



InNumbers

264

million

The number of pairs of shoes South Africans bought last year

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Trend just casually boosts takkie sales

Sneakers are the biggest driver of SA's footwear industry

By NTANDO THUKWANA

● Millennials setting the fashion agenda – ditching the traditional suit, tie and dress shoes – have given steam to the athleisure fashion phenomenon that has seen sales of sneakers boom.

Athleisure, the fashion trend that's a cross between athletic and everyday comfort wear, has become a global sensation and SA has not been left behind. It's a trend that even names that formerly specialised in formal footwear, such as Grasshopper, have jumped on.

According to 2019 data by market research provider Euromonitor International, the sneakers category is the biggest driver of SA's R90,6bn footwear industry.

Euromonitor International says the category in SA is worth over R15bn. This includes sports-inspired shoes and those sold by general apparel brands such as H&M, Zara and Gap.

South Africans purchased 264 million pairs of shoes last year, with over 58 million of those produced locally, says Unathi Matwasa, research associate at Euromonitor International.

In terms of value, men's shoes grew 6.7%, women's shoes 5.9% and sales of children's footwear rose 3% in 2019. Sales of men's shoes outstripped women's shoes mainly because the average unit price for men's shoes tends to be higher than that of women's footwear, says Matwasa.

Adidas is market leader when it comes to the local shoe sector, followed by Nike, Woolworths, Reebok and Mr Price.

Nicola Cooper, a trend analyst and cultural strategist, says a more relaxed approach to work, fostered by millennials entering the workplace, is the reason behind the growth of the sneakers industry.

Cooper describes this as "office attire that is translating into the necessity of clothing that is of a high-quality finish with the [comfort] of athletic wear".

Bernard Mostert is co-founder of Mr Tekkie, which recently merged with the New House of Busby for which he is CEO, which holds distribution rights for brands such as Aldo, Guess, Steve Madden and Call It Spring. He says the current trend in the street-style category was kickstarted by the comeback of iconic Italian brand FILA's chunky platform sneakers 18 months ago.

Chunky platforms

Balenciaga has a version of it, dubbed the dad shoe, which Mostert says is "a big throw-back to the heritage era of the late '80s and early '90s, [with its] big chunky platform sneakers. Various companies have done iterations of it. Quite a few brands from that era have developed it very nicely in the last two years."

For the more playful adult consumer, Aldo's Disney collection was a hit, selling out "virtually instantly", says Mostert. Aldo kept its traditional profile sneaker, adding Disney style elements with the Mickey Mouse characters emblazoned on the shoes.

"Aldo has played to its heritage, stuck with its DNA sneaker and has this collab with Disney in quite a unique way that has turned out to be very popular," says Mostert.

TFG, owner of Totalsports and sportscene, which sell sporting goods and international brands such as Nike and Adidas, among others, says it has incorporated experiential retail strategies to lure younger customers, such as at its Sandton City flagship store, which features a wide range of some of the biggest footwear and apparel sportswear and streetwear brands.

The concept of the store is modelled on a recording studio and houses events. It is also the base for sportscene's "Put me On" campaign to uncover musical talent, says TFG.

"Spaces were built and allocated to up-and-coming entrepreneurs, from sneaker laundry services to tattoo artists. It also features a fully equipped basketball court, digital kiosks and mobile payment options," the company says.



A young man wearing Converse sneakers walks past a mural of Caster Semenya running a race. Picture: Lungelo Mbulwana

Footwear in SA

Category	Market size (\$m)		Year-on-year growth (%)
	2018	2019	
Footwear	5,896.8	6,281.6	6.5
Children's Footwear	526.0	563.5	7.1
Men's Footwear	3,550.3	3,789.8	6.7
Women's Footwear	1,820.5	1,928.2	5.9

Footwear – brand ranking of market share				
1. adidas	2. Nike	3. Woolworths	4. Reebok (adidas Group)	5. Mr Price

Graphic: Ruby-Gay Martin Source: Euromonitor

The sneaker trend is firmly on the fashion runway. "We are starting to see a strong shift from strictly formal shoes on the runway; however, there will always be a space for these. We are also seeing new trends and manufacturing techniques – from mules to midi-heels to luxury sliders, I do think comfort is vital," she says.

The rise in sneaker purchases isn't threatening the sales of heels.

"The high-quality, more formal street offerings such as Aldo continue to do well but across the board sneakers are certainly on a much stronger trajectory than historic dress shoes. There are certain times of the year that heels do particularly well – more towards the end of the year," says Mostert.



Younger markets such as Generation Z want to dress comfortably, but be trendy to reflect their lifestyle

TFG says customers aren't buying fewer formal shoes, they are simply purchasing more sneakers.

"This is especially true for younger markets such as Generation Z who want to dress comfortably, but be trendy to reflect their fast-paced lifestyle. The trick is to convert non-sneaker-wearing customers by arousing their curiosity with limited edition or 'collab' products featuring big brand or artist partnerships. This creates hype, which builds demand," says TFG.

Generation Z are those aged between sev-

en and 22, according to Bloomberg.

Adidas's latest partnership is with Beyoncé's Ivy Park collection, which sold out in an instant worldwide.

Puma also previously collaborated with Rihanna's Fenty brand for its Creepers sneaker, while Nike previously partnered with Kanye West on its Air Yeezy bright red sneakers. In SA, actress Nomzamo Mbatha had a partnership with Puma and rapper AKA collaborated with Reebok.

Nike had influential ad campaigns resonating with today's woke society, with sportspeople such as Serena Williams who featured in the brand's "Just Do It" campaign film *Voice of Belief*. With the slogan "It's only a crazy dream until you do it," it follows the life of Williams from a young age, when she was coached by her father, through to her days as a legendary tennis player.

In SA, Nike partnered with athlete Caster Semenya in a "Birthplace of Dreams" ad detailing her rise from humble beginnings, and has continued to support her during her battles with the International Association of Athletics Federations.

Colin Kaepernick, who knelt during the singing of the US national anthem at football matches to highlight racism in the US, partnered with Nike in its "Just Do It" *Dream Crazy* film – which became controversial when it got the attention of US President Donald Trump, who publicly disapproved of Kaepernick's Nike ambassadorship.

Bright Khumalo, portfolio manager at Vestact Asset Management, says Nike liked the controversy because it is "good for their brand's strength".

He says Nike is at the forefront of breaking the status quo as part of modern-day marketing. "It helps their brand because millennials and Generation Z are very conscious, they want to know what the company stands for or against and then they will either distance themselves or become ambassadors themselves."

Nike was one of the first brands to sponsor athletes as part of its marketing strategy.



The growth of the athleisure fashion phenomenon has seen sales of sneakers boom. Picture: Masi Losi

"They started with track, and to this day they still sponsor track athletes. For example [Eluid] Kipchoge – recently, the Kenyan marathon runner broke two hours in [running a] marathon distance. That's all in their strategy, to sponsor the people who are good

at what they do in terms of sports and putting their name on it," says Khumalo.

Nike has just come out with a controversial Vaporfly sneaker, which is said to give athletes an unfair advantage. This may be marketing at no cost and may translate into a

sales boost for the company, says Khumalo.

"You create such a superior product, everyone is sceptical about the product itself and not actually that you're very good at engineering the next generation of shoes," he says.

adidas steps up use of recycled ocean plastic waste

● adidas will launch new fabrics made from recycled polyester and marine plastic waste and expand the product lines that use them after the success of shoes made with the Parley for the Oceans initiative, it has said.

The sportswear firm first teamed up with Parley in 2015 and gradually ramped up production of shoes using plastic collected on beaches and coastal regions to make more than 11-million pairs in 2019, still only a fraction of a group total of more than 400-million.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity that promotes a circular economic model that eliminates waste, says less than 1% of material used for clothing is recycled.

adidas will continue to make Parley-

branded shoes and clothes out of ocean plastic in 2020 and will also launch "Primeblue" fabric containing Parley marine waste that it will use in existing lines like its popular Ultraboost shoes.

In total, the German firm will produce 15-million to 20-million pairs of shoes using ocean plastic in 2020.

Recycled polyester costs about 10% more than the virgin material, but adidas wants to get the price down so more consumers can afford to choose sustainable products.

"It is a matter of time, it is a matter of scale, of volume and we are trying to lead that charge," said James Carnes, adidas vice-president of brand strategy.

adidas says it wants more than half of the

polyester it uses to be recycled in 2020, ramping up to 100% by 2024.

Criticism has been mounting of the environmental impact of the fashion industry, which is responsible for about 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions, according to charity Oxfam.

"Increasing the presence of recycled polyester fibre has the potential to massively impact global energy and resource requirements," said Barclays analyst Anushka Challawala. "Sportswear is leading a lot of the change."

Nike uses recycled polyester yarn for the uppers of its popular Flyknit shoes, saying that has helped it divert more than 4-billion plastic bottles from landfills. — Reuters