find out what their deeper understanding of these changes in fashion trends are → The Covid-19 crisis has influenced the way I look at fashion trends.
- Ask where the participants think these trends come from now → because everyone likes it? or because of the fashion industry? or because of celebrities → if yes, what type of fashion industry?
- Find out if it is because of the bandwagon effect or they try to be unique → or other reasons might be revealed.
- What do the participants think is trendy right now?

5. Based on what the participants answer, ask if they think these trends will be there in the long-term

- The Covid-19 crisis has affected the way I dress → Positively/negatively?
- The current economic crisis affects the way I dress → Positively/negatively?
- Why do you dress differently or the same?

- What other factors are there that influences the way you dress?

6. The fashion industry made the comfortable clothing style a long-term trend → do the participants think the fashion industry has had an influence on the changing styles and trends?

- If yes/no, why?
- Can the participants provide examples?
- Or do they think it is because of the crises? → if yes, why?

7. What clothing do you wear when you go to school or work?

- How would the participants describe this → is it comfortable, casual or something else?
- Why do the participants wear this type of clothing?
- What do the participants think is the most appropriate?
- Ask if the participants wear comfortable clothing to school or work

8. Comfortable clothing should be accepted in school and in the office.

- If yes/no, why?
- If no → Why would it be accepted when you work from home, but not in the office?
- Would you wear a certain type of style because others are doing it? (bandwagon effect)

9. Other discussions that might pop up during the focus group

c) Discussion and track questions – Focus group 2 – 24/04/023

Before/after Covid-19 → styles and trends → disturbances/changes in consumption behavior

1. What kind of clothing styles did you wear before the pandemic happened?

- Why did you wear this? Find deeper thoughts about why people wore certain styles
- Ask about mass market or more expensive fashion → ask why they would choose this

2. What kind of clothing styles do you wear now? (After the pandemic)

- Do you think your style has changed because the pandemic happened? If yes/no, why?
- Ask about mass market or more expensive fashion → ask why they would choose this → do they think their perception on these types of fashion has changed
- Do you think that the Covid-19 has affected the way you dress?

- Ask participants if there might be other reasons why there clothing style has changed

3. How did you come up with your clothing style before the pandemic? For example, trends, social media, etc.

- Did you follow these fashion trends? If yes/no, why?
- Ask where the participants think these trends come from → because everyone likes it? or because of the fashion industry? or because of celebrities → if yes, what type of fashion industry?
- Did you feel the need to follow the fashion trends? Why yes/no?
- Find out if they show symptoms of the need for uniqueness

4. How do you come up with your clothing style now?

- Do you follow fashion trends? If yes/no, why? → Let the participants explain this and find out what their deeper understanding of these changes in fashion trends are → The Covid-19 crisis has influenced the way I look at fashion trends
- Do you think fashion trends are different because of the pandemic? Do you think that if the pandemic did not happen, there would be other fashion trends?
- Ask where the participants think these trends come from now → because everyone likes it? or because of the fashion industry? or because of celebrities → if yes, what type of fashion industry?
- Do you feel the need to follow these fashion trends

5. What kind of clothing do you wear when you go to school/work?

- How would the participants describe this → is it comfortable, casual or something else?
- Why do the participants wear this type of clothing?
- What do the participants think is the most appropriate?
- Ask if the participants wear comfortable clothing to school or work

If they do not mention comfortable clothing right away

Comfortable clothing

6. What is comfortable clothing to you?

7. What are your perceptions on comfortable clothing?

8. Do you think your perception has changed over time? If yes/no, why?

9. “Comfortable clothing has become a long-term fashion trend”

10. “Comfortable clothing can be accepted at school/work”

d) Conclusions

Ask if the participants have any questions → or other discussion points they would like to point out

Summarize the findings

Thank the participants

- Questions after the research? → contact me
- Please send the consent form if you did not do this yet

End the recordings

Appendix D: The profiles of the focus group participants

a) *Focus group 1 – 17/04/2023*

Participant number	Gender	Age	Level of education
1	Female	23	Student, bachelor's in Psychology
2	Female	22	Working, master's in Strategic Entrepreneurship
3	Female	22	Student, bachelor's in Sociology
4	Female	22	Student, master's in Strategic Management
5	Male	25	Working, bachelor's in English and Citizenship
6	Female	22	Student, bachelor's in Medical Business and Innovation and Law
7	Female	23	Working, master's in Media and Business

b) *Focus group 2 – 24/04/2023*

Participant number	Gender	Age	Level of education
1	Female	21	Student, bachelor's in Psychology
2	Female	22	Student, bachelor's in Notarial Law
3	Female	22	Student, bachelor's in Nursing
4	Female	22	Student, bachelor's in Law & Public Administration
5	Female	23	Working, master's in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship

Appendix E: The codes of the focus groups

Code		Groundedness
• Adaptability		8
• Appearance		11
	• Physical appearance	11
• Appropriate attire for occasions		1
• Changing fashion habits		11
• Comfort		9
• Comfort dressing		1
• Consumer behavior		26
• Consumer culture		8
	○ Anti-consumerism	1
	○ Bandwagon effect	1
	○ Celebrity endorsement	1
	○ Influence of advertisement	1
	○ Luxury Brand	1
	○ Trend identification	3
• Different attire for specific situations		1
• Economic crisis		6
• Emotional distress		1
• Exploration of fashion style		2
• Fashion		24
• Fashion and style		1
	• Fashion sense	1
• Fashion Preferences		6
• Fashion trends		28
• Financial Management		9
	○ Budgeting	1
	○ Entrepreneurial mindset	1
	○ Financial Constraints	1
	○ Financial Responsibility	1
	○ Money management	1
	○ Personal finance	1
	○ Selective consumption	1
	○ Sustainable development	1
	○ Time pressure	1
	○ Value for money	1
• Impact on shopping		4
• Isolation		2
• Personal hygiene		1
• Personal style		10
• Self-expression		15
• Social influence		36
• Social media influence		6
• Social norms		16
• Standards		1
• Sustainability		8
• The effects of COVID-19		17
• Unaffected by COVID fashion trends		1

Appendix F: The coding tree