

## **Women's Ready-to-Wear Collection with the Influence of Cottagecore**

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This study aims to understand the cottagecore aesthetic and its relationship to fashion, especially the extent to which it could act as a form of self-expression and coping mechanism. This research used an exploratory descriptive research approach with the application of interview, observational research and pattern exploration. Samples were chosen non-random and purposively aiming on the representative values and perspectives. Taking inspiration from Netflix's series 'Anne with an E', which has comparable aesthetics to the cottagecore movement, this study took a modern approach on the cottagecore aesthetic to produce more wearable and versatile ready-to-wear pieces while retaining the principal elements and traditional techniques. It is found that the cottagecore aesthetic may appear to have arisen as a trend during the pandemic. However, as people are now seeking to be more sustainable, the cottagecore concept, which promotes slow living in connection with nature and appreciating craftsmanship, can continue to be prioritized in the future. Overall, this study offers pieces that boost people's moods and transport them to a bucolic pastoral fantasy while aiming on better suit the current local market preferences.

*Keywords: cottagecore, womenswear, self-expression, coping mechanism*

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, political and economic turbulence have often been the backdrop of rising negative emotions. But 2020 really sets a high record for negative emotions worldwide with the COVID-19 pandemic as the leading cause. In fact, the Negative Experience Index Score indicates that the year was officially the worst and the most stressful year ever for the last fifteen years, implying about 190 million people worldwide are now more stressed than they were last year ([Gallup, 2021](#)). COVID-19 has affected economic and social problem ([Faruq et al., 2022](#)) and also affected 80% of the respondents with physical discomfort, sadness, and anger were noted.

With the mobility restriction and being stranded at home for an extended period of time, people were left to their own company and devices. Here, the internet and social media enable people worldwide to stay informed and connected despite the distance and constraints. Connectivity technologies have been a lifeline for many in the face of pandemic, yet they may not be enough. People began to notice that they were not experiencing the actual feelings and reactions that arise from good relationships with nature and other people as soon as they advanced in their technological lifestyle. When people were left to their devices, they eventually become more creative and appreciative to minor activities like cooking, baking, or just stepping outside. Newfound domestic hobbies then are rising as a result of the pandemic stress that increase people's urge for escapism to simply distract oneself from the persistent feeling of stress, anxiousness, loneliness, and depression ([Langstedt & Hunt, 2022](#); [Wulandari & Mariant0, 2022](#); [Fullana et al., 2020](#)).

Establishing new hobbies allows one to pass the time, overcome boredom, and earn money on the side, but it also positively impacts life during these dreary times. About a third of those polled by Lending Tree/Qualtrics stated that they adopted hobbies intending to generate money while enhancing their mental health ([Stych, 2021](#)). Those laid off or furloughed, Gen Z, and millennials are the most likely to start up a new pastime during the pandemic. These micro-trends are not significant after all – they are part of a much broader trend that has been there for a while but has been gaining traction as many people seek a much-needed escape.

The expanding trend of this activity can be noticed by the proliferation of similar content widely circulated on social media under the name

*cottagecore*. Cottagecore with its famous hashtag #cottagecore is a budding aesthetic that celebrates rural domesticity ([Ramachandran, 2021](#)) and harkens to simple living, skills, and crafts with typically romantic aesthetic influenced by the bucolic attributes of classic English countryside style ([Kay & Wood, 2021](#)). The concept has attracted a group of people who appreciate old tradition while yet holding on to modern principles. It is also recognised as a clothing style popularised and much loved by young adults or Gen Z who celebrate idealised rustic lifestyle interpretations ([Atanasova, 2021](#)). The New York Times further defined the term as a desire to live in a world outside the one currently inhabited, as modern cottagecore is more about the feeling of comfort and peace, even if it is a fantasy ([Atanasova, 2021](#)).

Like many other recent trends, cottagecore is not entirely a new aesthetic as it reflects a burgeoning rejection of hustle culture that culminated in the 2010s, similar to previous movements when people moved to the countryside as a place of retreat and to calm down ([Kay & Wood, 2021](#)). This aesthetic provides a space to fantasise about a more serene life in the countryside away from the cities and devoid of the typical stress-inducing activities. It is fuelled by nostalgia for a simple peaceful stress-free life (Saxon, 2021) and appears to be the antidote to the chaos of modern internet society ([Waller, 2022](#)). The core value of cottagecore that rejects the fast-paced life and reminisces for the past pre-industrial times can be seen throughout history ([Kane, 2021](#)). Resemblances of values can be found in Ancient Greece, Marie Antoinette, nineteenth to twentieth centuries, to the cottagecore trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Rather than looking forward to a dismal future filled with uncertainty, society prefers to look back to simpler times free of urban distraction ([Dusanapudi, 2020](#)) and the simple joys of cottagecore provide a feeling of serenity ([Waller, 2022](#)). People who are attracted to the aesthetic do so as a means of self-expression anchoring themselves and seeking soothing escapism during isolation ([Brand, 2021](#)) and further for as a means of coping with the fast-paced modern environment for Generation Z ([Ramirez, 2020](#)). The cottagecore trend grows in massive popularity worldwide and generates demand in cottagecore-related areas, particularly fashion. The fashion may be classified as either a hyper-feminine, contemporary rendition of old fashion or a more practical and comfortable ensemble with whimsical aspects. Brown, dusty rose pink, olive green, pale yellow, beige, and baby blue are some of the natural or fading hues found in cottagecore with natural textiles like cotton, linens,

and knitted yarns are frequently used. Longer, loose-fitting, flowing dresses and skirts, and blouses with puffy sleeves are popular with florals, paisley, and gingham patterns along with nature embroideries.

Previous studies have documented the effects of clothes in creating impressions and perceptions. As a few examples, college instructors in formal attire are seen as more intelligent according to the students ([Morris et al., 1996](#)), clients have more trust in well-dressed therapists (1992, in [Adam & Galinsky, 2012](#)), and adequately dressed customer services have stronger purchase intention ([Shao et al., 2004](#)). The impact of clothing is not only limited to how other people perceive and judge, but it also influences the wearer themselves in certain ways. However, research finding in this part of clothing effects tend to be relatively inconsistent and fragmented. One theory that could possibly synthesise and understand the past findings is the term *encloded cognition*, which addresses the systematic influence of clothes on the wearer's psychological processes and behavioural tendencies ([Adam & Galinsky, 2012](#)).

The term *encloded cognition* was based on the former research on embodied cognition. Embodied cognition proposes that physical experiences through the brain's sensory system are stored in memory in the form of cognitive representations from which abstract concepts finally get their symbolic meaning. In contrast to this theory, the link between the physical experience and its symbolic meaning in *encloded cognition* is indirect and not automatically embodied. It is not the physical experience but the clothes that carry the symbolic meaning. In the context of cottagecore, the theory of *encloded cognition* explains its influence on psychological processes. Like Adam and Galinsky's (2012) doctor-associated lab coat experiment, cottagecore-style clothing explains its influence on psychological process evoking symbolic meaning associated with nostalgia, vintage, and longing for pastoral countryside ([Åberg & Tondelli, 2021](#)). Also, the physical experience of wearing clothes amplifies the psychological effect. Based on this theory, the relationship between clothing and psychology can be understood, where people imagine living in rural areas that function enough as self-expression and coping mechanisms.

The Netflix series of 'Anne with an E' was adopted in this research as the perfect inspiration that represents the cottagecore aesthetic and depicts the Western countryside life in the picturesque Green Gables. In some of the scenes, the main actor Anne, uses her imagination to help her overcoming past

trauma and enduring the stress of life in her transitional age. This is in line with the cottagecore concept which also utilises fantasy to create a feeling of comfort and calm.

Based on these issues, first, this study attempts at understanding the aesthetics and trends of cottagecore, especially the extent to which cottagecore could act as a form of self-expression and coping mechanism, as well as its relationship to fashion. Second, by drawing inspiration from the 'Anne with an E', this project intends to expand the appeal of this style and make the trend more inclusive by incorporating cottagecore-influenced fashion into the Indonesian market.

## METHOD

This study used an exploratory descriptive research approach with the application of interview, observational research and pattern exploration. Samples were chosen non-random and purposively aiming on the representative values and perspectives.

Four in-depth interviews were conducted to two consumers and two psychology experts. Questions related to the creation of a ready-to-wear collection with cottagecore influenced were given to selected consumers who have an interest and/or personal style that fits the aesthetic. They were selected at two age groups of the 20s (Consumer A) and 30s (Consumer B), respectively sharing their opinions on the cottagecore trend and design elements. Meanwhile, a mental health counsellor (Expert A) and a psychiatrist (Expert B) responded to questions about the context of cottagecore functioning as self-expression to emotional escape and coping mechanism for the current condition, as well as its relationship with fashion from a psychological perspective.

Quoting a passage from the series' manuscript (Road to Avonlea, n.d):

*It saved you, that you used your imagination to escape this place. Your reality is effervescent. Beautiful. It made you who you are. Able to see and dream what is possible, not just what is. – Anne with an E*

This is aligned with the idea of the cottagecore, thus inspiration from the series 'Anne with an E' was brought forward along with the data from interview and these sequences were taken into the design to depict the process of dealing with stress and subsequently finding comfort and tranquillity

through cottagecore fantasy. Pattern exploration was then executed by pattern drafting in order to achieve cottagecore inspired design outcomes. At first, rough sketches were made and developed where the fundamental design was modified to generate numerous styles to create the required designs. Dart manipulation was incorporated to manipulate the darts on the body and alter the pattern to create gathers and increase volume. Then, toile samples were created to ensure the fit and overall craftsmanship. A variety of smocking techniques, such as hand, elastic, and machine smocking, were executed to give an added value and intriguing details into the craftsmanship while remaining more reasonable for ready-to-wear.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In line with the secondary data, the interview with psychology experts discovered that 2020 was the most stressful year for at least in the last 15 years. In fact, during the ongoing pandemic, many people are feeling stressed with the cases could range from economic concerns to self-isolation. Expert A mentioned that the majority of the cases treated were connected to overthinking, anxiety, and self-confidence among students and workers in the 20-25-years-old age group. Further Expert B added that the cases' number peaked in the middle of the pandemic when individuals were concerned about the unclear situation and the virus itself. The main cause was maladaptation to unexpected changes in settings, like in economic concerns and educational system, which resulted in stress and depression in many individuals.

The case of cottagecore movement, it is believed that most likely it is born due to people's desire for a more tranquil environment. Not just because of the pandemic, but also because of the overcrowding and hectic urban environment, that people may feel bored and burned out. As a result, these folks imagined themselves in the bucolic countryside when they were actually in the centre of a bustling city. It might be the same scenario in this situation, where many people begin new hobbies and occupations to satisfy themselves and as a kind of creativity. Moreover, the pandemic has been impacting on how individuals dress. People express themselves through their clothing as a form of self-comfort. As long as their imagination is working, this strategy might help people feel more at ease, while the clothes simply add to the ambience. However, this may require holistic support, such as vacation or engaging in interesting hobbies and activities, so it is not only about the clothes.

When it comes to clothing, fashion is always subjective and determined by what each individual likes, thus it cannot be simply generalised because the effect will not always the same from one person to another. Although sometimes people can get carried away with what they wear, it is insignificant enough to alter the nature. Further, interviews showed that cottagecore has the potential to be used as a form of self-expression to cope with problems, but the effect is short-lived and does not apply the same to everyone. As a result, it all comes down to a person's style preferences, which vary depending on what they like and what kind of identity they want to project. In general, people like to follow what is trending and feel good about being a part of it. However, as people evolve with time and their style choices alter as well, this does not apply indefinitely.

The interviews found that consumers are aware of the latest prevailing aesthetic and they are welcomed to this aesthetic that could complement their personal styles, even if they are unfamiliar with the term cottagecore itself. Consumer A mentioned that trends have an impact on her clothing style as apparent on the participant's Instagram page in which she wore floral dresses with puff sleeves. Consumer A started wearing this kind of clothing during the onset of the pandemic as she was influenced by the *Bridgerton* aesthetic, which was also popular at the time. It is understandable that people who are interested the cottagecore aesthetic like consumer A, would perceive it as a trend. Even without any particular intention of doing so, being a part of the trend makes people feel better. Different from Consumer A, Consumer B who is in her 30s, is not affected by the cottagecore trend and that is because she already has a similar style long before the pandemic. She believed that this cottage girl style has existed before and in fact cottagecore may have a similar esthetic around one period or another.

*"This cottage girl style has existed before like Mori girl, a Japanese fashion centered on an appearance inspired by living in the woods, which was a trend at the time and becomes my inspiration."* – Consumer B

Interviews further proved that there must be a market segment in Indonesia that is interested in the aesthetic. Consumers have been attracted to cottagecore clothing since the pandemic with the advent of the trends and comparable aesthetics, as seen by the cases of the two participants. There are two possibilities: this customer may just embrace the style as a passing fad, or this aesthetic may be a style that suits their personality and will be developed further in the future. Both consumers admitted to

buying clothes with this aesthetic from foreign brands frequently. Due to the demand in the local market but brands that sell such products are still rather limited, establishing a collection with cottagecore aesthetic surely has an opportunity in Indonesia.

Speaking about the design preference, consumers in both age groups are drawn to designs that are simple but have subtle intriguing features, such as lace decorations on the neck or a ribbon detail on the back. Both are looking for clothes that not only match their style but also have a well-thought-out and balanced composition. According to experts, individuals mostly desire something soft and comfy material that delivers a light and relaxing experience. But overall, it can be inferred that material selection would vary based on the occasion.

*“I like cotton and similar materials for vacation, but I might also use other materials that are fancier and more sophisticated for some occasion.” – Consumer A*

*“The material used in a garment is determined by the wearer’s mood and the clothing’s design.” – Consumer B*

A six-looks line up was created using fabrics that can give a mundane and humble impression with a touch of nostalgia, vintage, and earthy cottage feel in conformance with the central theme of this cottagecore collection. Feminine elements like embroidery trim, ruffles, laces, and braids were added as embellishments that further emphasized the nostalgic and romantic feelings as well as the arts and craft concept in cottagecore.

Quoting a passage from the series’ manuscript (Road to Avonlea, 2020):

*It saved you, that you used your imagination to escape this place. Your reality is effervescent. Beautiful. It made you who you are. Able to see and dream what is possible, not just what is.*

This is aligned with the idea of the cottagecore, thus these sequences were taken into the design to depict the process of dealing with stress and subsequently finding comfort and tranquillity through cottagecore fantasy. The foundation of this project development is conveyed through the project scheme in Figure 1.

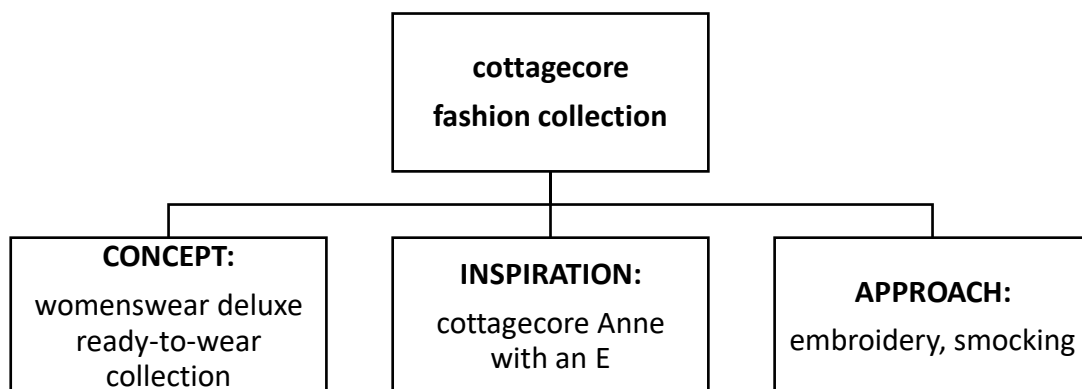


Figure 1. Project Schematic

Taking inspiration from the ‘Anne with an E; series, the outfit worn was then dissected further, revealing the three layers look. The first layer is an undergarment known as bloomers, then a knee-length dress is stacked, which is layered again with a pinafore. Each of these pieces serve as an inspiration for the collection to be worn separately to better fit the local climate rather than in three layers and allow for multiple wear pieces to be layered down or up depending on the wearer’s occasions and desires. Also, with the smocking accents mostly seen in Anne’s and her adoptive mom’s dresses, fabric manipulation like Canadian smocking was taken into experiment. Reviving this traditional technique becomes an attempt for cultural

preservation as well as to create a distinctive design as it is not frequently encountered in recent fashion products.

Design sketches were developed with main influences taken from the character’s attire in the series. Multiple variations of puff sleeves with varied forms, volumes, and pattern were explored as Anne and the whole cottagecore are infatuated with puff sleeves. A lot of gathers were incorporated in some sketches to enhance volume and provide a feminine feel to a design that appears vintage and nostalgic. Indonesian audience as the key market segment and prospected customers’ demographic

were taken into consideration to generate a more up-to-date, easy-to-wear, and consumer-driven look.

Reflecting upon the broad concept and aesthetics of *cottagecore*, creating a design that is less "cottage" or vintage may be able to appeal to a wider audience. Design elements like Peter Pan collar, Anne's bloomers inspired pants, pinafore like dress, white basic shirt, and ruffles were incorporated into the design to complement the cottagecore aesthetic with a touch of classic and feminine touch. The final line

up as depicted in Figure 4 strived to be bolder in experimenting with silhouettes, cuts, and lengths based on the results obtained from consumer interviews. More consideration was given to trimmings while retaining the *cottagecore* essence, such as the use of embroidery for the edges of the hems and ruffles in certain parts for accents. Apart from seeking more innovative materials, the second development process was also carried out coinciding with fabric and material research, and thus the designs were also more concentrated.



Figure 2. Six-looks line up

Toile samples were created for the chosen designs where paper pattern was checked, and fit was ensured as shown in Figure. At this stage, fabric manipulation and other pattern exploration were also

conducted. Figure 4 shows the exploration of smocking technique and puff sleeve to serve as one of the design features and shaped into rose-shaped puff sleeves for one blouse.



Figure 3. Toile samples



Figure 4. Fabric manipulation and pattern exploration



Figure 5. Final garments

Once paper patterns were adjusted after reviewing the toile samples, final garments were then produced complete with each design features (Figure 5).

### CONCLUSION

Coming from the recognition of a yearning for escapism in the midst of time, cottagecore trend emerged as a response to the hectic exhausting lifestyle based on technology and increased life stress. It is a movement that hearkens back to

agricultural life, skills, and crafts with the ideas of simple living in harmony with nature, inspired by romanticised interpretations of the traditional English countryside. As people long for a simpler life, it offers escapism of modern rural fantasy that brings a sense of comfort and tranquillity. Despite the debates on too idealised rustic images, some people find #cottagecore as a medium of self-expression to with situations like the ongoing covid pandemic.

In this regard, this study examines cottagecore more deeply understanding the extent of its effects and applies it in ready-to-wear fashion. Based on psychological research, clothing does have an influence on the individual who wears it, but the impact varies greatly from one person to another. Clothing might be able to aid a little but only to the extent of improving mood and self-confidence, and not in the long term. Clothing can reveal a person's identity based on how they dress. When people dress in comfortable clothes that complement their personality, they may feel happier and more confident. Although the effect might be temporary, people would still need more mood-altering products.

Taking inspiration from Netflix's series 'Anne with an E', which has comparable aesthetics to the cottagecore movement, this study took a modern approach on the cottagecore aesthetic to produce more wearable and versatile ready-to-wear pieces while retaining the principal elements and traditional techniques. A total of six womenswear looks was made offering pieces that boost people's moods and transport them to a bucolic pastoral fantasy while aiming on better suit the current local market preferences.

The cottagecore aesthetic may appear to have arisen as a trend during the pandemic. However, as people are now seeking to be more sustainable, the cottagecore concept, which promotes slow living in connection with nature and appreciating craftsmanship, can continue to be prioritized in the future. The creation of cottagecore fashion products might be benefit from a deeper look into the aesthetic and its similar trends over the period. As of now, the sample sizes are relatively limited, thus having a bigger scope and applying to different age groups might give future researches a more objective results and further test the possible development of this aesthetic that meet market demand as well as its possible psychological impact on the wearer. Sticking with the idea of escapism, the aesthetics that began with cottagecore can be free to grow over time in accordance with the seasons and trends.

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