

**Shein & the Paradox of Social Consciousness:
Gen Z's Motivations to Purchase Fast Fashion Under the Influence of
Social Media Trends**

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Abstract

In today's social media age, fast fashion brands are thriving. This research focuses on Shein, an immensely lucrative eCommerce business taking the fast fashion and social media world by storm. Shein's growth can be attributed most notably to TikTok - their prominence has grown as a result of the millions of user-generated content (UGC) shared by Influencers and Shein customers.

Despite their success, they are notorious for their unsustainable and immoral business practices. Like other fast fashion brands, their low prices and lack of transparency regarding their production process have led to multiple public controversies.

Shein's target market is Gen Z- the digital natives that are redefining the trajectory of social media through the creation of social media fashion trends that brands have quickly learnt to capitalize on. Shein has been particularly successful, making new trends available to consumers quickly and at a low cost. Gen Z drives the ultra-fast fashion industry, however, at the same time they are also labeled as the most socially conscious generation thus far. Therefore, if Gen Z is so socially conscious, why are fast fashion sites like Shein continuing to thrive?

Studying young consumers motivations is key for brands to further understand their consumers and their drives. As more and more brands are starting to turn to TikTok in hopes to tap into Gen Z and go viral, Gen Z's perspective is key to understanding how this can be done. This is relevant for brands interested in the creation of more viable sustainable fashion as well as fast fashion brands looking to understand their consumers. This study is an opportunity to conceptualize current relevant societal phenomenon while allowing for deeper understanding by synthesizing people's experiences with previous theoretical knowledge.

This research explores this social-consciousness paradox recognized within Gen Z through a qualitative study that answers the following research question: *What motivates Gen Z to purchase fast fashion products from Shein under the influence of social media fashion trends?* The data for the study is collected through means of 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using the qualitative method of thematic analysis.

The study concludes that Gen Z is motivated to purchase fast fashion products from Shein for several reasons: 1) to experiment with style and self-expression 2) the ease that TikTok adds to the Shein shopping process 3) to participate in trends 4) the overconsumption culture promoted to Gen Z via TikTok and 5) the value-action gap that exists within members of Gen Z. These factors represent the various internal and external motivations that contribute towards Gen Z continuing to shop from Shein.

KEYWORDS: Fast fashion, Shein, Gen Z, TikTok, Social media, Motivation, Fashion Trends, Social consciousness

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Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Dupe <i>Duplicate</i>	A term frequently used in the online beauty and fashion space referring to a cheaper product made to look like a more expensive or high-quality product. Dupes differ from fake or counterfeit goods, as they usually are not replicas of another design, but rather a design or product which is inspired by a certain high-end product or popular trend.
FYP <i>For You Page</i>	The term used to refer to TikTok's For You Page, or in other words, it is TikTok's landing page. Each user has a unique FYP featuring curated videos uploaded to the platform that TikTok's algorithm thinks the user will be interested in.
#SheinHaul <i>Shein Haul</i>	A hashtag on TikTok featuring hauls from Shein. Hauls are usually video recordings posted on the Internet in which a person shows, models, or discusses products they bought, in this case through Shein.
Social Media Fashion Trends	Micro-trends or aesthetics that rise in and out of popularity quickly, now often driven by TikTok. Some popular examples are the Y2K trend, Cottagecore, and the Dark academia aesthetic. These trends are often reflected on fast fashion websites.
Social Media Influencer	A person or group with a social media platform and audience who can influence potential buyers to buy a product. They are frequently approached by companies to collaborate on sponsored posts, which they often get paid for in the form of money or gifts.
TikTok Algorithm	An algorithm informed by artificial intelligence that determines which videos appear on viewers For You Page. TikTok's algorithm learns about users' interests and uses it to recommend videos. The algorithm can change over time based on factors such as videos a viewer has liked, watch time, and geographic location.
#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt <i>TikTok Made Me Buy It</i>	A hashtag on TikTok that features users showing off the purchases they have made because of TikTok. This hashtag is rampant on TikTok, has prompted many brands to recognize TikTok's commercial potential.
UGC <i>User-generated content</i>	Published information to a digital platform, in this case in the form of organic or sponsored videos on TikTok by users.

1. Introduction

Shein is a Chinese online ultra-fast fashion eCommerce site disrupting the fashion world with its ultra-low price point, trendy designs, and fast production time. The retailer is one of the most talked about brands on social media, and the most visited fashion eCommerce site in the world (Nguyen, 2021). Shein's growth can be attributed to social media, most notably TikTok - their prominence can be observed by searching for the hashtag #SheinHaul – which currently has over 5.7 billion views. Under this hashtag are millions of videos featuring young people unboxing their new Shein orders – highlighting the number of items they bought for a low price (Elan, 2021). Moreover, Shein's virality also grew through their social media collaborations with celebrities like Addison Rae, Katy Perry, and Lil Nas X as well as numerous micro and mid-tier influencers who are popular on TikTok to reach Gen Z audiences (Brenan, 2021). Unsurprisingly, Shein is also reportedly the most talked about brand on TikTok (HypeAuditor, 2020).

Despite Shein's success with Gen Z, their low prices and lack of transparency about their production process have led to public controversy. Shein is faster than standard fast fashion brands (Nguyen, 2021) and falls under the category of ultra-fast fashion, along with brands like Boohoo, FashionNova, and Pretty Little Thing. Shein reported releasing around 6,000 fresh items for sale informed by current trends compared to Zara which launches around 10,000 new products annually (The Economist, 2021). Moreover, Shein has an edge over its competitors through constant customer data gathering and analysis to make new designs and have them live on their site in as little as three days. If a particular item is going viral on TikTok, Shein can ramp up its rate of production depending on demand (Nguyen, 2021). However, much like other fast fashion brands, Shein is accused of supply chain problems, environmental damage, and questionable labor practices (Elan, 2021).

On the other hand, Generation Z (Gen Z) is Shein's target audience. Born between 1997 - 2012, they grew up surrounded by technology from a very early age and are often characterized by their socially conscious attitude (Dimock, 2019; Schroth, 2019). A recent study conducted by the world's largest student network paneled more than 18,000 Gen Z students and found that seven in ten Gen Z demand their clothes are made ethically and 57% find it important to support

brands championing sustainability (UNiDAYS, 2021). If Gen Z is socially conscious and favors ethically made products, why are ultra-fast fashion sites like Shein still so lucrative?

To answer this question, it is critical to scrutinize social media's role in creating viral trends that fuel mass consumption. TikTok is known for virality, with brands flocking to the platform trying to tap into Gen Z audiences in hopes to go viral and sell (World Finance, 2022). The hashtag #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt has over 14.4 billion views to date on TikTok, suggesting that people are comfortable with the idea that they are being persuaded to shop because of TikTok. The hashtag features countless videos with consumers showing products they bought thanks to TikTok's recommendations. The apps commercial nature has contributed to normalizing overconsumption, making it okay to be influenced to buy products seen on TikTok and even suggesting them to others (Russell, 2022). Many studies have demonstrated social media's potential to impact young consumers purchasing decisions (Ding et al., 2020; Hinterstein, 2020; Müllerb & Christandl, 2019) however, academic research into TikTok as a medium is needed, especially considering Gen Z is spending more money than pre-pandemic, with many of these purchases being fueled by viral trends (World Finance, 2022).

Consequently, a gap between belief and action exists termed a *value-action gap* (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), where one's beliefs are not aligned with their actions. While Gen Z is reportedly an extremely ethical generation that champions sustainability, they still support fast fashion brands known to have harmful impacts on the planet. Research into how social media can disrupt this value-action gap is relevant as Gen Z now accounts for 40% of consumers worldwide - a number that will continue to increase (World Finance, 2022).

Studying how social media trends can motivate Gen Z to buy from fast fashion brands like Shein is both socially and academically relevant as pinpointing people's motivations to purchase fast fashion is key in the creation of alternative fashion that is both ethical and affordable. Moreover, as the COVID-19 pandemic boosted online shopping and the number of active TikTok users (World Finance, 2022) it is relevant to dive into customers' perspectives of how these TikTok-driven trends are impacting people's personal shopping habits. TikTok has seemingly redefined the trajectory of social media marketing, therefore consumer perspectives from Gen Z who are driving this change can provide valuable insights. As of now much of the research on this topic is published by business intelligence firms, marketing agencies, blogs, journalistic sources, and Youtube channels, therefore academic research into Gen Z, Shein, and

TikTok as a phenomenon is required. The topic is a chance to hop into the psyche of Gen Z and understand their experience with social media trends and their purchasing decision. Research into this topic serves to allow fast fashion and beauty marketers to understand their consumer's perspectives to create products and services in line with their customer's tastes and drives. This topic allows for further understanding of how persuasion functions in the social media space, using Shein, the most talked about brand on TikTok (Hypeauditor, 2020) as a case study. This research will explore the following question:

What motivates Gen Z to purchase fast fashion products from Shein under the influence of social media fashion trends?

2. Theoretical Framework

This section will discuss the theoretical approaches central to this research. While all concepts are somewhat connected, they will be divided into sections to build up the argumentation while simultaneously providing theory. The division is as follows: 1) the social consciousness paradox of Gen Z and 2) social media and fast fashion. The two are connected as the first conceptualizes Gen Z and the research problem, while the latter theorizes relevant concepts.

2.1 The Social Consciousness Paradox of Gen Z

Generation Z, commonly known as Gen Z, is a generation born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019; Schroth, 2019). Growing up surrounded by constant advancements in technology impacted this generation to a great degree. Internet access bred a generation that is independent, highly digitally connected, and values truth and authenticity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Despite their high level of independence, Gen Z is found to be highly susceptible to others' opinions (Goldring & Azab, 2021). Moreover, they are also reported to be socially conscious or woke consumers, with nine in ten Gen Z consumers believing that companies have a responsibility to comment on moral, environmental, and societal issues (Amed et al., 2019). Gen Z's socially conscious attitude, as well as their desire for fast fashion, have both been linked to social media throughout literature. Previous research signals a value-action gap (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), a concept in environmental psychology where one's beliefs are not aligned with their actions. This value-action gap is found to be impacted the level of *pro-environmental consciousness* which constitutes one's level of environmental knowledge, values, and attitudes together with emotional involvement. A person's pro-environmental consciousness is embedded in their personal values and shaped by internal, external, cultural, as well as social factors, such as their personality, environment, and peers (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002).

When contextualizing this value-action gap in relation to fashion, on one hand, Gen Z's love for fast fashion is linked to their social media use, where they are exposed to online shopping (Muralidhar & Anand, 2019). On the other hand, the literature suggests Gen Z have higher knowledge about sustainability due to their use of the internet and social media (Tyson et al., 2021). Gen Z is reported to consume sustainable fashion for several reasons: these being trends, economic benefits, and sustainability (Kihl & Vähänen, 2018). Younger consumers want

to support brands that take a stand on social issues that align with their customers' core values (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Research by Mihelich (2013) supports this assertion, reporting that Gen Z is more concerned with environmental issues than any other generation. However, the rise in fast fashion sales suggests that Gen Z is either ignoring or tolerating the destructive cost of their overconsumption (Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). Despite Gen Z's socially conscious attitude, they continue to support ultra-fast fashion brands notorious for causing environmental and social harm.

Other studies suggest that Gen Z lacks environmental awareness, as it is often overrun by their drive for trendy, low-cost fast fashion. Kaplan (2020) finds Millennials are more passionate about the environment, showing high concern for issues like healthcare, global warming, and climate change, whereas Gen Z tends to prioritize social-justice concerns like mass shootings, racial equality, and immigration policy. Similarly, a report published by The Business of Fashion and McKinsey (2018) found Millennials to be more willing to buy and pay for sustainable products. Moreover, despite a positive approach to the environment, fashion enthusiasts are found less likely to opt for sustainable fashion options (Joergens, 2006; Niinimäki, 2010; Ochoa, 2011). They tend to prioritize identity expression through fashion trends over their concern for global warming or sustainability (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). Consumers perceive their need to consume fashion trends as the main hindrance to more sustainable consumption habits, with some holding the institutional fast fashion model accountable (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Gwozdz & Reisch, 2015).

The extent of the support for brands like Shein is only magnified by social media, with Shein being one of the most talked-about brands on TikTok and Youtube, and the most visited fashion eCommerce site in the world (Nguyen, 2021). Considering Gen Z's socially conscious attitude as well as their drive for fast fashion, it is relevant to question how social media can fuel young consumers' drive for fashion trends and contribute to or even exacerbate this value-action gap.

2.2 Social Media and Fast Fashion

To begin understanding why Gen Z consumes fast fashion, it is critical to theorize the impact social media has on people's motivations to buy, as well as some of the ethical concerns that come along with fast fashion.

The fast fashion model is driven by constantly changing consumer expectations (Barnes & Greenwood, 2006). On social media, these manifest as trends that reach a wide audience, providing an opportunity for brands to capitalize on (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). This becomes clearer when looking at the more recent popularity of highly interactive social platforms like TikTok, along with the ever-growing amount of sponsored content by monetized Influencers. Shein and similar fast fashion brands make use of Influencers by having them share *promo codes* on social media to drive purchase acceleration (Neslin & Jiao, 2021). Promo codes have played a large role in Shein's successful marketing, allowing users to buy items at a faster pace (Shen, 2022). These promo codes are often shared in sponsored UGC, however, organic UGC contributes majorly to Shein's success on TikTok as well, with consumers sharing their own Shein purchases online in short-video format. Jenkins (2008) articulates that social media creates a *participatory culture* that can then be contributed to by anyone. In the case of TikTok, this participatory culture becomes imminent when looking at the amount of UGC. Previous studies have found UGC to have persuasive qualities, leading to a more positive attitude towards the brand and its products (Müllerb & Christandl, 2019) as well as having an impact on a consumer's consumption process (Halliday, 2016; Kim & Johnson, 2016). Gen Z seemingly embraces this commercialization, further driving sales on these eCommerce fashion sites through the consumption and creation of UGC on TikTok. Gen Z is reportedly aware of how TikTok's algorithm functions, developing ways to optimize their experience by tricking the algorithm (Klug et al., 2021) - they play a role in determining the content they watch. This carries implications in the case of commercial content, as research suggests now consumers enter and exit the sales journey based on their wants and needs, transforming the customer journey from a funnel into an infinite loop (TikTok Business, 2022). TikTok has reportedly redefined the traditional linear sales funnel, now allowing people to enter and exit the funnel based on their personal needs and wants that are built and informed by their behaviors and interests. The infinite loop includes product discovery, consideration, review, participation, and purchase (TikTok Business, 2022). Social media is a driving force shaping how people consume, especially evident in Gen Z - the digital natives.

The extent to which a consumer will want to participate in current fashion trends will depend on their motivations to purchase. A study by Chalachatpinyo, Padgett, and Crocker (2002) found that fashion-conscious consumers can be identified by their high information-

seeking abilities and adoption of new trends. They found two kinds of fashion consumers: *innovators* who are more concerned with differentiating themselves from others and *followers/laggards* who are more motivated by their social needs. In Gen Z's case, the innovators are trying to differentiate themselves from the group. Research suggests that differentiation through personal branding has become key for key Gen Z, encouraging them to create a cohesive aesthetic that matches who they are as a person as a way to express their distinctiveness (Vişlar, 2019). On the other hand, Gen Z also seeks out information through social media about the latest fashion trends and is motivated to keep their closets up to date with the latest styles (Iyer & Eastman, 2010). These consumers could be more socially driven and classified as followers/laggards.

Nevertheless, the ephemeral nature of social media trends is reflected in the pace of fast fashion companies like Shein, producing designs every day to reflect trends, and in turn fueling Gen Z's desire to discover these trends earlier to get ahead of this cycle and participate in the trend while it's still relevant (Jennings, 2022). Prior research proposes that Gen Z are *identity nomads* who believe in experimenting with different forms of expression through their style to shape their identity over time (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z is known to express themselves through consumption to reflect their current self-concept (Ismail et al., 2021). Additionally, Gen Z fashion trends are driven by social value - by key opinion leaders, celebrities, luxury brands as well as film and television (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018) and in the last couple of years, by social media Influencers. While people follow Influencers for a number of reasons, gaining practical knowledge about products drives people to follow Influencers and consume their content (Chae, 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This is relevant considering the number of Influencers who post about fast fashion brands, sponsored or organically - creating a trend that can reach millions.

As these designs are often inspired by those from luxury brands, a certain sense of status or social capital can be attained from wearing them. Fashion to convey social or cultural capital is discussed in theory by sociologist Bourdieu. He writes about three primary forms of capital: *economic*, *social*, and *cultural* capital. Economic capital refers to one's financial ability to consume high quantities of material or cultural good. Social capital encompasses networks of trust, influence, and support one can draw on. Cultural capital comprises of the knowledge and education that one receives from socialization within their family, personal networks, and

environment. While some of this can be taught through formal education, often this capital is passed on through implicit means (Bourdieu, 1987). In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu links cultural capital to the consumption of fashion, and deems taste in fashion as a marker of class. Those who can afford to buy the latest fashion do so to differentiate themselves from the crowd, earning them cultural capital. However, as the lower-class wants to emulate the upper class, the item or fashion trend makes its way into the mainstream, causing it to lose its distinctive properties (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's critiques concerned mid 20th century French society, however, is interesting to recontextualize in light of fast-fashion brands like Shein who are making dupe and luxury inspired trends and designs accessible to the public at a much more rapid rate than before. There is not much research conducted into these luxury-inspired or dupe items, but studies regarding people's motivations to purchase counterfeit products suggest that people buy them to gain social acceptance and praise (Bloch et al., 1993). In addition, as price is a powerful motivator to purchase an inauthentic product, research suggests that people either perceive their decision to purchase counterfeit goods as smart, as they get the same style and quality for a much lower price or they view it as lower quality but find the price compensates for any other weaknesses (Albers-Miller, 1999; Ang et al., 2001; Cordell et al., 1996; Tom et al., 1998). As Shein is widely known to sell low-quality items, Shein consumers tend to fall into this second bracket, perceiving the price to compensate for any other weaknesses and buying Shein to gain "prestige without paying for it" (Bloch et al, 1993, p. 31). These dupe or luxury-inspired products are rampant on social media, with videos featuring users sharing dupes for more expensive products going viral on a regular basis.

Alternatively, those that reject fast fashion altogether are often found to have environmental concerns (Kihl & Vähänen, 2018). However, it is important to note that more sustainable clothing options are often expensive and harder to access. A study by Shaw and Dominique (2004) exploring people's motivations to purchase sustainable fashion found price and lack of awareness to be limiting factors in motivating people to shop sustainably. Awareness regarding sustainable consumption is found to alter consumer behavior and ultimately result reduced consumption (Bly et al., 2015). However, research regarding how one's financial status impacts their consumption of fast fashion suggests that fashion consumers often equate sustainable and ethical fashion as financially inconvenient (Joergens, 2006) and do not wish to experience any personal hardships by paying more than they can afford to (Pookulangara &

Shephard, 2013) which leads Gen Z to overlook ethical aspects like the factory workers wage or working conditions. As Gen Z is young and may not possess the financial ability to buy high cost sustainably made clothes, they turn to cheaper options like Shein where they can buy what they desire without much economic or psychological investment (Gabrielli et al., 2013). When taking into consideration the role of finances, Gen Z's socially conscious approach (Amed et al., 2019), the growth of fast fashion as well as ethical consumerism within the market (Shaw & Dominique, 2004) it is important to question the accessibility of these ethically made garments.

Fast fashion causes several environmental hazards. Brooks (2015) holds popular online fashion retailers and social media accountable. While fashion trends have always had an ephemeral nature, ultra-fast fashion brands like Shein have accelerated the rate at which consumers shop and contribute to making the cycle of fast fashion much harder to break out of (Mahmood, 2022). The increase in consumption has detrimental effects on garment workers from emerging economies including unfair working hours, conditions, and wages (Brooks, 2015). Considering Shein is notorious for having unethical and unsustainable business practices, it is relevant to question Gen Z's awareness of this, and how it may impact their decision to purchase, or if the desire to participate in social media-driven fast fashion trends overpowers this.

3. Research Design and Methods

In this section, the research design and methodology used in this study will be explained. A justification for the method will be provided, followed by an explanation of the operationalization process. Next, the sampling strategy will be covered, followed by an explanation of the data collection and analysis methods. For the data collection, in-depth interviews are conducted, and for the analysis, thematic analysis is applied. To conclude the chapter, the validity and reliability of the study will be examined followed by a discussion of the ethical implications. The steps taken in the research are explained in more detail in the subsequent sections.

3.1 Justification for the Method

For this research, qualitative means were used due to the inductive nature of the study, involving observation making, pattern recognition, and then deriving conclusions. Qualitative methods allow for a dynamic approach within research where the research can interpret meaningful occurrences and relations within society. This study makes use of qualitative interviews, as the method provides opportunities for the researcher to follow up with respondents in real-time and generate meaningful conversation around a topic. The method of in-depth interviews is suitable as this study deals with exploring people's personal motivations and experiences of social media trends. Johnson (2011) asserts that in-depth interviews serve to find the underlying meanings individuals construct about topics they do not question, but often involve multiple viewpoints. In this study, interviews can thus serve to gain a deeper understanding of people's motivations and influences on purchasing Shein. The purpose of qualitative interviews is to examine the experiences, motivations, opinions, and beliefs of participants (Gill et. al., 2008). The focus of this research is on people's perceptions of how social media motivates them to purchase Shein, which is a highly subjective and nuanced topic where people's in-depth interpretations are crucial for understanding. Moreover, measuring a value-action gap within participants through qualitative or more structured means would limit the scope of the analysis as this topic requires diverse consumer perspectives and personal experiences. Several internal and external factors seemingly contribute to Gen Z's social consciousness paradox. These factors will differ from person to person based on their location, interests, and experiences. A structured or standardized interview would diminish the advantages

of qualitative research. Conducting a closed interview with only a certain number of fixed questions would only allow for information regarding specific anticipated topics. This would limit the scope of the analysis and fail to capture all relevant data.

3.2 Operationalization

To operationalize the various sensitizing concepts existing within the research topic, the social consciousness paradox of Gen Z was utilized as an overarching concept that is defined by aspects which explore people's social consciousness, such as their awareness regarding fast fashion practices and their own level of care for the environment and other social causes. Moreover, Gen Z's awareness of fashion trends is another important concept that was operationalized through style inspiration and trends they follow, buy, or like. Moreover, when operationalizing Gen Z's experience and awareness of Shein, the frequency of their orders, their experience with Shein, how they first heard about the brand, whether they generally like what they ordered and how much they know about the brand's business practices were utilized. To understand Gen Z's social media use; the platforms and their frequency of use and their favorite influencers were used. To operationalize their use of TikTok in specific, how long people have had a TikTok account, the kinds of videos they watch, and whether they bought anything they saw on TikTok served as aspects to note. The last concept explored sustainability awareness and social consciousness; causes people were passionate about, whether they consider themselves socially conscious, their knowledge about sustainability and the negative impacts of the fast fashion industry, and whether they find it important to buy from ethical brands served as indicators.

These sensitizing concepts formed the basis for the topic list used for the interviews. The topic list was developed to explore the overarching sensitizing concepts that were later used to develop and code the interview data. The Interview guide and the topic list can be found in Appendix A at the end of the report.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Strategy

The population being studied in this research is members of Gen Z who have bought from Shein more than once. Due to the nature of qualitative research, purposeful sampling, volunteer sampling, and snowball sampling were used to recruit the sample.

As research involved talking to members of the Gen Z group who have bought from Shein more than once,

First, as the research involved talking to quite a prevalent group of people, members of Gen Z who have bought from Shein more than once, purposeful sampling was used to recruit the sample. The participants needed to be over 18, born after 1997, and have ordered from Shein more than once. The sample was heterogeneous, as it allowed for the inclusion of a variety of people from diverse backgrounds within the target population. This allowed for a more representative and inclusive sample and captured more opinions and approaches to the subject within the given population. Participants for the research were recruited through volunteer sampling, using volunteers who fit the target population who signed up for the study. The recruitment post was shared on LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok. While the text was slightly changed to cater to each platform, the overall recruitment text used can be found in Appendix B. Moreover, the research made use of snowball sampling, asking participants if they know anyone who fits the criteria and may be interested in participating.

After the participants were all recruited, the sample consisted of four men, ten women, and one individual who identified as non-binary. They represented a diverse group of geographic locations, the brackets indicating the number of people from each country: Spain (1), The U.K (2), India (1), The Netherlands (3), America (2), Germany (1), Israel (1), U.A.E (1), Romania (2) and Mexico (1). They were born between 2003 and 1997 with most participants being in university, working in corporate or the service industry, or as an entrepreneur.

3.4 Description of Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interview questions were developed according to guidelines predicated by Johnson (2011) to develop insight into people's perceptions of how social media fashion trends influence them to buy Shein. A topic list with possible questions was formulated beforehand, with added room for new questions or areas of discovery that emerged from the interviews. First, the participants were asked some ice-breaking, contextual questions to provide the researcher with some background information. These questions aimed to uncover Gen Z's purchasing habits to establish some background on the participants. The researcher asked about whether they enjoy shopping for clothes, their favorite stores, the frequency at which they shop, why they like shopping, and the factors that dictate why they buy a certain item of clothing such

as fit, material or style. During the main section of the interviews, participants were asked about aspects such as their awareness of fashion trends, experiences, and opinions on Shein, social media use, and about their level of sustainability awareness and social consciousness.

15 interviews were conducted, each lasting around 45-60 minutes. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, as it allowed for the inclusion of people outside of the researcher's immediate location into the sample. Moreover, Zoom helped keep the conditions the same for each interview as well as transcribe the interviews automatically after recording.

The data collection process went as planned, and participants were recruited with ease. The interviews took around a month and a half to conduct. As most participants were interested in this topic and signed up on their own accord- the interviews resulted in interesting insights, with participants speaking openly without much confusion or hesitancy. No one from the sample withdrew their participation and most participants were interested in being informed later regarding the results of the study. A list of participants can be found in Appendix C of the report. Their names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

3.5 Processing and Analysis of Data

To analyze the data, the qualitative method of thematic analysis was utilized. It is a method for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 79). This methodology was selected as it is an ideal way to examine the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting their similarities and differences and generating new insights (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Moreover, it provided a methodology to coherently derive and organize conclusions from a semi-structured set of data such as these in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis helped summarize the key features found within the data while still yielding a rich level of depth and analysis. The method helped answer the research question in a systematic manner, organizing the conclusions by main themes.

The thematic analysis was conducted using an inductive approach, based on a methodology designed by Braun and Clarke (2008). Here, the themes identified were strongly connected to and derived from the data. The literature review conducted in the initial stage of the research provides a theoretical lens to discuss the results.

To begin the analysis, all the interview data was transcribed using Zoom's audio transcription tool and edited manually to include stutters, pauses, and laughs, as well as checked for any transcription errors.

After the materials were in place, the five phases of coding began, starting with the familiarization phase. Here the data was organized using the Atlas.ti, an online tool for qualitative analysis that made it possible to select relevant extracts from the data and assign them to specific codes. In this phase, initial ideas that emerged from the data were noted. Here the researcher coded for initial ideas and made note of aspects that appear relevant to the research question. Open coding was also conducted, simplifying, and marking important parts of the data while creating codes for them. For example, making notes of trends being mentioned. This allowed the researcher to mentally compare and contrast aspects of the data and make note of where the responses converged and where they differed from one another. For example, answers which demonstrated social consciousness and answers which did not were marked separately.

In the second phase, any salient features or ideas that emerged from the data were noted and organized. Each observation was further supported by corresponding quotes from the interview data to ensure that the analysis stays grounded in the initial data. Next in the third phase, themes were looked for within the data by observing how the participants perceive the impact of social media fashion trends on their motivations to purchase Shein. All relevant information was gathered for each main theme and sub-themes were extracted from the main ones through sub-coding of the relevant quotes. In this phase, axial coding was conducted to draw links between codes to formulate initial themes. For example, data extracts where participants reflected on how Shein makes trendy pieces available quickly were coded using separate terminology like "instant gratification" and "could buy right away." As both of these quotes pointed toward the same idea, that being how Shein allows them to find trendy pieces right away - the codes converged into the theme "Joining new trends immediately." The quotes under each main theme were divided based on their relevance and turned into sub-themes. For instance, "participating in trends" emerged as a salient theme, but the sub-codes under this main code revealed that "joining new trends" and "finding dupes" are aspects that make up this code.

In the fourth phase of coding, the themes formulated in phase three were reviewed to ensure that they work in relation to the coded data in phase one as well as the data set as a whole.

The researcher checked for repetition of themes, or redundancy within data extracts used to support the sub-themes. For example, under the main code #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt, three sub-codes were initially created: User's FYP, Gen Z's overconsumption culture, and TikTok consumerist culture. "Gen Z's overconsumption culture" included aspects of the data where participants talked about the frequency of their shopping habits whereas "TikTok consumerist culture" focused more on how the videos on TikTok get participants to shop. However, when taking a closer look and refining the themes, the data extracts seemed linked as "Gen Z's overconsumption culture" and "TikTok's consumerist culture" converge and overlap in many ways. Therefore, the theme was turned into "Gen Z's overconsumption culture", which also encompasses TikTok's consumerist culture perpetuated by Gen Z.

After this, the themes were refined accordingly and turned into a thematic table, followed by a thematic map. In the fifth phase, the themes were named and defined. Selective coding was conducted here to connect all codes around one main code. The researcher checked to see what the individual themes contributed to the overall study. Finally, in the last phase, the data was organized accordingly for the final thesis using demonstrative quotation extracts from the interview data to support the themes and conclusions that were drawn in relation to the overall research.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Various steps were taken by the researcher to ensure validity and reliability during all steps of the research. In the initial stages, a thorough literature review was conducted to formulate the theoretical framework. The literature review surveyed a variety of perspectives on the topic contributed to by several different researchers and publications. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to get well acquainted with the topic to understand the target population and their possible motivations more clearly. However, this literature review also allows for more assumptions to arise during the research process. As the researcher falls under the demographic that was being studied and was particularly interested in the topic, the literature review served to inform the researcher beyond their perspective and assumptions and contribute towards making the study more valid. Nevertheless, the researcher's role unavoidably plays a part in the meaning-making process of the interviews and analysis - however various steps were taken to ensure that this does not skew the results.

When planning, a diverse sample in terms of age and geographic location within the sample of 15 was selected to ensure more variation within the respondents. Also, the topic list was pre-tested before conducting the actual interviews which resulted in minor alterations to the interview guide, by removing questions that yield closed answers or seemed repetitive.

In the data collecting phase, the three threats to validity were accounted for: these being *respondent bias*, *researcher bias*, and *reactivity* (Robson, 2002). To tackle respondent bias, the researcher tried to ensure uniform conditions for all participants. Zoom was used for the interviews and all the interviews were conducted on weekdays. Moreover, the researcher avoided interviewing close friends. In regard to researcher bias, it was important to attempt to not let assumptions impact the process. Therefore, when conducting the interviews, if respondents' answers were unclear, the researcher clarified the answers to avoid interpretation. The final threat to validity is reactivity which refers to the impact the researcher's presence has on the interviewee. This was combatted by establishing rapport and making participants feel comfortable like they are talking to a friend. Since the researcher falls under the demographic being studied as well, this was not a difficult task. The participants were able to discuss aspects of social media and their experiences. As the researcher was well acquainted with TikTok and Shein, the conversations flowed well, encouraging the participants to share more. However, the researcher also tried to maintain neutral conditions during all the interviews in terms of their behavior.

In the analysis and reporting phase, the interview data was transcribed twice. Once automatically using Zoom's transcription tool and then transcribed again by the researcher and edited. This boosted the credibility of the transcripts allowing for the inclusion of pauses, laughs and stutters as well as allows for double checking, ensuring the results are grounded in valid data.

Lastly, when coding, the researcher checked that the coding is informed by the data and the literature review, and not by previous assumptions held by the research. The coding was data-driven, and then linked and grounded to the theory covered in the literature review.

3.7 Research Ethics

Pertaining to ethical considerations, the participants received an information sheet and informed consent form prior to the interview which they all either signed or verbally consented

to. The consent and information sheet signed by participants can be found in Appendix D. The participants were informed about the general nature of the study. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study anytime and told that their answers will remain confidential and anonymous and will not link back to them. They were made aware of the fact that the interviews were being recorded and were told they do not need to answer certain questions if any of them makes them uncomfortable.

No potential consequences that the researcher can foresee can come from participating in this study. This research has some ethical implications as it does question the participants about the inconsistencies they have between their actions and values, which may be a sensitive topic to some participants. However, the questions were designed, ordered, and asked in a way that tried to mitigate making the participants possibly uncomfortable.

Moreover, as the Gen Z population does contain minors, the research focused on those who are over 18 in the Gen Z population to mitigate the risks of working with children.

Concerning participant data, they were informed that it is confidential and reported anonymously. Their data was stored privately using Zoom's cloud function and deleted 30 days after recording. By this time the data had already been transcribed and anonymized.

4. Results and Discussion

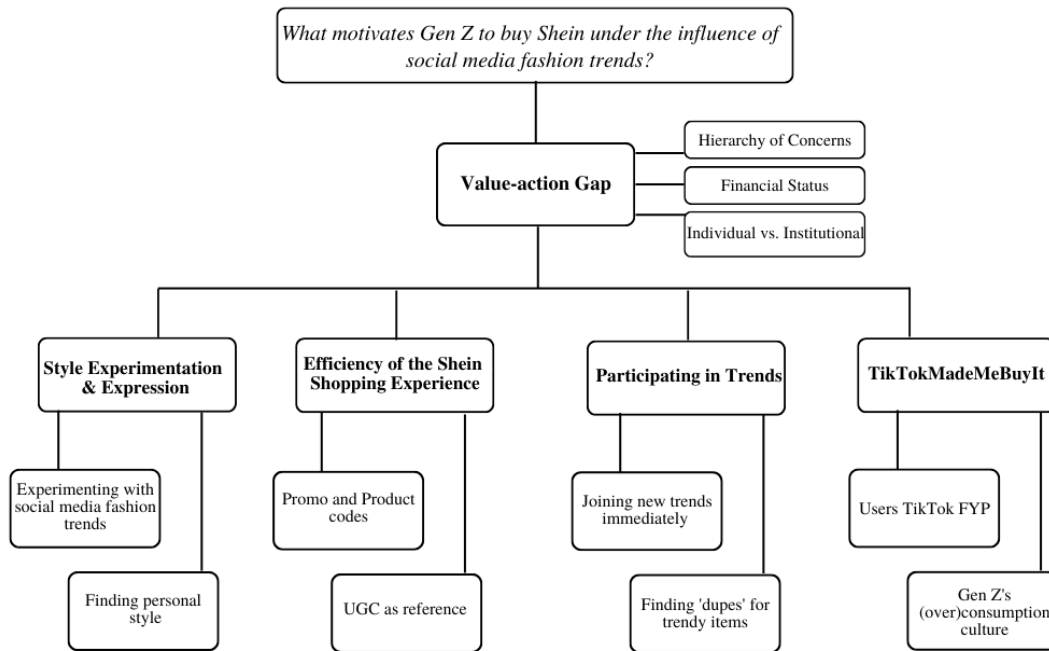
This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis conducted for this research. These results will be interpreted in relation to the originally proposed research question and theoretical framework in Chapter two.

The thematic analysis resulted in five main overarching themes and eleven subthemes. The first three themes, *Style Experimentation and Expression*, *Efficiency of the Shein Shopping Experience* and *Participating in Trends*, are directly related to Gen Z's motivations to buy Shein under the influence of social media trends. The last two themes, *#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt* and *Value-action gap*, encompass more nuanced external and indirect influences that lead to Gen Z buying Shein as influenced by social media, all of which are highlighted throughout the interviews. The thematic map presented below in Figure 1 presents the results visually. In addition, the final thematic table coded for the analysis can be found in Appendix E.

The value-action gap is the overarching concept that impacts the other themes; thus, it is presented visually higher and connects to the other themes in the thematic map. The value-action gap seems to regulate the other motivations that push Gen Z to buy Shein. However, in the discussion of the results, the value-action gap will be discussed as the last theme, as it ties the model together. The discussion of the themes one to five provides a basis to further understand this value-action gap and conceptualize the overall model in order to answer the research question.

Figure 1

Thematic Map



4.1 Style Experimentation and Expression

The first theme found during the analysis refers to Gen Z's desire to experiment with their style and express themselves through their fashion choices. The interviewees directly brought up the notion of experimentation and self-expression in 10 out of the 15 interviews. Style experimentation and expression directly motivates Gen Z to buy Shein under social media's influence.

Within this theme, two additional subthemes were found. The first, *Experimenting with Social Media Fashion Trends* refers to Gen Z's desire to experiment with styles and current fashion trends that are popular on social media. The second subtheme, *Finding a Personal Style* can be defined as Gen Z's inclination to create a coherent style aesthetic, where the emphasis is placed on developing a personal sense of style, rather than following trends. The two sub-themes are different but are also somehow interrelated as often experimenting with a variety of trends is done to find a personal style aesthetic.

4.1.1 Experimenting with Social Media Fashion Trends

As highlighted above, the analysis revealed a clear link between buying Shein, social media fashion trends, and the desire to experiment with these fashion trends through the consumption of low-cost clothes at high volumes and frequencies. Due to Shein's low prices, Gen Z is motivated and able to afford to buy many clothes of different styles to experiment with a variety of social media fashion trends.

When participants were asked if they buy any particular styles or trends or follow any fashion aesthetics, ten mentioned a variety of trends they like or wear, such as “floral dresses”, “y2k”, “crochet”, “streetwear”, “Euphoria style”, and the “model-off-duty look”. These trends overlapped between some participants as well. The trends named are prevalent on social media and common amongst fast fashion retailers. The fleeting nature of trends on social media reflects the pace of fast fashion brands like Shein, which produce new designs in just a couple of days to mirror what's trending online (Jennings, 2022). Most of the trends named by the interviewees can be found by name on Shein when shopping by per trend or style. Shein has a curated section dedicated to several of these social media fashion trends named by the interviewees. For instance, consumers can click on y2k, crochet, and streetwear to buy clothes that fit the particular trend they are looking for. When a certain style or product goes viral on TikTok, the item will often be sold out before most people are able to even see the video. This fuels users' desire to discover TikTok trends early in an effort to get ahead of the cycle so they can try out the trend as well. (Jennings, 2022).

For example, participant Rupsha said: “I actually love the goth style and the y2k style... I also heard that all-white clothing is going to be big, I think I could pull that off.” She mentioned liking goth and y2k style clothes and referred to a possible upcoming fashion trend that she would be interested in participating in. Another participant, Jen stated: “Right now, I am really into crochet, and I think it's at all the stores. I went through a streetwear phase but after watching Gossip Girl recently I noticed my TikTok FYP is all preppy looks...I was into buying more preppy looks.” Jen's statement demonstrated a trend she likes right now, a style she used to like, as well as how her TikTok FYP is influencing her to try out a new style. It is worth noting that at this stage, social media was not asked about at all by the researcher but was often brought up when asked if the participants follow any styles or trends. In another case, Jasmine answered she likes “y2k-alt-edgy looks...inspired by many people on social media.” Gen Z fashion trends are

driven by key opinion leaders like celebrities, luxury brands, the media (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018), and now, more importantly, by social media Influencers and users. Today people can search beyond their immediate surroundings for style inspiration, making participating in trends easier and more accessible. Whereas before one might have to carefully observe a particular style on other people they come across in their day-to-day life or read about it in a fashion magazine to know what is trending - now people can easily look on social media and even turn to Shein for curated suggestions based on social media trends.

The link between fashion trends and social media is made even more salient when the participants are asked if they have come across dedicated Shein hauls or try-on videos on their TikTok FYP. Jasmine answered: “I’ve recently been getting many music festival outfit inspiration videos and I am so influenced, haha, I ran to Shein, their festival clothes and y2k section have really nice clothes for night-outs and festivals.” Another participant, Valentina said she made some of her own “try on-haul style videos for TikTok before...like loungewear, cottagecore, and vacation edition.” She also says she does not buy any singular trend and prefers “to buy what is trendy and then later again will change the style.” This way she is “able to experiment with different styles.” While studies have long demonstrated a link between fashion-conscious consumers and their adoption of new trends (Cholachatpinyo, Padgett & Crocker, 2002), TikTok has greatly increased the rate at which trends appear. Consumers seeking out information about these trends through social media are motivated to keep their closets up to date (Iyer & Eastman, 2010) - increasing the frequency of their trend experimentation and overall consumption. Gen Z can be understood as identity nomads, who are comfortable with not having only one right way to be themselves and believe in experimenting with different forms of self-expression that “shape their individual identities over time” (Francis & Hoefel, 2018, para. 6). This notion put forth by Francis and Hoefel is in line with the findings of this analysis, as interviewees indicated they enjoy experimenting with different fashion trends.

Furthermore, in relation to experimenting with fashion trends, some participants highlighted the consequences that rapidly evolving fashion trends have on their shopping habits. When asked how frequently they shop for clothes, a participant, Cindy answered: “Every week... social media and trends are changing so quickly...as I'm getting older, I feel out of touch...I buy things but end up donating or giving them to someone...also why I always need new things.” Similarly, when asked if participants liked the clothes they bought from Shein, Anu

and Liel's answers highlighted their awareness of fleeting trends, Anu saying: "Thankfully I bought trendy pieces that were cheap and I didn't care for anymore." Liel talked about a cow-print trendy dress she ordered from Shein which "served its purpose...and was nice, for the time" but she "wouldn't wear that again." These comments highlight that Gen Z is aware of how their choices and tastes in styles change with time. As trends change, consumers are motivated to shop more and experiment with different trends. One may not like the style of jeans they bought last month and go out and buy a trendier style. Trends have been changing for centuries, but ultra-fast fashion brands like Shein have made the cycle of "buy, wear, throw away and repeat" much more difficult to break out of (Mahmood, 2022, para. 7). While Gen Z is experimenting with trends to express themselves, it's important to keep in mind that this self-experimentation has a detrimental impact on the environment and garment workers who work in fast fashion production factories. The analysis indicates that the importance of identity construction and experimentation overshadows Gen Z's desire to be sustainable or ethical. This assertion is supported by previous research, which found consumer identity expression through fashion trends to outweigh their sustainability concern (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). This consequence pertains to Gen Z's value-action gap and will be discussed further in section 4.5.

The analysis revealed that Gen Z often experiments with various styles and trends that are directly inspired by those on social media. Shein's prevalence on social media, its low price point combined with current rapidly changing trend cycles make experimenting with fashion trends more enticing and motivate Gen Z to shop from Shein. Moreover, there is often a sense of awareness regarding the consequences of these trend cycles such as a rapidly changing consumer taste and excess waste.

Shein's popularity on social media, along with its low prices and wide availability perfectly compliment today's rapidly changing trend cycles. Combined, these elements make experimenting with fashion trends more tempting and push Gen Z to buy from brands like Shein at a high volume and frequency.

4.1.2 Finding Personal Style

Another salient theme that arose from the analysis is the concept of finding one's own personal style. Gen Z is motivated to follow a certain coherent style aesthetic, where they focus

on curating their closet to fit a certain style or trend that they like. Often, experimenting with trends is done to find a personal style. This subtheme is different from the previous one as the first is about enjoying trying different styles as a way to experiment whereas this is about trying different styles in order to discover your personal style aesthetic.

In seven out of the 15 interviews, the concept of finding one's personal style or developing a coherent style aesthetic was brought up by the participant. In one instance, Jasmine comments: "My favorite store is Dollskill because I think they sell clothes that match my aesthetic." When asked more about this, Jasmine continues: "I want it to work with my vibe and match the clothes I already own." Similarly, Liel answers "Aritzia clothes fit the kind of clothes I look for." Here, the participants indicated the desire for coherence within their style and signal a link between their personal style and their sense of self. These consumers want to express themselves through their fashion and plan to do so by following or creating an aesthetic they feel corresponds with who they are as a person.

Moreover, when asking participants about where they get their style inspiration from, 13 participants mentioned social media. One participant, Alexandra elaborates: "I see many nice videos and it helps me choose what to buy rather than buying whatever I like. The TikTok fashion girls help me find my individual style." Another participant, Jen says: "I'm like...discovering my personal style...so shopping allows me to try various styles and find those amazing, valued pieces for my closet." These excerpts reveal the tendency for Gen Z to shop and try out different styles and trends with the hope of discovering their personal style that is in line with who they are as a person and how they choose to express themselves. This quest for self-expression through the creation of a coherent aesthetic motivates Gen Z to continue buying fast fashion from Shein. Similarly, their pursuit to find their personal style motivates them to try out several different styles. If they like a certain trend enough they may consider turning it into their personal style and purchase more clothing that fits that style aesthetic. This aesthetic may change based on current trends or personal taste, often resulting in further consumption. A study by Cholachatpinyo, Padgett and Crocker (2002), classifies two kinds of fashion consumers, *innovators* concerned with differentiating themselves, and *followers/laggards* motivated by socializing forces. In this case, consumers are interested in innovation through the creation of a personal style, but still take inspiration from the crowd, so are still in a sense, followers of the crowd. Moreover, Gen Z is motivated to build a personal brand, where their style should

complement their brand. Personal branding has become a necessity for Gen Z, motivating them to create a cohesive aesthetic that aligns with their personal brand to help express themselves and convey their distinctiveness (Vițelar, 2019). Gen Z expresses themselves through their consumption habits and prefers to buy from brands that reflect their current self-concept (Ismail et al., 2021). Shein supplies clothes of various styles, making it a widely accessible platform for consumers to find clothes that match a wide range of people's sense of self. As Gen Z places importance on self-expression, their personal style also reflects their self-concept or in other words, their personal brand. They are motivated to buy from Shein to discover their personal style and find items that fit coherently into their aesthetic.

4.2 Efficiency of the Shein Shopping Experience

The second theme that emerged from the analysis is the *Efficiency of the Shein Shopping Experience*. This theme refers to the notion that shopping at Shein is an easy and efficient process, thanks to the numerous social media posts that drive consumers to shop at Shein. These posts can be sponsored by Shein, in the form of influencers sharing promotional codes with their audience, or they can be organic UGC posted by consumers in the form of hauls or outfit videos. These videos have the power to directly drive people to Shein. Within this theme, two additional subthemes emerged. The first is *Promo and Product Codes* which can be found using TikTok and used to further facilitate buying from Shein. Moreover, the second sub-theme *UGC as Reference* refers to the sponsored posts and organic UGC that acts as a reference for consumers to find someone who has the same style or even the same body type as them to help see what the clothes really look like on a real person. These elements embody how social media makes shopping at Shein more efficient and alluring and emerged as a motivation for Gen Z to buy Shein.

4.2.1 Promo and Product Codes

The analysis revealed that videos shared on social media which include promotional codes or product codes, motivate people to go shop at Shein with immediacy. Promo codes are discount codes shared in sponsored posts by Influencers that allow their audience to get a discount. They often come along with an expiry date, encouraging those who are thinking of buying, to buy now. On the other hand, product codes are product numbers or links that can be

used to find a certain product on the Shein site. These are shared in social media posts or in the comment section, allowing people to find the exact item referenced in the video.

Promotional codes, or promo codes emerged as a patterned response within the data. Promo codes were brought up in responses to various questions. When asked how many times or when one ordered from Shein, Carmen mentioned: “First I saw videos on TikTok in 2020 during self-quarantine and then actually tried to order some clothes because I found a code on TikTok.” Another participant, Jen said: “When I see Shein videos and Shein ads with promo codes that I’ve started getting recently...I do decide to order a bunch of new clothes.” These promo codes drove participants to order clothes from Shein. Promo codes have played a large role in Shein’s marketing strategy, allowing users to buy items at a faster pace (Shen, 2022). Promo codes often have an expiry date - introducing a sense of immediacy to the consumer's purchasing decision. Promo codes induce purchase acceleration due to their limited duration (Neslin & Jiao, 2021). Moreover, when considering the commercial nature of social media, with an ever-increasing amount of sponsored content, ads, and eCommerce efforts by brands, customers are tuned to pick up cues to shop, with promo codes activating a sense of immediacy within the participants. As Gen Z are digital natives who have been exposed to the internet and social networks from their earliest youth (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), they are a hypercognitive generation that is conditioned to respond to promo codes. If they already show interest in the product, finding a promo code on TikTok is a way to inspire that final leap into purchasing.

Furthermore, another participant, Grace elaborates on another way these social media posts motivate her to buy Shein, through sharing of direct product codes. She says: “The videos help me find cute outfits because sometimes the influencer or creator posts the product number to find that particular outfit, so I don't have to put the effort to browse for what I want.” She highlights how the sharing of product codes makes the process easy for her, allowing her to buy items that are inspired by others on social media. Similarly in another interview, Yannick brings up both the promo and product codes, sharing: “Many times you can find a link to the product directly on the social media post so it's easily accessible and usually comes with a discount.” Research published by the University of Southern California finds influencers can earn affiliate commissions by referring customers to Shein’s website (Shen, 2022). This is often done by sharing direct product codes in the video or comment section on TikTok, allowing consumers to buy exactly the product they see online. Moreover, as Gen Z is driven by social value - trusting

key opinion leaders such as social media influencers (Van den Bergh & Pallini, 2018) they are further convinced to make a purchase. This research confirms the effectiveness of Shein's marketing strategy from the consumers' perspective. When these influencers share product codes for trending pieces, consumers can find these items online on the Shein website with ease. Consumers find that this strategy used by Shein makes the shopping experience easier and more efficient, while also strengthening their motivations to buy trendy and low-cost clothing from Shein.

4.2.2 UGC as Reference

During the analysis, UGC as Reference additionally emerged as a second subtheme. This theme can be defined as the content posted by users on social media that can act as a reference for viewers to find someone with a similar style or even body type as them. The coding revealed that Gen Z uses these videos as reference points, motivating them to buy Shein. There was consensus amongst the participants that UGC makes it easier for them to find items they want to buy.

In one case, a participant, Liel said: "I used to watch these to see what kind of clothes I want to order from Shein. Since so many people are posting, I can find a video where the poster's style and my style are similar so I can get ideas into what clothes I want to order." Due to the high number of videos posted to #SheinHaul on TikTok, there is diversity in styles, trends as well as body types within the UGC on the platform. This facilitates Gen Z to find videos that include people that have similar styles or body types to them, allowing them to see what the clothes look like on a real person, as opposed to solely on a model on the Shein site. Another participant, Chloe comments: "I found it great that there are so many real people trying on the clothes and reviewing them...it helped me figure out if the clothes will fit my body type." A remark by another interviewee, Vlad, summarizes this theme, "I often see TikToks that give me ideas of what to buy." These UGC act as a reference point and contributes to making the Shein shopping experience all the more efficient for the consumers.

The coding revealed that the Shein UGC on social media contributes to the efficiency of the overall Shein shopping experience, motivating Gen Z to order from Shein. This finding is corroborated in a study conducted in 2019, finding that UGC establishes a high conceptual persuasion understanding in viewers leading to a positive attitude towards the brand and its

products (Müllerb & Christandl, 2019). Moreover, UGC is found to impact a consumer's consumption process as well as the potential to sway users purchasing decisions (Halliday, 2016; Kim & Johnson, 2016). Similarly, a study published in 2022 finds 49% of TikTok users turn to TikTok to discover something new, with 35% using TikTok for new information about products or services they may already be considering (TikTok Business, 2022). Users are starting to use TikTok for more information, with these UGC videos serving as not just motivations to purchase, but also references.

The analysis revealed that Shein UGC on TikTok is used by consumers as a means to gain knowledge about certain items, which participants attribute to motivating them to buy Shein. This is in line with previous studies that found one of the reasons people turn to Influencers is to gain knowledge and practical information about certain products (Chae, 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Considering TikTok shows the content of both users, and professional Influencers on users FYP, as well as the fact that more of these Influencers are posting sponsored content, Gen Z is turning to Shein UGC in general, not just content by Influencers to serve as a reference to guide their purchasing on Shein. These UGC encompass most, if not all the aesthetics and trends on social media, allowing viewers to find videos that align with aspects they deem important when choosing clothes to order. These UGC videos contribute to the accessibility and efficiency of the Shein shopping experience, motivating Gen Z to buy from Shein.

4.3 Participating in Trends

The third theme discovered during the analysis, *Participating in Trends* can be defined as Gen Z's desire to participate in social media fashion trends online and in their everyday life. The interviewees brought up their desire to join in on new trends quickly. Similarly, many participants also mentioned their desire to find cheap and accessible dupes for trendy items. These two main aspects constitute theme three. Participating in trends is found to be one of the motivations for Gen Z to buy Shein under the influence of social media.

Comprising this theme are two subthemes, the first, *Joining New Trends Immediately*, refers to Gen Z's desire to join in on new trends as fast as possible. This subtheme differs from subtheme 4.1.1. *Experimenting with Social Media Fashion Trends*, as this sub-theme captures the importance of the immediacy of participating in trends and Shein's quick grasp of trends.

Subtheme 4.1.1. focuses on the idea of self-experimentation through the consumption of fashion trends.

The second subtheme, *Finding Dupes for Trendy Items*, represents Gen Z's motivation to find cheaper and more accessible versions of trendy items. Dupe products are popular in the online fashion space, with #dupesclothing having 10.9 million views on TikTok. Often expensive items are trending, and are not accessible to everyone, but when someone posts about a dupe or a brand comes out with a dupe - it is more accessible to a wider audience as it is most likely cheaper than the original; Shein often sells dupes for current trendy designs.

4.3.1 Joining New Trends Immediately

The analysis uncovered another significant finding: Gen Z is motivated to join in on new trends quickly. Participants feel that Shein can produce and sell these trendy designs faster than other fast fashion retailers. This enables them to join in on current trends in a timely manner, allowing more people to keep up with current fashion.

During the interviews, Shein's ability to supply timely trendy designs was compared to that of slower fast fashion brands like Zara, Uniqlo, and H&M. An interviewee, Martin named Shein as his favorite store and compared it to Zara, saying: "They produce stuff faster...but more up to date and same quality." Another participant, Yannick said he "likes to keep up with styles" and shops "once a week on average." The Gen Z participants expressed a desire to keep up with trends and often brought up the fact that Shein makes these trends accessible very quickly. Interviewee Valentina reflected on Shein being her favorite store, stating: "They have all the popular designs so fast. I am able to get them." Participant Rupsha made a similar comment when reflecting on why she bought from Shein: "I was able to select from almost infinite options, and I think compared to what I get in India... it takes ages for these new designs to appear in stores, and Shein had them really fast."

The coding unveiled that Gen Z is motivated to buy Shein due to its ability to make trendy pieces available to the public faster than many of its other fast fashion counterparts. As these social media fashion trends come and go at a rapid rate, buying from Shein is a way to participate in the trends while they are still relevant. Media scholar Jenkins (2008) argues that social media creates a participatory culture that can be contributed to by anyone. As most of these fashion trends intersect between social media and the real world, this participatory

culture does not exist solely online. Moreover, considering these online trends change so rapidly, buying from Shein allows people to be a part of this participatory culture at the right time.

Furthermore, joining these new trends immediately may be a way for Gen Z to gain validation within a social group. This notion is similar to Rieman's (1962) concept of other-directedness, where he asserts that people's commodities have become a form of social capital - where appearances play a big role. Moreover, fashion as a way to convey social or cultural is also supported in theory by sociologist Bourdieu (1987). Participating in these social media fashion trends may act as a way for Gen Z to increase its cultural capital. Doing so in a time-sensitive way is critical due to the transient nature of these trends. Shein's counterparts like Zara and H&M are slower at bringing these trends to the people (The Economist, 2021; Nguyen, 2021), and Shein helps bridge this gap. Taking into consideration the current rapid rate of trend cycles that is only exacerbated by TikTok, participants believe Shein is taking advantage of this gap by making trends available quickly to consumers. This democratizes fashion trends, allowing more people to keep up with current fashion, thus acting as a motivator for Gen Z to purchase from Shein.

4.3.2 Finding Dupes for Trendy Items

Another relevant finding within the research relates to Gen Z's quest to find cheaper and accessible versions of trendy items, often available on Shein. TikTok is a well-known marketing tool for virality. Often products go viral, reaching millions and creating sales. When the product is expensive, not as many people are able to buy it. This leads to people searching for a dupe, or a cheaper version of a similar product. Throughout the interviews more than half of the participants mentioned the idea of searching for dupes. Some explicitly mentioned that they search for dupe products like Grace, who says Urban Outfitters is her favorite store but since it's expensive, she turns "to cheaper stores that sell great dupes" and Anu, stating TikTok helps her find dupes like "Skims and Victoria's secret dupes." One participant, Liel even mentioned her FYP often features "creators showing the dupes they use for more expensive products that could be hard to find." These participants either look for dupes for trendy styles in general or for specific pieces or brands.

Moreover, when discussing the notion of dupes on Shein, participants mainly highlight turning to the site for cheaper and more accessible alternatives. One interviewee, Liel, reflected

on the process she goes through when searching for dupes, saying: “When I see something online, I will look at where it is sold and then try to find clothes that look like that but are easier for me to buy through other websites like Shein.” Similarly, Yannick who says he loves luxury fashion but “can’t afford to buy the real brand on a student budget” turns to “cheaper alternatives that at least match the style.” Grace reflects on criticism towards Shein for allegedly stealing designs, saying: “they are making those designs accessible to the general public.”

Finding dupes for trendy items encourages Gen Z to buy from Shein, as they are able to provide dupes for trending items quickly. These dupes democratize current fashion trends, allowing more people to participate in them. Bloch et al. (1993) find that people buy counterfeits as a way to get social prestige without paying for it. In this case, consumers are buying dupes instead of counterfeit designs, however, they are still looking for a way to gain social prestige through purchasing a dupe product. Gaining social prestige through fashion consumption is also reflected in Bourdieu’s (1984) research. In this case, these consumers are not only motivated to buy trends quickly before they become mainstream and lose their distinctive properties, but also as a way to symbolize their cultural capital. Buying a cheaper, more accessible dupe version of a trend allows more people to receive social prestige and flaunt their materially acquired cultural capital.

Moreover, research suggests that price as a motivator in purchasing counterfeit products works in one of two ways: one group thinks of themselves as smart for buying fakes and perceives counterfeits as comparable in quality to the original. The other group views counterfeits as lower-quality but finds the lower price compensates for other faults and weaknesses (Albers-Miller, 1999; Ang et al., 2001; Cordell et al., 1996; Tom et al., 1998). The Gen Z interviewees seemed to fall into the second group, as Shein is known to be of low quality. Also, as Gen Z is still young - comprising of college students and newly working graduates, they may not have the financial ability to buy the real product yet and find cheaper options such as Shein much more accessible. Many of these consumers seem to favor the low price of the dupe more than any other shortcomings such as low quality or the fact that the design may be another person’s intellectual property. Therefore, Gen Z is motivated to buy from Shein to find dupes for popular items, allowing them to receive prestige for their participation in the trend while spending less.

4.4 #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt

#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt is the fourth theme discovered during this analysis and refers to the more nuanced and indirect motivations of Gen Z to buy Shein under the influence of social media. The theme captures the phenomenon where people buy items after seeing them on TikTok - with many of these items being fueled by trends. The theme is named in the form of a hashtag as the *#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt* hashtag is popular on TikTok and a well-known phenomenon amongst the participants.

TikTok evidently impacts Gen Z's consumption habits, with 14 out of 15 participants stating they bought something they saw on TikTok in the past. This theme defers from the previous three as it relates to key external factors that motivate Gen Z to consume, like their TikTok FYP and the current (over)consumption culture promoted to and by Gen Z. The first three themes, relate to internal motivations to consume while the last two encompass the effect of external motivators as well. While internal and external motivations to buy Shein are undoubtedly interconnected, for clarity and depth of discussion they are separated as themes.

Two subthemes make up this theme, the first being *Users TikTok FYP*. This sub-theme relates to the video recommendation system that TikTok uses to determine which video will appear on users' TikTok home page. User's interest, watch time and other factors determine the types of videos that appear on one's page. For instance, if a user watches fashion and beauty content, the algorithm will program more of such content to be shown to the user. TikTok's strategic algorithm intensifies the *#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt* phenomenon, encouraging a culture of overconsumption amongst its users. The second subtheme, *Gen Z's (Over)consumption Culture* captures the shopping habits of the Gen Z participants as shaped by external social media culture. TikTok's algorithm along with Gen Z's consumption culture is motivating Gen Z to buy Shein.

4.4.1 *Users TikTok FYP*

The analysis revealed that Gen Z's TikTok FYP is a key external motivator in their purchasing decisions. 14 out of 15 participants indicated they bought something they saw on TikTok, some even naming some viral products they bought such as "Dior lip oil," "green vines," "Gisou hair oil" and dupes for the House of Sunny's Hockney dress, better known as the "green TikTok dress" that went viral in 2020. Participants talked about their TikTok FYP as if it was an active decider in what they watch and purchase, saying phrases like "My TikTok

algorithm knows what I want to watch” (Alexandra) and “I’m getting influenced by TikTok to shop more” (Carmen). TikTok’s FYP learns quickly via artificial intelligence what users like. When someone shows interest in a certain genre of content, TikTok will push more similar content out. If one watches videos about a certain product, one may receive more of these videos, creating a sense of social proof. Participants reflected on the commercial nature of TikTok, Rupsha saying her FYP is mostly “shopping recommendations. I get less and less of normal content and much more shopping ads, for clothes, shoes, and jewelry.” Other interviewees also mentioned the prevalence of “fashion” and “outfit of the day” videos on their FYP. The #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt effect intersects with the real world, resulting in many accounts similar to that by participant Liel, who bought a viral lip gloss after it repeatedly appeared on her FYP, saying “now it is always sold out. I really see the impact of TikTok on sales, even just locally and in my neighborhood.” The interviewees felt that TikTok’s algorithm is subconsciously leading them to consume by creating buzz around certain products. When asking participants if they have come across Shein videos before, 11 out of 15 said they remember watching these videos. A participant, Alexandra shares she used to encounter Shein videos in the past when she was showing interest in fashion content. Now that she does not buy from Shein any longer, she notes her “TikTok algorithm knows what I want to watch now so I don’t see as much of Shein anymore.” Similarly, research suggests TikTok users are generally aware of the algorithm’s functionality and are often developing ways to change their algorithm to optimize their experience (Klug et al, 2021). They are aware that they play a role in what videos appear on their FYP, but ultimately are found to point blame toward the algorithm as a whole.

A study published by TikTok Business highlighted how TikTok is reshaping the traditional consumer purchase journey. Instead of a funnel, the journey is described as an infinite loop with no start and end point. Now consumers enter and exit and re-enter this journey based on their needs and wants (TikTok Business, 2022). This infinite loop is reflected in TikTok’s infinite algorithm, as well as in the participant’s responses and is relevant as it will tend to steer users’ FYP based on their current hobbies, needs, wants, and interests. Moreover, as trends and interests change, a user’s FYP will adapt. In the case of users who may consume fashion content, their FYP may comprise an infinite number of suggestions that morph with time, taste, and current trends. Furthermore, fashion-conscious consumers are found to have high information-seeking abilities and keep up with the latest trends through social media (Cholachatpinyo,

Padgett & Crocker, 2002). When taking this into consideration, there appears to be a dialogue between users and their FYP. While interviewees signaled toward their TikTok page motivating them to shop, their choices such as the kinds of videos they watch, and their watch time ultimately inform their FYP algorithm. Therefore, while the user's FYP is an external player that exposes people to social media trends, individual users' decisions are what determine these trends. This is often an unconscious process and plays a role in shaping Gen Z's tastes and in turn motivating them to buy fast fashion from brands like Shein.

4.4.2 Gen Z's (Over)consumption Culture

The second sub-theme, Gen Z's (Over)consumption Culture reflects Gen Z's tendency to buy large amounts of clothing at a high frequency. These consumption habits are encouraged on TikTok through ever-changing trend cycles and massive haul videos, prompting consumers to continue to consume at a high rate. These shopping habits are shaped by social media and are pushing Gen Z to turn to options like Shein.

Regarding Gen Z's frequency of shopping, the analysis revealed that participants tend to turn to Shein to buy hauls for certain occasions or bulk orders seasonally. Moreover, they find it important to have clothes for various respective special occasions such as holidays and seem to value quantity over quality.

Placing bulk and haul orders is no surprise when ordering from Shein, considering the low price-point and prevalence of Shein hauls on social media. A participant, Chloe comments that she ordered clothes from Shein for a "spring break trip," while Anu mentions she buys "new clothes for occasions but the big hauls are seasonal... probably every season." Similarly, another participant, Liel says she shops for one-off clothes often but when she shops online it's "once every couple of months." While these answers indicate Gen Z shops in-frequently, their tendency to over(consume) and order in bulk was noticed during the interviews. Jen said: "I usually try to buy clothes that cover all occasions," Grace said: "I really just like having many options" and Yannick mentioned: "It is just a nice luxury to have many outfits to choose from and be able to wear every day something else." These answers emphasize social media's impact on Gen Z's consumer habits, encouraging overconsumption. Haul videos and influencers have altered the way Gen Z shops, prioritizing trends, and variety over quality. Participants summarize Gen Z's attitude towards shopping from Shein, Grace saying: "My goal is usually to get as many cute

outfits as I can for the cheapest price possible,” while Martin says since he buys clothes frequently, he doesn't “wear them for too long...quality isn't a priority” but he does not want it “to look cheap.” Gen Z is encouraged to overconsume through social media, normalizing the level of consumption they witness on their TikTok FYP.

Gen Z is undoubtedly fueling Shein and other fast fashion brands, creating a culture that promotes frequent consumption. Gen Z is less concerned with ownership than previous generations and views consumption as an experience rather than a commodity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Moreover, Gen Z tends to express themselves through their consumption habits (Ismail et al., 2021) and turn to social media as a source of information to keep up with trends and keep their clothes up to date (Iyer & Eastman, 2010). They are known to be independent yet still highly susceptible to others' opinions (Goldring & Azab, 2021). Companies have started to recognize Gen Z's tech-savvy nature and their tendency to overconsume, and are using this as an opportunity to capitalize on (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010), perpetuating an endless cycle of overconsumption amongst Gen Z. As the fast fashion model is driven by constantly changing consumer expectations (Barnes & Greenwood, 2006), adding TikTok's addictive nature and Shein's low prices to the mix, a culture of overconsumption manifests. Additionally, TikTok's commercial nature has normalized this level of consumption, making it okay to be influenced to buy something and even tell others about it (Russell, 2022). Influencers, users, and brands contribute to this, perpetuating a culture of overconsumption. Due to its low prices, Gen Z can afford to buy more things from Shein and is incentivized to purchase more frequently through changing social media fashion trends. Gen Z's shopping habits shaped by social media are motivating Gen Z to consume at a higher frequency through affordable options like Shein.

4.5 Value-action Gap

The final theme uncovered during this analysis is called the value-action gap, a concept used in environmental psychology referring to when a person's beliefs do not align with their actions. The term is borrowed from research by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) and is applied to Gen Z in this case. This theme relates to the social consciousness paradox discussed in the theoretical framework, questioning why Gen Z as a generation consumes fast fashion despite also being an extremely socially conscious generation. The theme explores the notion of a social consciousness paradox within the participants and uncovers the different factors that play a role

in their decision to continue consuming Shein. During the interviews, participants were asked how aware they are of criticisms towards Shein as well as about social causes they care about. This theme answers why Gen Z continues to buy from Shein under the influence of social media trends in reference to this value-action gap. This concept requires a dedicated theme as it forms the theoretical basis for this research. Discussing elements of this value-action gap within each theme would result in a repetitive analysis and take away from other pertinent findings.

This theme has three additional subthemes. First, the *Hierarchy of Concerns* refers to Gen Z's tendency to have a higher level of social consciousness regarding socio-political affairs when compared to environmental issues. Moreover, Gen Z's need for self-expression and love of trends (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) seems to contribute to this hierarchization, outweighing their motivation to be sustainable. The second sub-theme, *Financial Status* embodies the role that one's personal finances may play in their decision to buy from Shein. Here, finances are discussed as a factor that disrupts this value-action gap as one may believe in buying only ethical fashion but may not be able to afford to do so. Lastly, the sub-theme *Individual vs. Institutional* refers to an approach to the fast fashion problem, viewing it as an issue that cannot be tackled on an individual level and needs to be addressed on an institutional or systemic level. These subthemes contribute to the distortion of this overall value-action gap and lead Gen Z to continue purchasing fast fashion.

4.5.1 *Hierarchy of Concerns*

The analysis revealed that most of the participants were not well-informed about sustainability, which could be an underlying factor contributing to why Gen Z still consumes so much fast fashion despite their label as a socially conscious generation. Participants tended to prioritize socio-political issues over environmental issues. An interviewee, Rupsha mentioned she is passionate about issues like “feminism, equality, and gender politics,” while Jen named “diversity and representation within the media...and U.K politics” as issues she holds dear. When asked if one is a socially conscious person, Jen continues: “I am in regard to some issues, but not in regards to all. I don't know if that makes me a hypocrite.” Similarly, when asked about their level of knowledge regarding sustainability, Carmen says: “There is a lot more I can do to improve. I do the basics like recycling,” while Grace answers that she is “not the most educated about this topic.” Moreover, Cindy states she believes “in climate change and...it needs to be

addressed” and knows she should consume less but believes “there is a difference between knowing and actually doing... I do wish I could address these issues and change my lifestyle, but it’s easier said than done.” Participants demonstrated that they find environmental problems important but are not well-informed regarding how to address these problems. Moreover, participants seemed to show more concern regarding social justice issues.

There seems to be a hierarchization of social issues, with most participants not demonstrating a high level of awareness about environmental problems. This finding corresponds with previous research that finds Gen Z to show higher levels of concern regarding social-justice issues like mass shootings, racial equality, and immigration policy whereas Millennials are more passionate about issues such as healthcare, global warming, climate change, and mass shootings (Kaplan, 2020). Moreover, Millennials were found to be more likely to buy products from companies that offer sustainable solutions and are willing to pay a higher price for them (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2018). This may be due to Gen Z’s lack of awareness concerning sustainability, which could further explain their purchasing habits. Previous research supports this claim, finding that awareness of sustainable consumption leads to a shift in consumer behavior, ultimately fostering consumption reduction (Bly et al., 2015). However, several previous studies report results that deviate from the findings above, finding Gen Z to be more concerned with environmental issues than previous generations (Mihelich, 2013) and more informed than previous generations due to their social media use (Tyson et al., 2021). Nevertheless, these studies do not consider this value-action gap.

Despite their socially conscious attitude, Gen Z still fuels the fast fashion industry. The rise in sales suggests that consumers are either ignoring or tolerating the negative impacts of their fast fashion consumption (Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). The discrepancies in the results could be explained by Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) notion of pro-environmental consciousness. A person’s pro-environmental consciousness is embedded in their personal values and shaped by internal, external, cultural, and social factors, such as their personality, environment, and peers (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002). As most of the interviewees can be classified as fashion enthusiasts, their love for fashion may weaken their level of environmental consciousness. Previous studies substantiate this claim, finding despite a positive mentality toward the environment, fashion enthusiasts are less likely to buy sustainable fashion (Joergens, 2006; Niinimäki, 2010; Ochoa, 2011). Moreover, as the interviews concerned Gen Z, their

emphasis on identity expression through consumption (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) may also contribute to weakening their desire to be sustainable. This assertion is supported by previous research which found expression through fashion trends to outweigh sustainability concerns (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ronholt & Overgaard, 2020). These factors result in Gen Z placing importance on other social issues and overlooking environmental and social problems concerning fast fashion. This hierarchization of social issues is an underlying factor contributing to Gen Z continuing to consume fast fashion at such a rapid rate.

4.5.2 Financial Status

Another aspect found play a role in Gen Z's motivation to buy Shein is a person's financial status. Shein is a notoriously low-cost brand, known for democratizing the idea of owning several trendy items without necessarily being extremely wealthy. Financial Status explores how economic status impacts one's decision to buy from Shein. In this case, personal finances are discussed as a factor that may potentially disrupt this value-action gap, as a desire to buy sustainable or high-quality fashion defers being able to afford to do so. Shein's low price point is a major factor in its success - with many participants reflecting on the role, pricing plays in their purchasing decision. Rupsha notes: "Prices made it all the more tempting", while Jasmine similarly says: "I find it tempting...it's so cheap." Jen mentions she does not want her "financial status to stop me from indulging... and from dressing the way I want," while Yannick comments that he thinks it's a "really good thing even people with less budget can afford Shein." The analysis revealed that participants favor Shein's democratization of fashion and are particularly tempted by the low prices. Moreover, when confronted with supporting fast fashion brands like Shein, some participants alluded to this value-action gap and the role their personal finances play. Grace says: "I wish I could support 100% ethical brands but unfortunately, most people can't," while Jasmine states: "There is a gap between how I'd like to be and how I can afford to be." Similarly, Arnold recounts buying Shein "due to necessity" and Yannick mentions when he has a better salary, he can live more sustainably but for now believes, "everyone spends on what they can afford and...will not pay 5 times the price of the same item just because it is labeled sustainable." Financial status plays a role in Gen Z's ability to carry out their actions in line with their values. On the other hand, a participant, Chloe, indicated she now buys from sustainable fashion labels, saying: "I am privileged that I have the chance to do so, because I

know many people cannot afford to.” Her comment highlight how her financial status enables her to buy sustainable fashion.

The inability to afford sustainable clothing seems to be motivating Gen Z to continue to order from Shein. This assertion is corroborated in research by Rønholt and Overgaard (2020) which found the low prices offered by fast fashion retailers affect consumers' attitudes and lead them to compromise their morals towards sustainability. Moreover, as Gen Z is still relatively young and may not have the financial ability to buy expensive or sustainable items, they tend to turn to inexpensive options like fast fashion which allows them to consume without much economic or psychological investment and still express themselves through their consumption (Gabrielli et al., 2013). These consumers view their financial status as a hindrance to buying more sustainable fashion and value the assortment and the high number of clothes they can get for the amount they spend. This is supported by previous research, finding that fashion consumers often approach ethical fashion as financially inconvenient (Joergens, 2006) and do not want to experience any personal hardships by paying more than they can afford to (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

Moreover, participants brought up how Shein allows them to buy a variety of items at a low price. Retailers like Shein have democratized the idea of ownership, allowing even those who are not extremely wealthy to buy and own many commodities. Although people are incentivized to buy many items for a low price, they are also encouraged to shop frequently which exacerbates the constant cycle of buy-throw-buy and can use up a significant amount of Gen Z's income. The price is a factor that allows them to overlook certain ethical issues involved in their purchasing decision. This finding is corroborated by previous research asserting that Gen Z wants fast fashion at an affordable price, overlooking aspects like the factory workers' wages or working conditions (Brewer, 2019). Their love for trendy fashion leads them to disregard these factors and turn to sites like Shein where they can afford to buy numerous items. Thus, Gen Z is motivated to buy from Shein due to its low prices. Gen Z's financial status disrupts their sense of social consciousness and contributes to widening their value-action gap.

4.5.3 Individual vs. Institutional

The last sub-theme discovered refers to the idea that fast fashion cannot be tackled on an individual level and requires intervention on an institutional or systemic level. This belief is found to be impacting Gen Z's value-action gap, encouraging them to continue buying from

Shein and other fast fashion brands. One interviewee, Liel says she does not want to “support brands that...are hurting humans or the environment for profit” but feels “a change needs to take place on an institutional level...young women who turn to these brands are not the ones to hold responsible.” Jasmine states: “There is no ethical consumption under capitalism, and while we as can make small changes to our lifestyle, the bottom line is nothing can change until the system is changed altogether.” Similarly, Yannick comments: “It won’t make a difference if I for example start driving an electric bike instead of a car while the 1% of rich people fly all over the world with their private jets.” The interviews revealed that Gen Z sees fast fashion as a problem that cannot be dealt with on an individual basis and holds overall institutions responsible for addressing this issue. While Gen Z may disagree with Shein’s business practices, they do not consider boycotting fast fashion on an individual level unless they have the financial means to do so. This approach to the fast fashion debate allows Gen Z to carry on consuming Shein products despite their actions and values not being aligned.

The analysis revealed that participants felt that there needs to be institutional intervention to solve the issues that currently exist within fast fashion and approach the problem as one that cannot be tackled by consumers. While Gen Z tends to be socially conscious, they also believe that companies have the responsibility to address environmental and social issues (Amed et al., 2019). This finding is corroborated by previous research which also found that consumers felt political or governmental intervention is required for progress concerning a more sustainable future (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). Similarly, previous studies have found that consumers view their need to consume fashion trends as the main hindrance to sustainable consumption and hold the current fast fashion model accountable (Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Gwozdz & Reisch, 2015).

The analysis uncovered that the participant's approach to the fast fashion problem reflects anti-capitalist rhetoric, blaming the system as a whole for its overconsumption. This approach to the fast fashion debate is shared by Egri (2019), in a robust analysis of capitalism within the fashion industry, naming “Capitalism, trends and time” as the main drivers of the industry (p. 117). This approach indicates a line of reasoning embedded in anti-capitalist ideologies which are also made prominent in Rønholt and Overgaard's (2020) study. Similarly, Gen Z is found to have a more positive view of socialism than previous generations and is more likely to embrace socialist ideologies (Kaplan, 2020). These studies are in line with the findings of this research as

participants' comments about “capitalism” and “the rich” have socialist and anti-capitalist undertones. Ultimately, Gen Z does not hold themselves accountable and shares the assertion that giving up fast fashion is difficult considering contemporary materialistic values that they have learned to internalize and adopt. They feel that external intervention and change on a systemic level is the answer to solving issues concerning fast fashion and sustainability. This approach permits Gen Z to continue buying Shein under the influence of social media fashion trends despite their knowledge of its detrimental impacts. This widens their value-action gap and contributes to their internal social consciousness paradox.

5. Conclusion

In this final chapter, a conclusion and answer to the main research question will be provided, followed by a general discussion of the research implications. This section will also discuss the study on a methodological level; presenting the imitations of the research design and methodology, suggest areas for future research, and discuss the societal, academic, and practical implications of the results.

First, this chapter will answer the main research question: *What motivates Gen Z to buy from Shein under the influence of social media fashion trends?* In order to answer this question, a literature review surveying a variety of related topics was conducted to form a theoretical framework for the research. Next, semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with Gen Z participants to understand their perspectives and individual motivations which drive them to buy Shein. Lastly, the interviews were coded and analyzed using the method of thematic analysis to uncover themes and formulate a thematic map.

5.1 Discussion of Findings and Answer to the Research Question

The study revealed that Gen Z is motivated to buy from Shein under the influence of social media fashion trends for five overarching reasons which will be elaborated on in the subsequent paragraph: 1) to experiment with style and self-expression 2) the ease that TikTok adds to the Shein shopping process 3) participating in trends 4) the overconsumption culture promoted to Gen Z via TikTok and 5) the value-action gap that exists within members of Gen Z. The first three stem from intrinsic internal motivations while the last two are more nuanced, accounting for a variety of internal, external and indirect factors that persuade Gen Z to buy Shein as influenced by social media.

Gen Z's motivations to buy Shein seems to be regulated by their internal value-action gap, which goes onto impact their other motivations to buy Shein that stem from external factors like their environment and peers. This value-action gap disrupts Gen Z's moral beliefs. Therefore, while they are found to be socially conscious in value, they are limited in their actions. Their internal value-action gap is regulated by some external forces and beliefs that Gen Z have internalized. Firstly, they tend to trivialize issues concerning sustainability compared to social justice matters. They prioritize identity expression through consumption which weakens their will to live more sustainably. Moreover, their financial status also heavily impacts whether

their actions can be aligned with their values, as they are unwilling to inconvenience themselves by paying more than they can afford to or buying less. This leads them to overlook their morals regarding the detrimental impact of fast fashion. Their financial status coupled with their desire to live more sustainably seemingly leads Gen Z to approach this problem through an anti-capitalist lens. They tend to believe issues concerning the fast fashion world are not in their control, holding the government and systemic institutions of power accountable.

Moreover, different external forces are perceived to also impact Gen Z's desire to buy Shein. In these instances, their internal level of social consciousness may strengthen or weaken their other motivations. Gen Z is found to be driven to purchase Shein due to their desire to try out different fashion trends to experiment with these trends or to discover their personal style so they can accurately express themselves through their fashion. Their inherent desire for self-expression contributes to them buying Shein as they can buy many items for a low cost. Moreover, the ease and accessibility that TikTok brings to the Shein shopping experience in the form of UGC and promo and product codes further drives Gen Z to Shein. Shein's marketing strategy on TikTok from the consumer's perspective seems to be effective and pushes Gen Z towards Shein. The participatory culture created by TikTok motivates Gen Z to take part in social media trends. Thanks to Shein's quick production of trendy designs, consumers can jump on these trends while they are still relevant and contribute to TikTok's participatory culture. Moreover, Gen Z can also find dupe products that allow them to receive prestige for their participation in the trend while spending less. Gen Z partially attributes their consumption of fast fashion to external forces such as their FYP, which suggests videos based on an algorithm that knows their interests, and the general culture of overconsumption which is promoted to and by Gen Z on social media. These factors are found to unconsciously shape Gen Z's tastes and normalize high levels of consumption.

When putting these conclusions into context, Gen Z's use of social media along with TikTok's increasing commercialization creates a culture where overconsumption is promoted and even rewarded in the form of social or cultural capital. Moreover, taking into account Gen Z's yearning for self-expression and identity experimentation, they are predisposed to experiment with trends. As these social media fashion trends are always changing, Gen Z is driven to turn to accessible and low-cost options like Shein. While they do carry socially conscious values, they seem to be more passionate about social issues over the environment.

While they ideally would like their values and actions to be aligned, they deem this as unrealistic considering the inaccessibility and high prices of sustainable fashion options. Gen Z believes issues surrounding fast fashion cannot be solved by them, and while they know they too contribute to the culture of overconsumption, they ultimately hold institutions and systemic structures like governments and the fast fashion industry responsible for the negative consequences that fast fashion brands like Shein have for world. The conclusion and implication of this study are summarized well in this quote:

Giving up fast fashion altogether is a tall order for young people still figuring out how to express themselves and manage their finances in the face of years of austerity, rising university fees and the ubiquity of unattainable beauty standards. It's up to those of us with the time, energy, and experience to hold the corporations to account (Mahmood, 2022, para. 10).

TikTok has undoubtedly make fast fashion even faster, prominently evident in the case of Shein as well as many other fashion brands. Shein's vast trend availability and low-cost perfectly complement TikTok's fast pace and format, with Shein videos dominating TikTok. These videos are not only a glorification of over consumerism, but also promote emulation – encouraging others, mainly impressionable Gen Z to buy from Shein as well. The ubiquity of trends like #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt normalize and promote this level of consumption. TikTok's rapid trend turnover fuels mass consumption, having detrimental effects on the planet, garment workers, the psyche and wallet of young consumers. As Gen Z seemingly holds socially conscious values, they should work to bridge their value-action gap to their personal capacity through education, and by putting pressure on brands to change, but ultimately, they should demand change on an institutional and societal level. Fast fashion brands like Shein may offer certain societal benefits like inclusion, accessibility and democratization. However, when adding TikTok to the mix, the overconsumption these fast fashion brands create results in bigger issues than they intended to resolve.

5.2 Limitations

While the study aimed to answer the research question accurately with as little error as possible, certain limitations exist within the research. First, only fifteen participants were interviewed, and their answers were compiled and interpreted as Gen Z. These participants were gathered through a mix of purposeful and snowball sampling. These forms of sampling could result in similar people who are interested in the topic, skewing the overall results. More participants would allow for further insights and a more heterogeneous perspective on the topic. Moreover, as the data was collected through interviews, the accuracy of the data depended on the participant's ability to respond accurately and share their genuine thoughts and opinions. While majority of the interviews were very robust, yielding rich information - the participant's subjectivity and ability to recall certain facts presents themselves as a limitation. Also, the study could benefit from the addition of other research methods such as a content analysis where Shein-related UGC TikTok videos are analyzed or even the addition of a quantitative element to the research to be able to generalize the findings. Also, to analyze the data, thematic analysis was utilized which often relies on the researcher's subjectivity and interpretation. This could result in inconsistencies and different themes if another researcher decided to recreate this study with the same interview data. Lastly, the researcher's pre-existing knowledge, experience, and passion for the topic could hinder the results and include elements of subjectivity.

5.3 Societal and Practical Implications

This research carries practical implications for society as it allows for further understanding regarding the psyche of Gen Z and helps conceptualize their experience of social media trends and purchasing decisions. As more and more brands are starting to turn to TikTok in hopes to tap into Gen Z and go viral, Gen Z's perspective is key to understanding how this can be done. Moreover, as climate change is an important issue to address, and fast fashion is contributing greatly to the problem, pinpointing people's motivations to purchase fast fashion, as well as sustainable fashion, is the key to the creation of alternative fashion options that are appealing, accessible, ethical, affordable, and sustainable.

5.4 Academic Relevance and Implications

This research has substantiated the notion of a social consciousness paradox recognized within Gen Z and has contributed to research on the topic by uncovering the factors that contribute to this social consciousness paradox and further disrupt their action-value gap. The findings of this research point towards Gen Z's sense of environmental consciousness to be present but impacted by various external forces that impact Gen Z practicing what they preach such as the price of sustainable fashion and their desire for self-expression. On the other hand, this research also highlights the need to approach Gen Z's sense of environmental consciousness differently. While they may be conscious and ethical at heart, their actions do not align with their beliefs. While several studies take the theoretical perspective of Gen Z being the most environmentally conscious generation, this study indicates a need to think about this differently. The notion that Gen Z is the most environmentally conscious seems to be deterministic, as several other factors come into play that hinders Gen Z from actually making choices that benefit the environment. There is a need to view Gen Z's beliefs and actions are separate, as too often previous studies seem unable to distinguish between the two.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for more future research relating to this topic. Firstly, there is limited academic research published about Shein and TikTok which is surprising considering the influence that Shein has had on social media and the fast fashion world. Moreover, as TikTok is growing and has completely altered the trajectory of social media, more academic research needs to be conducted and published on the topic. Research regarding UGC currently concerns mostly Influencers, but as participatory platforms like TikTok continue to grow, research into individual users and their contributions to persuasion needs to be studied. Similarly, with the prevalence of dupe and luxury-inspired products in the market and on social media, scholars need to begin exploring them, as current research mainly concerns replica or counterfeit goods. Most contemporary studies are done by marketing agencies, data analysis firms, and journalistic sources. Research into TikTok as a medium is needed especially since the COVID-19 pandemic which led millions of people to turn to TikTok and has changed the way people shop. Also, as Gen Z is spending more money than pre-pandemic, with many of these purchases being fueled

by these viral trends (World Finance, 2022) it's important to explore the effects of online eCommerce efforts and the impact that the pandemic has had on people shopping decisions.

Furthermore, more research into Gen Z needs to be conducted as Gen Z has a high amount of buying power and is dictating trends that have implications for various fields. Most research about young consumers is about Millennials. A significant amount of Gen Z is still under the age of 18, therefore as they continue to become a significant force in the market, more research into Gen Z is urgently required.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Guide and Topic List

Opening

- 1. Welcome participant*
 - 2. Inform about confidentiality and anonymity*
 - 3. Inform about right to withdraw*
 - 4. Inform about recording*
- Introduction and warm up questions*

Icebreakers and Introduction

1. Name + where you were born/from/lived most of your life?
2. What gender do you identify as?
3. What year were you born in and what do you currently do?

Purchasing habits and fashion trend awareness

1. Would you say you enjoy shopping for clothes?
 - a. What are your favorite stores and why?
 - b. How often do you shop for clothes?
 - c. Why do you enjoy shopping for clothes?
 - d. Where do you get your style inspiration?
2. Do you buy any styles or trends or follow any aesthetics fashion wise?
 - a. If not, what current styles/designs/trends do you like in general if any?
3. What dictates whether you buy a clothing item? Is it Material? Sustainable? Price? Style? Fit? All?

MAIN SECTION

Shein

1. Since this interview is related to Shein, can you remember roughly how many times or when you ordered from Shein?
 - a. How was your experience ordering from them?
 - b. Do you remember how you first learnt about Shein?

- c. Did you like the clothes? What kind of clothes did you order?
2. How much do you know about them as a brand? They are quite a popular brand in the fashion space, do you have any further thoughts about them relating to their clothes, business practices, etc?

Social media habits

1. Do you use social media? If yes, which ones do you use?
 - a. How frequently do you go on social media?
 - b. Do you have any favorite influencers/accounts?
2. TikTok questions
 - a. How long have you had a TikTok account?
 - b. What does your ForYouPage mostly consist of? What kind of videos do you like watching?
 - c. Did you ever buy anything because you saw it on TikTok?
 - d. Do you come across Shein videos on TikTok?
3. Instagram questions (ask if they don't use TikTok)
 - a. What kind of accounts do you mostly follow?
 - b. What does your explore page mostly consist of?
 - c. Do you watch Instagram reels?

Sustainability awareness + social consciousness

1. What issues do you hold close to your heart/what social causes are you passionate about and why?
2. Would you consider yourself to be a socially conscious person?
3. Would you say you are knowledgeable about issues concerning sustainability?
4. Do you find it important to know if a brand is ethical/sustainable before you buy from it?

Concluding remarks

1. Is there anything else you'd like to share that we didn't cover?
2. Do you have any questions?
3. *Gratitude*
4. *Goodbye*

Appendix B Social Media Recruitment Post Text

LOOKING FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Hi!

I'm currently finishing up my master's degree at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, and I'm looking for participants to interview for my master's Thesis. The interviews will last around an hour and will be conducted on zoom :)

I am looking for people who:

- Have ordered from the fashion company Shein more than once
- Are currently between the ages of 18-25 (born between 2003- 1997)

If you fit the above criteria above and are interested in participating, please send me a message.

It would really help me out! Thank you :)

Appendix C List of Participants

Table 1

	Name	Gender	Location	Birth Year	Current job/study
1	Carmen	Female	Valencia, Spain	2000	Physiotherapy student at university
2	Chloe	Female	London, UK	1999	Hostess at cafe
3	Rupsha	Female	Delhi, India	1998	Marketing assistant at pharmaceutical company
4	Jen	Female	Groningen, NL	1998	SEO marketing for eCommerce company
5	Grace	Female	Boston, USA	2001	BA in film production
6	Jasmine	Non-Binary	Frankfurt, GER	1999	BA Media studies student
7	Martin	Male	Rotterdam, NL	2001	Bachelors in A.I
8	Liel	Female	Tel Aviv, IL	1997	Sales at a livestream app company
9	Yannick	Male	Dubai, UAE	1998	Marketing internship at paint company
10	Arnold	Male	Roden, NL	2000	Masters Chemistry student
11	Alexandra	Female	Bucharest, RO	2003	Bachelors Mechanical engineering
12	Vlad	Male	Bucharest, RO	1998	Software dev for fashion insight company
13	Cindy	Female	Coventry, UK	1997	Nail art business
14	Anu	Female	California, USA	2000	Community manager for tech company
15	Valentina	Female	Mexico City	2002	Economics student

**Names have been changed for anonymity*

Appendix D Consent Form

INFORMATION & CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in research about the fast fashion brand Shein. The purpose of the study is to understand why Gen Z buy Shein. This research is being conducted for my master's thesis in Media and Business at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. My questions will be related to your shopping and social media habits as well as about your thoughts about Shein.

I will be audio recording our interview so I can later analyze the material. The recording will be transcribed and then deleted, and your answers will remain anonymous.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: As far as I can tell, there are no major risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or any other identifying information in the study. Everything you say will remain anonymous.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation in this study will take approximately 40 minutes to an hour. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS: There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS: If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:

For questions about the study, contact:

Tulsi Gaddam (MA Media & Business Student)

592017tg@eur.nl

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish:

Joep Hofhuis (MA Thesis Coordinator)

j.hofhuis@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity.

I give consent to be recorded during this study. I understand everything I say will be anonymous and remain confidential. I know I can withdraw my participation at any time.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix E Final Coding Table

Table 2

Theme	Subtheme	Quotes from Interview
Style Experimentation & Expression	<i>Experimenting with social media fashion trends</i>	<p>I like to wear floral dresses (1)</p> <p>I actually like the goth style, and the y2k style, but I do not have the guts to wear those kind of clothes out. I heard that all white clothing is in style, I think I could pull that off (3)</p> <p>I really like trying out new styles and putting outfits together for different occasions (4)</p> <p>Right now I am really into crochet, and I think its at all the stores! I went through a street style phase, but after watching Gossip girl recently I noticed by TikTok FYP is all preppy looks and I was into buying more preppy looks (4)</p> <p>I love euphoria style overall (5)</p> <p>y2k-alt-edgy looks. I am also inspired by many people on social media (6)</p> <p>I recently have been getting so many music festival outfit inspiration videos and I so am influenced, haha, I ran to shein, their festival clothes and y2k section have really nice clothes for night-outs and festivals (6)</p> <p>I feel social media and trends are changing so quickly, and as im getting older i just feel out of touch a little bit. I buy things but I end up donating them or giving them to someone else in my family pretty quickly.. Also why i always need new things (13)</p> <p>I also love streetwear and chic but casual looks. Hobo chic as they may say (13)</p> <p>Thankfully i bought trendy pieces that were cheap and i didnt care for anymore (14)</p> <p>At the time I did like what i ordered, it served it's purpose. I can't remember the entire order but I remember being particularly excited about this cow print dress I ordered. It was nice, for the time but I wouldn't wear that again (14)</p> <p>Try on-haul style videos for TikTok before...like loungewear, cottagecore, and vacation edition (15)</p> <p>I like to buy what is trendy and then later again will change my style. I am able to to experiment with different styles this way (15)</p>
	<i>Finding personal style</i>	<p>My favorite store is Dollskill because I think they sell clothes that match my aesthetic (6)</p> <p>I want it to work with my vibe and like, uh match the clothes I already own (6)</p> <p>artizia clothes fits the kinda clothes I look for (8)</p> <p>I get my style inspiration from girls on tiktok and instagram. I see many nice videos and it helps me choose what to buy rather than buying whatever I like. The tiktok fashion girls help me find my individual style (11)</p> <p>I'm like.. At the age where I am discovering my personal style and see what works and what doesnt, so shopping allows me to try various styles and find those amazing valued pieces for my closet (4)</p> <p>Young women who turn to these brands for clothes either because they are cheap, or because they want to find clothes that fit their style are not the ones to hold responsible (8)</p>
Efficiency of the Shein Shopping Experience	<i>Promo & product codes</i>	<p>First I saw videos on tiktok in 2020 during self-quarantine and then actually tired to order some clothes because I found a code on TikTok (1)</p> <p>When I see Shein videos and Shein ads with promo codes that I've started getting recently, uh, I do decide to order a bunch of new clothes (4)</p> <p>The videos help me find cute outfits because sometimes the influencer or creator posts the product number to find that particular outfit, so i dont have to put the effort to browse for what I want (5)</p> <p>Many times you can find a link to the product directly on the social media post so it's easily accessible and usually comes with a discount (9)</p>
	<i>UGC as reference</i>	<p>I used to watch these to see what kind of clothes I want to order from Shein. Since so many people are posting, I am able to find a video where the poster's style and my style are similar so I can get ideas into what clothes I want to order (8)</p> <p>I found it great that there are so many real people trying on the clothes and reviewing them, and even in the shein comment section. It helped me figure out if the clothes will fit my body type (2)</p> <p>I often see TikToks that give me ideas of what to buy (12)</p>

Participating in Trends	<i>Joining new trends immediately</i>	<p>Shein, i feel like they have good clothes and they produce stuff faster than zara but more up to date and same quality (7)</p> <p>I do like clothes and like to keep up with styles. I would think I shop quite a lot, I would say like once a week on average (9)</p> <p>They have all the popular designs so fast; I am able to get them (15)</p> <p>I was able to select from almost infinite options, and I think compared to what I get in india at Uniqlo, H&M, Nykaa Fashion and all, these clothes were really diverse, and the prices made it all the more tempting. In India it takes ages for these new designs to appear in stores, and Shein had them really fast (3)</p>
	<i>Finding dupes for trendy items</i>	<p>I think urban is my favorite store, I love the clothes they sell and they fit me super well, but i find it a bit pricy so I turn to cheaper stores that sell great dupes (5)</p> <p>I've also bought numerous clothes and dupes thanks to tiktoks recommendations..Skims dupes from Shein, VS dupes (14)</p> <p>Also videos where creators show the dupes they use for more expensive products that could be hard to find (8)</p> <p>When I see something online, I will look at where it is sold and then try to find clothes that look like that but are easier for me to buy through other websites like Shein (8)</p> <p>I can't afford to buy the real brand because on a student budget so I have to look for cheaper alternatives that at least match the style (9)</p> <p>they are making those designs accessible to the general public (5)</p>
TikTokMadeMeBuyIt	<i>User's FYP</i>	<p>Dior lip oil...gisou hair oil (1) Green vines (2) TikTok dress (13)</p> <p>my tiktok algorithm knows what i want to watch now so i dont see as much of shein anymore (11)</p> <p>Yes, I think I'm getting influenced by tiktok to shop more (1)</p> <p>clothes and lots of shopping recommendations. I get less and less of normal content and much more shopping ads, for clothes, shoes and jewelry (3)</p> <p>series where they show outfit of the day (7)</p> <p>My fyp is mostly fashion and styling tips (14)</p> <p>Yes, definitely. I saw this lip gloss recently that is sold at a store local to me. It was on my fyp and when I tell you I ran to the store. And now it is always sold out. I really see the impact of tiktok on sales, even just locally and in my neighborhood (8)</p>
	<i>Gen Z (over) consumption culture</i>	<p>I ordered because some friends and I were going on a spring break trip. We all ordered a bunch of stuff for the trip (2)</p> <p>I do still buy like new clothes for occasions but the big hauls are seasonal. I shop probably every season (14)</p> <p>maybe like once every couple months (8)</p> <p>I usually try to buy clothes that cover all occasions (4)</p> <p>I really just like having many options (5)</p> <p>It is just a nice luxury to have many outfits to choose from and be able to wear every day something else (9)</p> <p>My goal is usually to get as many cute outfits as I can for the cheapest price possible (5)</p> <p>Since i buy clothes often i dont wear them for too long, quality isnt a priority but i dont want it to look cheap (7)</p>
Value-action Gap	<i>Hierarchy of concerns</i>	<p>I am very passionate about certain political and societal issues, especially about feminism, equality, and gender politics (3)</p> <p>I really care about social problems, especially concerning diversity and representation within the media as well as neocolonialism and decolonial discourse... and like UK politics (4)</p> <p>To be honest, I am in regards to some issues, but not in regards to all. I don't know if that makes me a hypocrite (4)</p> <p>But to be honest there is a lot more I can do to improve. I do the basics like recycling, and I donate my clothes and try not to buy too much plastic (1)</p> <p>I wouldn't say I am. I do care about global warming, but I am not the most educated about this topic (5)</p> <p>I believe in climate change and think it needs to be addressed. I know I should consume less, travel less, use less plastic but there is a difference between knowing and actually doing. I wish I could address these issues and change my lifestyle but it's easier said than done (13)</p>
	<i>Financial status</i>	<p>I try to always buy from sustainable fashion labels, and I am privileged that I have the chance to do so, because I know many people cannot afford to (2)</p> <p>prices made it all the more tempting (3)</p> <p>I find it tempting, and it is so cheap (6)</p> <p>And as someone who loves fashion, I do not want my financial status to stop me from indulging and from dressing the way I want (4)</p> <p>But it's a really good thing even people with less budget can afford Shein (9)</p>

		<p>I wish I could support 100% ethical brands but unfortunately, most people can't. These fast-fashion brands make fashion accessible (5)</p> <p>But there is a gap between how I'd like to be and how I can afford to be, if that makes sense (6)</p> <p>When I have a better salary I can change that but everyone spends on what they can afford and I will not pay 5 times the price of the same item just because it is labeled sustainable (9)</p>
	<i>Individual vs. Collective</i>	<p>No brand is perfect, nor do I want to support brands that I think are hurting humans or the environment for profit. But in this subject matter I feel that a change needs to take place on an institutional level. Young women who turn to these brands for clothes either bc they are cheap, or because they want to find clothes that fit their style are not the ones to hold responsible (8)</p> <p>However, I think in conclusion that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism, and while we as consumers can make small changes to our lifestyle, the bottom line is nothing can change until the system is changed altogether (6)</p> <p>I am not here to save the world and it won't make a difference if I for example start driving an electric bike instead of a car while the 1% of rich people fly all over the world with their private jets (9)</p> <p>I know a fair bit about sustainability, and I really think we need to change the way we live. I try to make small changes to my routine and habits, and I think many around the world are as well (3)</p>