Formalwear, casualwear, athleisure: How brands are shaping their offer in 2022

By Chenu Alexis · July 25, 2022

The latest study by Retviews, the fashion market analysis platform, has taken a look at the new consumer trends since the lifting of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Among the first lessons to be drawn, the return of formalwear. "Formalwear is not dead," introduces their analysis, "but is undergoing a revamp, although the tie may be on its way out."
"The long global pandemic has led to changes in consumer behaviour which have had a significant impact on the fashion industry", Retviews added. "After almost two years, as Covid restrictions are being lifted in some parts of the world, people are once again able to go out and resume formal dress. However, pandemic habits - such as the tendency to opt for comfortable clothing - are now deeply embedded in consumers' lives. This means that fashion brands need to find the right balance in their collections between formal and informal wear."

The study showed that casualwear lost influence between 2021 and 2022, in favour of more elevated and stylish looks. Thus, dressier skirts and formal dresses have increased by 5 to 6% in the offer of the brands studied. The same is true of shoes, where the presence of flat sandals in the collections has fallen by 30%, while heels have increased by 6% in the range of collections. Retviews explained that "as the public is once again participating in events and parties, the leading brands are taking advantage of these new opportunities to launch wedding or weekend collections", which are, therefore, favouring the use of formalwear pieces.
In the same time, the loss of interest in suits is evident, with suits no longer included in the Consumer Prices Index basket of products in the UK, for example.

"The global pandemic has resulted in a reset of the male dress code, with a softening of formal wear and a refinement of casual wear. Many retailers are adapting their range with an emphasis on casual wear and offering customers hybrid pieces that are smart enough to be worn in the workplace, yet offer the comfort and casual style they had become accustomed to during the pandemic shutdown."

To corroborate this statement, the study highlighted the sharp decline between 2021 and 2022 of the suit in the offer of men's ready-to-wear brands, such as Hugo Boss or Paul Smith. A decrease of 22% on the American market and 8% on the British market.
A paradigm shift that benefits the development of new categories of suits using more comfortable materials, particularly those used for athleisure. Hugo Boss, known for its formal wear, is now led by casuals, as the brand reduced its range of suits by 28% from 2021. In the meantime, it is taking advantage of the 'suit reboot' by partnering with Russell Athletic to create a collection of jersey suits. Looking at jersey fabric in the Hugo Boss range, the focus is on suit jackets, trousers and sweatshirts, which have grown by 336%, 343% and 220%.

"The pandemic was not the only cause of consumers mixing casual and formal wear in the office environment," said the Retviews study. "Casual attire has become more acceptable in the U.S. office environment as millennials, who make up a sizable portion of the U.S. workforce. The increased importance of activewear is symbolic of the societal shift towards self-care and wellness that has developed during the period of containment. The global activewear market is expected to grow by 8-10% per year until at least 2025, from €295 billion in 2021 to €395 billion by 2025."

Retviews' data showed that in 2022, activewear's share of assortment in the collections of major brands (such as Zara, Gap, Aritzia and Uniqlo) increased by 48% compared to the previous year - with March, April and May seeing the biggest increase.

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