

The Fabric of the City: Weaving a Sustainable Urban Identity through Kuala Lumpur's Fashion Districts

Guo Hui¹, *Asliza Aris², Rose Dahlina Rusli³

^{1,2,3}Fashion Department, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia

uitmguohui@163.com¹, arisasliza@salam.uitm.edu.my², dahlina77@uitm.edu.my³

*Corresponding author

Received: 16 July 2024; Accepted: 11 August 2024; Published: 1 September 2024

ABSTRACT

This research explores the integration of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements within Kuala Lumpur's fashion districts, explicitly focusing on the Central Market. This cultural synthesis enhances the city's international image in a globalised context. Central Market is a prime example of how fashion innovation can foster cultural appreciation, social cohesion, and economic sustainability. The market's unique blend of historical heritage and contemporary fashion underscores the potential for cultural landmarks to drive sustainable urban development. This study investigates the intricate relationships between fashion, urban geography, and cultural identity by employing a methodology that includes observation and interviews with designers and industry stakeholders. Findings highlight the role of the fashion sector in celebrating Kuala Lumpur's diverse cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development through eco-friendly production practices and multicultural integration. Key brands like NALA, Coconutshop, Borneo Pearls, and TENMOKU POTTERY are beacons of successful sustainable practices, ranging from natural and recycled materials to innovative design approaches that minimise environmental impact. These practices contribute to environmental sustainability and bolster the market's economic vitality by attracting a diverse consumer base, painting a promising picture for the future of sustainable fashion. The study suggests that strengthening policy frameworks and fostering strategic partnerships within the fashion industry can help consolidate Kuala Lumpur's status as a hub for multicultural fashion heritage. Kuala Lumpur can further its global standing in the fashion industry by addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities within a competitive environment. This article underscores the importance of cultural diversity and creativity in promoting sustainable urban development in an interconnected world. It offers practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers in Kuala Lumpur and other cities to harness the potential of fashion districts in driving economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and sustainability.

Keywords: Multicultural Fashion Heritage, Sustainable Urban Development, Eco-Friendly Fashion practice, Cultural Integration and Innovation, Kuala Lumpur Central Market



eISSN: 2550-214X © 2024. Published for Idealogy Journal by UiTM Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Urban cultural identity and economic development are facing unprecedented changes and challenges in the wave of globalisation. Globalisation accelerates the exchange and integration of cultural elements

and reinforces the role of cities as platforms for cultural exchange. Consequently, the cultural identity of cities has become a focal point of global attention, with its transformation directly impacting the shaping of urban image and international status.

Urban cultural identity is undergoing significant transformation in the context of globalisation. Globalisation not only promotes cultural exchange and integration but also has a profound impact on urban cultural identity. Studies show that a critical issue is how cities maintain and develop their unique cultural identities amidst globalisations. For instance, Jan Nijman explores the reconstruction of Amsterdam's urban cultural identity under the influence of globalisation (Nijman, 1999). Similarly, HA Nia's research highlights globalisation's challenges to urban cultural identity (Nia, 2023).

At the same time, the fashion industry must be considered a critical driver of urban cultural and economic development. Research indicates that the fashion industry can significantly boost cities' economic development and cultural innovation (Nia, 2023). For example, E Chilese and AP Russo's study points out that Barcelona's fashion policies enhance cultural diversity and creativity, thereby driving economic growth (Erica & Russo, 2009). Frederic Godart's research on the power structures within the fashion industry reveals how fashion capitals leverage globalisation and creativity to dominate the industry, thereby influencing the cultural and economic landscapes of global cities (Godart, 2014).

As the intersection of culture and economy, the fashion industry plays a pivotal role in shaping urban cultural identity and driving economic development. It serves as a mode of urban cultural expression and a crucial force driving economic growth. Research shows that the fashion industry promotes urban economic vitality and global competitiveness by creating jobs, attracting international investments, and enhancing urban brand value. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for urban planners, policymakers, and individuals interested in urban cultural development and globalisation's impact on cities.

In Kuala Lumpur, mainly along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the vibrant "textile district" attracts numerous tourists with its lively outdoor environment and cultural festivals such as Ramadan markets and Hari Raya celebrations. This area focuses on creative textiles, drawing inspiration from global fashion districts, aiming to become a centre for innovation and cultural heritage fusion in the fashion industry. The high pedestrian traffic and presence of traditional shops within walking distance add unique visual and cultural characteristics to the area, offering a variety of fabrics and festive attire, further enhancing its fashion appeal (Samadi et al., 2012). The Central Market, located in Kuala Lumpur, was built by the British in 1888 and initially served as an open market for locals and tin miners. After several expansions, by 1933, the market reached its current size. During the rapid development of Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s, there were plans to demolish the market, but the intervention of the Malaysian Heritage Society preserved this historically significant building. In 1985, the Central Market was renovated into a vibrant and colourful cultural market, and this role has continued ever since (Jamaludin & Kadir, 2012). The market features corners representing various ethnic characteristics and stalls divided according to ethnic traits, including Lorong Melayu, Straits Chinese, and Lorong India, making it a must-visit tourist destination (Jamaludin & Kadir, 2012).

The changing urban landscape and social behaviours in Asian cities, including Kuala Lumpur, lead to a fusion of global culture and residents' perceptions and experiences of the city. Studies show how historical urban sites in Kuala Lumpur influence locals' perceptions, knowledge, emotions, and memories, depending on personal experiences, roles, duration of interactions, and age. The attachment of city residents to these places is primarily influenced by their economic and cultural dependence on them, highlighting the importance of preserving Kuala Lumpur's cultural diversity and multi-ethnic identity. Despite the close connections and awareness of Kuala Lumpur's architectural heritage among

its residents, maintaining the unique identity of these places poses a challenge due to the complexity of urban environments and lifestyles (Ujang, 2016).

While research on how specific fashion districts enhance urban cultural identity and international image is relatively scarce, especially in multicultural Asian cities, the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur presents a unique and promising research opportunity. As a fashion district integrating Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements, the Central Market is a living example of how the fashion industry can influence urban fashion image. By studying this impact, this research can help improve and strengthen urban cultural identity in the face of globalisation. It provides valuable information for city planners, decision-makers, and people interested in urban culture and how globalisation affects cities.

1.1 Research Objective

This study explores how the Central Market in Malaysia, as a specific fashion district, influences the construction of Kuala Lumpur's urban fashion image. By investigating the attitudes and practices of designers and brands within the Central Market, the study seeks to understand their approaches toward urban fashion sustainability. Additionally, it analyses how this fashion district enhances Kuala Lumpur's international image by integrating Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes and practices of designers and brands within the Central Market regarding urban fashion sustainability?
2. How does this fashion district enhance Kuala Lumpur's international image by integrating multicultural elements?

The study aims to explore how the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur contributes to the cultural and economic development of the city. It also seeks to propose strategies for leveraging the fashion industry to enhance urban image and socio-economic development.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Urban Fashion and Cultural Identity

Urban fashion plays a significant role in the interaction between fashion and the urban environment, reflecting cultural, economic, and social characteristics. Natural fibres, such as lemongrass and other spices, promote sustainability and cultural preservation (Asri, 2022). Urban wandering, an essential activity in fashion practice, allows designers to accumulate an emotional understanding of a place, enhancing fashion presentation and contributing to the ambience of the space (Handcock & Joannides, 2021). Fashion is viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon, redefining urban spaces and representing urban activities, underscoring its crucial role in modern cities (Zhang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, cities' fashion districts are hubs of commercial activity and significant manifestations of cultural identity and international image. By showcasing unique urban landscapes and lifestyles, fashion districts enhance cultural identity and shape the city's brand image globally. Studies indicate that the interaction between fashion and urban cultural diversity in Milan enriches the city's cultural layers and fosters creativity across different cultural backgrounds, showcasing inclusivity and innovation (Bovone, 2006). Fashion cities intertwine cultural identity with urban growth, exploring how creativity and cosmopolitanism synergise to enhance cultural participation and regional development (Cerisola & Panzera, 2022). They cultivate a sense of environmental identity, transforming "spaces"

into "places," which is crucial for urban illumination culture and sustainable development, reflecting sociocultural trends in modern urban environments (Lekus, 2018). Cities establish unique cultural identities to attract investment and affluent residents in the competitive global market, leveraging branding strategies to stand out and promote growth (Masiya, 2012). In Kuala Lumpur, the central areas have evolved due to globalisation and colonial influence, shaping the nation's socioeconomic development and prosperity. Studies on Kuala Lumpur's millennial consumers indicate a growing interest in sustainability, suggesting a shift towards environmentally conscious consumer behaviour in the fast fashion industry. These converging factors highlight the dynamic and diverse nature of Kuala Lumpur's urban fashion environment. Research exploring Malaysian visual culture reflects the urban landscape's historical, value-based, and aesthetic elements, emphasising the persistence of cultural patterns, including fashion, in Malaysia's visual environment (Blankenship & Tan, 2020).

2.2 The Central Market as a Cultural and Fashion Landmark

The Central Market in Kuala Lumpur is a Malaysian cultural and heritage landmark that showcases multicultural and traditional crafts. It is a hub for shopping and tourism and promotes cultural heritage and art through various activities and exhibitions, such as DIY batik painting, fish spa treatments, and henna tattoos. These cultural and artistic activities enhance Kuala Lumpur's appeal as a cultural tourism destination, fostering cultural exchange and social cohesion. The market's role in preserving historical elements and promoting cultural values makes it an essential landmark for Malaysian culture and heritage. Its historic architecture reflects the unique blend of Malaysian ethnic cultures, contributing to its cultural significance (Zamri et al., 2023). Additionally, preserving heritage buildings like the Chan Clan Association enriches the city's cultural value, attracting local and international tourists and highlighting the importance of retaining historical sites for cultural arts and humanities (Kristiningrum, 2014).

Moreover, the architectural features of traditional shophouses in Malaysia, influenced by climate, colonial standards, and cultural assimilation, emphasise the importance of preserving traditional architectural designs to maintain the historical character of urban areas (Peng & Ng, 2018). Focusing on the Central Market as a fashion district that integrates Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements, this study fills a research gap in understanding how such districts can enhance urban cultural identity and international image, particularly in multicultural Asian cities. By exploring the fashion industry's impact on Kuala Lumpur's urban fashion image, this study aims to reveal the pathways for reconstructing and enhancing urban cultural identity in globalisation.

2.3 Application of Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

The global fashion industry progressively incorporates sustainable practices through eco-friendly materials and focuses on efficient energy and resource utilisation in production processes. As a leading fashion capital, Milan has begun to adopt sustainable materials and optimise production processes to minimise environmental pollution. These practices have improved environmental quality and enhanced enterprises' social responsibility image (Jansson & Power, 2010). Through these sustainable fashion practices, public awareness of environmental protection is elevated, and the environmental values reflected in fashion products further propel society toward overall sustainable development. Cultural continuity and heritage preservation have become integral to this transformation, emphasising the protection of traditional crafts and local knowledge (Brown & Vacca, 2022). Moreover, incorporating sustainable practices into fashion design not only aids economic development and job creation but also enhances the overall appeal of cities. By promoting the circular economy, implementing legislation, and encouraging sustainable consumerism, the industry can move towards a more sustainable future, benefiting both the environment and society.

Sustainable fashion design plays a crucial role in urban society by addressing social and environmental impacts, as evidenced by sustainable development in Indonesia (Brown & Vacca, 2022). Cities and the fashion industry can develop sustainable relationships by embracing changes and prioritising social and ecological responsibilities. This includes adopting economically viable practices that benefit society and the environment. In an urban context, the support and implementation of sustainable practices by various stakeholders, including businesses, consumers, and policymakers, are critical to this relationship. Their collective efforts can create a new fashion culture that aligns with sustainable development principles (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020). Additionally, the fashion industry can contribute to urban sustainability through circular economy practices, aligning with sustainable development goals, the Green New Deal, and the New Urban Agenda, taking a more environmentally and socially responsible approach (Pastran et al., 2021).

In urban fashion communities like Kallio in Helsinki, clothing designers and tailors are increasing value and extending the lifespan of materials through upcycling old garments into new ones. These designers prioritise slow fashion, creating timeless clothing at a thoughtful pace driven by creativity and environmental considerations rather than adhering to the fast-paced cycles of large corporations. Challenges include balancing the desire for innovation with sustainable development principles as designers strive to create unique, recognisable pieces without succumbing to the pressures of fast-trend cycles. Kallio's approach reflects the broader sustainability trend in the fashion world, focusing on quality, longevity, and waste reduction in alignment with contemporary urban cultural values (Gurova & Morozova, 2018).

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing field observations and in-depth interviews for data collection. Three field observations were conducted at the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur, with representative designers and brand founders selected from five speciality shops for semi-structured interviews. Criteria for selection encompassed distinct product features, utilization of natural and eco-friendly materials, incorporation of artistic elements, and cultural significance. The initial list of interviewees was established through internet searches, site visits, and market recommendations. Contact with interviewees was made via email and telephone to elucidate the study's objectives and schedule interviews, both orally and in writing.

The data analysis process was rigorous, involving qualitative content analysis that incorporated coding and thematic analysis of interview and observation data. We meticulously scrutinized transcriptions of all interviews and written responses, along with field notes, to identify prevalent themes and patterns. Open coding was used to organize data into overarching themes, while thematic analysis aimed at comprehending the interrelations between themes and systematically interpreting research inquiries. The interviews, conducted in accordance with Patton's (1990) guidelines, were recorded and transcribed with participant consent, lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. The focus of content analysis was on sustainable fashion practices at the Central Market. We gleaned insights through categorization, abbreviation, comparison, and integration of data at both individual and aggregate levels. Primary issues were assessed alongside secondary concerns to enhance reliability, with the researcher's consensus on the central issues presented subsequently.

Table 1 Participants profiles

ID	Gender	Age	Position	Brand	Brand Description
A	Female	35	Designer & Founder	NALA	Heritage-Inspired Fashion Store: NALA is in the heart of the Central Market, specialising in innovative fashion that blends traditional Malaysian patterns and craftsmanship. The core philosophy is to preserve and promote local cultural heritage using natural fibres and eco-friendly dyes, ensuring minimal environmental impact. NALA collaborates with local artisans to revive traditional crafts and hosts workshops and cultural lectures to enhance consumer cultural identity and engagement.
B	Male	40	Store Manager	Coconutshop	Coconut Shell Fashion Items: Coconutshop, situated on a market corner, specializes in fashionable items made from coconut shells, such as bowls, plates, and jewellery. The brand aims to convert natural waste into high-value fashion products using simple processing techniques without chemicals, ensuring environmental friendliness. Customers can choose their preferred patterns and shapes, participating in product design, enhancing product uniqueness and consumer satisfaction.
C	Female	36	Designer	Borneo Pearls	Natural Flower and Pearl Jewelry: Borneo Pearls, located in a prominent spot in the market, is renowned for its exquisite jewellery made from natural flowers and pearls. The store uses sustainable natural materials and accepts recycled pearls into unique pieces. Customers highly appreciate and welcome the brand's eco-friendly and personalised design philosophy, with the pearl recycling project going viral.
D	Female	38	Store Manager	TENMOKU POTTERY	Handcrafted Pottery: TENMOKU POTTERY, situated on a central passage of the market, displays and sells various handcrafted pottery items. The brand uses locally sourced natural clay and non-toxic glazes to ensure environmental friendliness. Handcrafting reduces energy consumption and imparts a unique character to each piece. TENMOKU POTTERY frequently holds pottery workshops, attracting many consumers interested in handicrafts.
E	Male	30	Designer & Founder	ekha Plastic Recycling Design Brand	Plastic Recycling Design Brand: Located at the entrance of the second floor of the Central Market, this store specialises in bags and accessories made from recycled plastic. The core philosophy is to convey environmental protection concepts through design and reduce plastic pollution. The store offers various recycled plastic materials for customers and involves them in the design process, enhancing environmental awareness and product uniqueness. The market response to these eco-friendly products is very positive, with customers appreciating their unique designs and environmental principles.

4 RESULTS

This study identified the determinants of sustainable fashion practices in the Central Market through in-depth interviews analysed using Michael Porter's diamond model (Patton, 1990). The results indicated four key factors: factor conditions, demand conditions, associated and supporting industries, and company strategy, structure, and competition.

Participants operating speciality shops mentioned the rich source of local materials and crafts available in the market, which supports sustainable design and production. For example, NALA and TENMOKU POTTERY founders highlighted the abundance of skilled artisans and natural materials that facilitated their sustainable practices. The unique location and historical context of the Central Market provide inspiration and resources for fashion brands. NALA benefits from access to traditional fabrics and eco-friendly dyes. At the same time, Coconutshop utilizes abundant coconuts for eco-friendly products, and Borneo Pearls combines local pearls and flowers in their designs.

Demand conditions in the market are favourable, with high consumer acceptance and interest in sustainable fashion. TENMOKU POTTERY attracts tourists and residents willing to pay for unique, eco-friendly handicrafts. The increasing consumer interest in products that allow participation in the design process enhances brand competitiveness. Organizing events and workshops further raises consumer awareness and interest in sustainable fashion.

The Central Market also benefits from a network of associated and supporting industries. Relationships with local artisans and material suppliers, as seen with NALA and TENMOKU POTTERY, ensure the sustainability and distinctiveness of products. Borneo Pearls' collaboration with local flower suppliers and pearl farms guarantees a consistent supply of high-quality materials.

Corporate strategy and structure are crucial for success. Brands in the Central Market adopt innovative business models that enhance uniqueness and competitiveness through customer engagement. Coconutshop, for example, offers personalized design services, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Collaboration with local government and cultural organizations can promote sustainable fashion by leveraging cultural and tourism resources.

The study revealed that the five featured shops in the Central Market successfully implement sustainable fashion practices through their distinctive approaches and innovative ideas. These businesses meet market demands and promote environmental protection and sustainability. The positive consumer response indicates significant market potential for sustainable fashion. The findings provide valuable insights for future research and practice, helping to explore further the application and promotion of sustainable fashion in urban settings.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Utilising Historical and Cultural Heritage

Interview participants unanimously agreed that actively leveraging Kuala Lumpur's cultural and artistic resources is essential for revitalising the Central Market as a sustainable fashion district. To survive the intense competition from other major cities and online retailers, the Central Market must attract more tourists and consumers by showcasing the unique brand value of local small and medium-sized cities. Kuala Lumpur's Central Market, a cultural landmark that bridges the past and present, has a unique historical and cultural background. By utilising this distinctive cultural heritage and historical resources, the market can develop a fashion district with unique characteristics that promote sustainable fashion and enhance Kuala Lumpur's urban brand value. Participants noted that when the Central

Market is mentioned, people naturally associate it with its rich cultural heritage and unique shopping experience. By narrating the market's historical stories and displaying traditional handicrafts, the Central Market can attract more attention and tourists.

"The unique image of Kuala Lumpur's Central Market is already appealing. The harmonious blend of historical heritage, traditional crafts, and modern fashion creates a romantic coexistence of past and present" (B).

NALA's founder mentioned that many buildings and shops in the market have profound historical significance, similar to London's Liberty department store, which conveys a "Kuala Lumpur sensibility" through unique stories and product selections.

"Many shops in the Central Market have their own historical stories, much like London's Liberty department store. It has tremendous potential to become an iconic venue showcasing Kuala Lumpur's culture and fashion" (A).

Most participants emphasised the importance of incorporating Kuala Lumpur's cultural arts into each fashion street's unique themes and concepts. Unique themes characterised by art and culture attract many tourists and consumers.

One participant explained the cases of Shoreditch in London and Mitte in Berlin, highlighting how old and impoverished alleys could be rejuvenated through art.

"Shoreditch has transformed from one of London's poorest districts into one of its hottest spots. Streets full of murals and vintage charm have made it a haven for artists. Berlin's Mitte is similar; by developing galleries and antique markets, these areas have become city landmarks that attract young consumers" (C).

The Central Market has effectively shaped Kuala Lumpur's urban image by integrating Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements. In the interviews, NALA's founder mentioned that their design inspiration comes from the unique fusion of Malaysia's multicultural heritage, showcasing harmonious coexistence through traditional patterns and handicraft techniques in their garments. This cultural integration attracts residents and numerous tourists, enhancing Kuala Lumpur's international image as a city of cultural diversity.

"Our designs embody the essence of Malaysia's multiculturalism. Each piece tells a story of the blend of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures, attracting local customers and tourists worldwide" (A).

The discussion highlights several key points:

The Central Market's unique historical and cultural heritage can be a significant asset in developing a sustainable fashion district that stands out in a competitive market.

Leveraging these cultural resources can enhance the market's appeal, attracting tourists and consumers by offering a unique shopping experience that integrates traditional crafts with modern fashion.

The Central Market serves as a model of cultural integration, effectively blending Malay, Chinese, and Indian elements to create a distinctive urban identity that resonates locally and internationally.

Revising the Central Market by strategically using its historical and cultural assets can significantly contribute to Kuala Lumpur's urban fashion image. The market enhances its brand and promotes the city's cultural diversity and international appeal by fostering a sustainable fashion environment that values heritage and innovation.

5.2 Designers and Brands' Sustainable Practices

Designers and brands within the Central Market demonstrate a positive attitude and proactive practices toward sustainable fashion. Through interviews, it was discovered that many brands, such as Coconutshop and Borneo Pearls, focus on using natural and eco-friendly materials and implementing sustainable production processes. For example, Coconutshop creates fashionable items from coconut shells, reducing waste and producing high-value products. On the other hand, Borneo Pearls recycles used pearls to reduce resource waste and craft unique jewellery.

"We use coconut shells to make our products, which is not only environmentally friendly but also provides customers with a unique shopping experience. Each product is one-of-a-kind" (B).

"By recycling used pearls, we not only reduce waste but also offer personalised design choices to our customers" (C).

The Central Market is an exemplary model for adopting sustainable practices within the fashion industry. Designers and brands' commitment to sustainable practices is evident through their innovative use of materials and production methods. This addresses environmental concerns and enhances the market's attractiveness by offering unique, eco-friendly products.

The sustainable practices embraced by brands such as Coconutshop and Borneo Pearls reflect a broader trend within the fashion industry toward environmental responsibility. These brands create sustainable and distinctive products using materials that would otherwise be discarded, such as coconut shells and used pearls. This approach minimises waste and adds a unique value proposition for consumers increasingly seeking products that align with their environmental values.

Moreover, the success of these brands highlights the potential for sustainable practices to drive economic and social benefits. By prioritising sustainability, brands can differentiate themselves in a competitive market, attract a conscientious consumer base, and contribute to broader environmental goals. This alignment of business practices with sustainability principles is crucial for fostering a more sustainable and resilient urban fashion ecosystem.

In summary, the sustainable practices adopted by designers and brands within the Central Market underscore the vital role of innovation and environmental responsibility in the fashion industry. These practices contribute to waste reduction and resource conservation, enhance the market's appeal, and support the development of a sustainable urban fashion image for Kuala Lumpur. The Central Market's commitment to sustainability sets a precedent for other fashion districts, illustrating how heritage and modernity coexist harmoniously while promoting environmental stewardship and economic vitality.

5.3 The Contribution of Fashion Innovation to Urban Development

Fashion innovation is crucial in the Central Market, enhancing cultural appreciation, social cohesion, and economic vitality. The founder of TENMOKU POTTERY highlighted that their handcrafted items are not merely fashion products but also forms of artistic expression, attracting numerous customers interested in culture and art. Hosting pottery workshops not only increases

customer engagement but also fosters social cohesion within the community. The founder of a plastic recycling design brand mentioned that through environmentally friendly fashion innovations, they have successfully attracted young consumers with solid environmental awareness, stimulating the market's economic vitality.

“Our handmade products are more than just items for sale; they are an artistic experience. By conducting workshops, we not only sell products but also strengthen social cohesion within the community” (D).

“Eco-friendly fashion has attracted many young consumers who are passionate about our brand, significantly boosting the market's economic vitality” (E).

Fashion innovation in the Central Market significantly contributes to urban development by fostering a vibrant and sustainable urban culture. The efforts of brands like TENMOKU POTTERY demonstrate how fashion can serve as a medium for artistic expression and community engagement. Their pottery workshops are an excellent example of how hands-on activities can deepen customer involvement and promote a sense of community. This approach not only enhances the cultural fabric of the area but also encourages a participatory culture where individuals feel more connected to their local environment.

Similarly, plastic recycling design brands' emphasis on environmentally conscious fashion showcases the market's commitment to sustainability and innovation. By creating products that appeal to eco-conscious consumers, these brands are tapping into a growing market segment that values sustainability. This drives economic growth and aligns with broader environmental goals, creating a more sustainable urban ecosystem.

The impact of these innovations extends beyond immediate economic benefits. They also play a pivotal role in shaping the identity and image of Kuala Lumpur as a forward-thinking and culturally rich city. Integrating traditional crafts with modern sustainability practices creates an appealing and meaningful blend. This fusion of old and new preserves cultural heritage and ensures its relevance in a contemporary context.

Moreover, fashion innovation at the Central Market enhances social cohesion by providing platforms for community interaction and collaboration. Events and workshops organised by local artisans offer opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with each other, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. This social cohesion is vital for the overall well-being of the urban population, contributing to a more harmonious and resilient community.

In summary, fashion innovation at the Central Market significantly contributes to the cultural, social, and economic development of Kuala Lumpur. These innovative practices create a dynamic and sustainable urban environment by promoting cultural appreciation, fostering social cohesion, and driving economic vitality. The Central Market is a testament to how fashion can be a powerful tool for urban development, merging heritage with modernity and sustainability with economic growth.

CONCLUSION

This study analyses Central Market's contributions to Kuala Lumpur's urban image and sustainable development. By integrating Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural elements, Central Market enhances Kuala Lumpur's international reputation while promoting environmental awareness and economic dynamism through sustainable fashion practices (Luxon, 2019). Renowned for its unique historical and

cultural heritage, the market is a landmark blending the city's past and present. Leveraging these heritage assets, Central Market cultivates distinctive fashion districts that foster sustainable practices and elevate Kuala Lumpur's urban brand.

Interviews with stakeholders highlighted the market's rich cultural heritage and its ability to attract tourists with a unique shopping experience. The founder of NALA emphasized the market's deep historical roots, like London's Liberty department store, showcasing Kuala Lumpur's cultural heritage and fashion prowess. Designers and brands at Central Market, such as Coconutshop and Borneo Pearls, demonstrate a commitment to sustainability by using natural and eco-friendly materials. For instance, Coconutshop creates fashion items from coconut shells, reducing waste, while Borneo Pearls recycles used pearls to minimize resource wastage.

Fashion innovation at Central Market fosters cultural appreciation, social cohesion, and economic vitality. TENMOKU POTTERY's handmade pottery appeals to customers interested in culture and art, and their workshops enhance community engagement. Similarly, ekha, a brand specializing in plastic recycling designs resonates with environmentally conscious consumers, driving economic vitality.

To further promote sustainable fashion, it is recommended that the government enhance policy support and industry collaboration. Measures include establishing funds for eco-friendly materials, encouraging innovation through tax incentives, and building industry alliances to facilitate resource sharing. The government could lead in organizing seminars and exchange activities to foster cooperation and innovation.

Implementing these strategies could drive sustainable development within the Central Market and enhance Kuala Lumpur's global standing in the fashion industry, attracting international attention and investment. Future research should focus on similar fashion districts to compare and enrich existing findings, exploring variations in sustainable practices across different cultural contexts. Additionally, studying consumer behaviour can provide insights into perceptions and purchasing decisions regarding sustainable fashion, promoting these concepts more effectively.

Adopting these recommendations and pursuing future research can further advance sustainable fashion development in Kuala Lumpur and other cities, leading to coordinated economic, social, and environmental growth. This would enhance the city's international image, promote cultural identity and cohesion, and drive sustainable economic expansion. Insights from this study can inform fashion retail courses, using sustainable practices at Central Market as case studies for visual merchandising and fashion consumer behaviour courses. Research on small and medium-sized cities can help students understand the fashion industry's nuances across different urban scales, enhancing their learning experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

No acknowledgement is due to any individual or organisations.

FUNDING

This research is not funded by any organization it is individual expenses.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors played equal contributions to this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest declared for this paper.

REFERENCES

- Asri, A. (2022). Produk Fashion Bagi Masyarakat Urban Indonesia Dengan Pemanfaatan Rempah Nusantara. *Jurnal Kajian Pemerintah: Journal of Government, Social and Politics*, 8(1), Article 1. [https://doi.org/10.25299/jkp.2022.vol8\(1\).9440](https://doi.org/10.25299/jkp.2022.vol8(1).9440)
- Blankenship, S. F., & Tan, K. K. H. (2020). The Survival of Cultural Patterns in Malaysia's Contemporary Visual Landscape. In P. Mura, K. K. H. Tan, & C. W. Choy (Eds.), *Contemporary Asian Artistic Expressions and Tourism* (pp. 147–167). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4335-7_7
- Bovone, L. (2006). Urban style cultures and urban cultural production in Milan: Postmodern identity and the transformation of fashion. *Poetics*, 34(6), 370–382. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2006.10.004>
- Brown, S., & Vacca, F. (2022). Cultural sustainability in fashion: Reflections on craft and sustainable development models. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 18(1), 590–600. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2022.2100102>
- Cerisola, S., & Panzera, E. (2022). Cultural cities, urban economic growth, and regional development: The role of creativity and cosmopolitan identity. *Papers in Regional Science*, 101(2), 285–303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12654>
- Erica, C., & Russo, A. (2009). Urban fashion policies: Lessons from the Barcelona catwalks.
- Godart, F. (2014). The power structure of the fashion industry: Fashion capitals, globalization and creativity. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 1. https://doi.org/10.1386/inf.1.1.39_1
- Gurova, O., & Morozova, D. (2018). A critical approach to sustainable fashion: Practices of clothing designers in the Kallio neighborhood of Helsinki. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 18(3), 397–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540516668227>
- Handcock, T., & Joannides, T. (2021). Urban Flâneur: A Site-Responsive Walking Methodology for Fashion Design. In B. E. A. Piga, D. Siret, & J.-P. Thibaud (Eds.), *Experiential Walks for Urban Design: Revealing, Representing, and Activating the Sensory Environment* (pp. 275–288). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76694-8_16
- Jamaludin, M., & Kadir, S. A. (2012). Accessibility in Buildings of Tourist Attraction: A case studies comparison. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 35, 97–104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.02.067>
- Jansson, J., & Power, D. (2010). Fashioning a Global City: Global City Brand Channels in the Fashion and Design Industries. *Regional Studies*, 44(7), 889–904. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400903401584>
- Kristiningrum, N. D. (2014). Heritage Tourism dan Creative Tourism: Eksistensi Pasar Seni (Central Market) di Malaysia Sebagai Salah Satu Pasar Bersejarah. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*.
- Lekus, E. (2018). Environmental identity: “Space” vs “place”. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 43, 01005. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184301005>
- Luxon, E. M. (2019). Economics-Oriented Discourse Strategies in Environmental Advocacy. *Environmental Communication*, 13(3), 320–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2019.1567569>
- Masiya, T. (2012). Social Accountability in African Cities: Comparing Participatory Budgeting in Johannesburg and Harare 1. In *Rethinking Global Urbanism*. Routledge.
- Nia, H. A. (2023). Globalization and the Challenge of Urban Identity. *Proceedings of the International Conference of Contemporary Affairs in Architecture and Urbanism-ICCAUA*, 6(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.38027/iccaua2023en0336>

- Nijman, J. (1999). Cultural globalization and the identity of place: The reconstruction of Amsterdam. *Ecumene*, 6(2), 146–164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096746089900600202>
- Ozdamar Ertekin, Z., Atik, D., & Murray, J. B. (2020). The logic of sustainability: Institutional transformation towards a new culture of fashion. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(15–16), 1447–1480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1795429>
- Pastran, A., Colli, E., & M. Nor, H. (2021). Public Policy and Legislation in Sustainable Fashion. In M. Á. Gardetti & R. P. Larios-Francia (Eds.), *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles in Latin America* (pp. 171–189). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1850-5_9
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, 2nd ed (p. 532). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Peng, N. F., & Ng, I. A. S. (2018). Old Market Square as a Container of Diasporic Meaning in Chinese Kuala Lumpur. *Millennial Asia*, 9(1), 66–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399617753754>
- Samadi, Z., Mastura, N., & Mohammad, N. (2012). An Urban Outdoor Environment in the ‘Textile District’ of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, K. Lumpur. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 35, 659–663. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.02.134>
- Ujang, N. (2016). Affective Perception of Place: Attachment to Kuala Lumpur Historical Urban Places. *Open House International*, 41(2), 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OHI-02-2016-B0012>
- Zamri, M. A. H., Majid, R. A., & Rasyidi, M. H. (2023). The Influential Factors of The Heritage Shophouses’ Architectural Design In Urban Historic Districts In Malaysia: A Review. *Malaysian Journal of Sustainable Environment*, 10(June), Article June. <https://doi.org/10.24191/myse.v0iJune.22671>
- Zhang, X., Zhang, Y., Chen, T., & Qi, W. (2024). Decentralizing the power of fashion? Exploring the geographies and inter-place connections of fashion cities through fashion weeks. *Urban Geography*, 45(1), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2022.2147742>