

Fashion's Love Affair with Outdoor Brands: Blessing or Curse?

Published on 22 Aug 2025 | By IFI Correspondent



When Fashion Meets the Outdoors: The Strategic Tightrope for Brands

The convergence of **fashion and outdoor wear** has been in motion for years, visible in trends like *Gorpcore* and the rise of fashionable functional pieces. For consumers, mixing an outdoor jacket with jeans or pairing trail runners with skirts is second nature. But while wardrobes blend seamlessly, brands and retailers often face a more complex strategic bind.

Consumers Blur Boundaries, Retailers Keep Them Rigid

Gorpcore is only the latest example in a long line of crossovers between fashion and outdoor apparel. Shoppers freely mix and match across categories, but for brands the question of identity looms large: are they fashion, performance, or something in between? In the retail world, those boundaries remain surprisingly impermeable — and straddling both camps can prove risky.

When Fashion Hijacks Outdoor Heritage

The 1990s offer an early case study. Scandinavian sailing and outdoor label **Helly Hansen** found itself embraced by the hip-hop community, with puffer jackets turning into streetwear staples. The unintended association alienated core customers, and when the trend faded, the brand's credibility had taken a hit.

Adidas navigated a similar phenomenon when **Run-DMC** made its three stripes iconic in streetwear. The German giant responded by creating distinct brand worlds: *Adidas Originals* for fashion, and performance-driven lines for sport. While Originals thrived, **Adidas Terrex**, its outdoor division, still struggles to shake scepticism from core outdoor consumers.

Outdoor Brands Push Back Against Fashionization

Other players have faced similar tensions. **The North Face** and **Salomon** now split their fashion and performance collections, while **Mammut** has made a point of rejecting streetwear positioning. "We are not a streetwear brand," current CEO **Heiko Schäfer** insisted, vowing not to repeat past flirtations with flashy urban styles.

Even **Arc'teryx**, one of the most coveted outdoor labels in recent years, has pulled back. Despite creating its high-end urban sub-line **Veilance** more than 15 years ago, fashion fans instead flocked to its core mountaineering gear and military division. Collaborations with Jil Sander and a surge in Gorpcore visibility boosted hype — but at the cost of credibility with purists. “We would never position ourselves in fashion for the sake of Gorpcore,” said **Sven Radtke**, Arc'teryx's EMEA general manager.

Why Fashion Wants the ‘Real Thing’

The irony is clear: the fashion industry does not crave the *designed-for-fashion* sub-labels but the hardcore originals. The attraction lies in authenticity — garments born of function, tested in the field, and often unchanged for decades. Think of **Fjällräven's Kånken backpack**, essentially untouched for over 50 years, or **Lowa's Renegade hiking boot**, about to mark its 30th anniversary. This durability and timelessness stand in stark contrast to fashion's rapid trend cycles, making outdoor gear ripe for stylistic appropriation.

The Balancing Act Ahead

For outdoor brands, the fashion spotlight is a double-edged sword: it can boost visibility and sales in the short term, but risks alienating loyal core users in the long term. As Gorpcore and similar trends ebb and flow, the challenge remains the same: how to court new audiences without losing the authenticity that made the brand desirable in the first place.

DISCLAIMER: THE VIEWS/CONTENTS EXPRESSED/PRESENTED HEREIN, WITHIN THIS ADVERTORIAL AND PROMOTIONAL FEATURE ARE THE SOLE AND EXCLUSIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS/EXPERT/THEIR AUTHORISED REPRESENTATIVE/VISHAL KHAIRNAR, TO WHICH EFFECT, PUBLICATION HOUSE/ITS REPRESENTATIVES/AFFILIATES ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE/LIABLE WHATSOEVER.