



Drivers of South African Female Consumers' Attitudes Towards Ultra-Fast Fashion

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Corporate Strategy

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the evolution of fast fashion to ultra-fast fashion within the global and South African contexts. The ultra-fast fashion model utilises technological innovations, e-commerce channels and aggressive social media strategies to optimise every aspect of its business from trend discovery to sales. It provides customers, especially young women, with a steady stream of affordable, trendy fashion online. Shein and Temu are two of the most well-known and widely adopted ultra-fast fashion platforms; their success is evidenced by their rapid growth and growing market share. Consequently, this model has also reshaped consumer behaviours, whereby consumers now prioritise affordability and trendy fashion over brand loyalty, sustainability and ethical production. Against this backdrop, with the introduction of ultra-fast fashion, the industry finds itself at a pivotal juncture, as it navigates balancing the consumer benefits of accessibility and affordability with the environmental and ethical trade-offs.

The study aims to understand consumer attitudes, as well as the factors influencing those consumer attitudes and ultimately driving purchase intentions. The research narrowly focuses on South African female consumers over the age of 18, as female consumers engage more regularly with fashion than male consumers. Accordingly, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with female participants, including both students and professionals. The results show that, in general, there is an overall positive attitude towards ultra-fast fashion platforms, with Shein being the most prevalent. The study revealed convenience, low prices and the wide variety of styles and sizes as the main drivers. In terms of awareness towards sustainable and ethical production, the majority of the participants lacked appropriate levels of awareness or preferred not to know; however, awareness was not shown to deter them from future engagement.

These findings have important implications for several stakeholders, ranging from marketers and retailers aiming to drive successful business models within fast fashion to policymakers as they navigate curbing the economic and environmental impact associated with ultra-fast fashion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Affective Behavioural Cognitive
AI	Artificial Intelligence
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
CTCP	Clothing and Textile Competitive Programme
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LATR	Large-scale Automated Test and Reorder
PBC	Perceived Behaviour Control
TPBC	Theory of Planned Behaviour
R-CTFL	Retail – Clothing Textile, Footwear and Leather
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The global fashion industry has experienced a profound transformation over the past two decades, marked by technological advancement, increased consumer demands, and an overhaul of global supply chain capabilities (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Central to this evolution, is the rise of fast fashion, which is a model characterised by short production cycles, trend replication, and affordable pricing (Camargo, Pereira, & Scarpin, 2020). More recently, the fast fashion model evolved into a relatively new concept known as ultra-fast fashion. Through digital innovations, this new model drives production efficiency at an accelerated pace, shortening the time from design to sale to as little as a few days. Thereby meeting consumers' insatiable demand for up-to-date, trendy fashion. Retailers such as ASOS, Bohoo, Misguided and the widely known Shein were amongst the first retailers to adopt the ultra-fast fashion model (Camargo et al., 2020).

The emergence of ultra-fast fashion retailers, alongside the significant increase in social media engagement and growth in e-commerce adoption, has fundamentally reshaped how consumers interact with and purchase clothing and fashion accessories. These retailers have significantly reshaped the fashion industry by increasing the affordability and accessibility of clothing for a broader audience (Koep-Andrieu & Del Valle, 2025). However, apart from the advantage of the business model, ultra-fast fashion giants such as Shein and Temu's success is derived from a targeted customer strategy. These companies primarily target females, specifically GenZs and millennials, who are price sensitive and driven by the appeal of constantly changing fashion trends (Huang, 2024).

Furthermore, ultra-fast fashion giants such as Shein and Temu have also successfully captured significant market share in the US and Europe, overtaking traditional fast fashion retailers like Zara and H&M. Over the last five years, ultra-fast fashion retailers have also gained popularity in South Africa, particularly among young consumers who seek affordability and access to trendy fashion. Retailers, such as Shein, have experienced substantial growth, supported by the rise in smartphone adoption. Brands like Shein have benefited from increased social media interaction and online purchasing behaviours (Lalu, n.d.). Additionally, Bläse et al. (2023) also note that this behaviour change is closely associated with digitalisation, especially the impact of social media marketing and influencer culture. These factors have led to an increase in online fashion sales in South Africa, as consumers tend to opt for

convenience, variety, and price over brand loyalty or concerns about quality (Camargo et al., 2020; Russo, Mola, & Giangreco, 2023). Since entering South Africa between 2020 and 2024, Shein and Temu now have a combined 3.6% market share, significantly surpassing retailers like H&M, Zara, and CottonOn together (Lalu, n.d.).

While the ultra-fast fashion business model offers various benefits to consumers, it has also contributed to negative behavioural consumption patterns, including overconsumption and impulsive purchasing. These trends lead to significant environmental waste generation and ultimately have a detrimental effect on the environment. The industry has also come under repeated criticism for its contribution to environmental pollution as well as unethical societal issues related to the production process (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Bick et al., 2018).

Against this backdrop, the rapid growth of the ultra-fast fashion industry raises important questions about consumer attitudes and the underlying factors which influence these attitudes. An evaluation of attitudes is also relevant in contexts where awareness of ethical and environmental issues conflicts with other factors which drive actual purchasing decisions. While online ultra-fast fashion platforms such as Shein and Temu enable rapid access to affordable, trendy clothing, the psychological and social factors that drive these purchases remain largely unexplored, particularly in emerging economies like South Africa. This study aims to explore this gap by focusing specifically on consumer attitudes, which are defined as the evaluative stances individuals take on a given idea, object or practice (Azjen, 1991).

1.2 The ultra-fast fashion industry

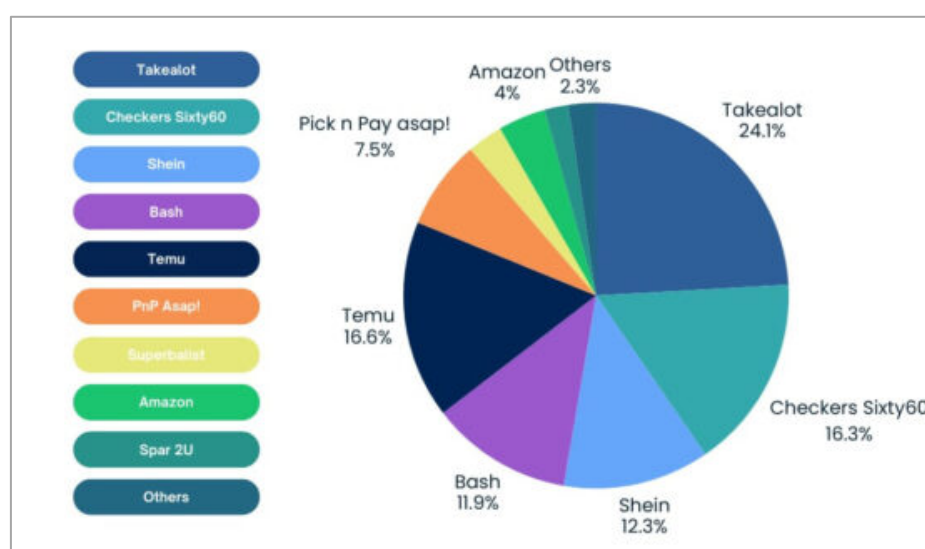
Ultra-fast fashion brands differ from traditional fast fashion retailers in that their business models use digital platforms, social media analytics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify and respond to new trends quickly (Pereira et al., 2022). Through supply chain innovation, ultra-fast fashion retailers accelerate production cycles to deliver current and up-to-date fashion trends, often at exceptionally low prices. In 2023, Shein introduced up to 10,000 new designs daily at an average price point of 14 USD, compared to 26 USD at H&M and 34 USD at Zara (McKinsey & Company, 2025). The global fast and ultra-fast fashion industry is valued at 150 USD billion; over the last year, it has grown by more than 10%, and from 2021, by 65% (Cardona, 2025). Ultra-fast fashion, as a subset of the above, had a market value of 37 USD billion in 2023. This is projected to grow significantly, reaching a market value of 481 USD billion by 2033, with a cumulative average growth rate of 30% over the period 2024 to 2033 (MarketResearch.biz, n.d.). The most well-known ultra-fast fashion retailers are Shein and

Temu. Research by McKinsey (2025) shows that 40% of US consumers and 26% of UK consumers shopped at either of the two in 2023.

Furthermore, research also shows that a significant portion of the sales, i.e. more than 60% is attributed to female consumers who regularly purchase fashion items and update their wardrobes. Women's fashion includes a variety of styles and products such as dresses, tops, skirts, and accessories intended for different occasions and preferences. The ultra-fast fashion model, which is based on rapid production and frequent introduction of new styles, corresponds with demand for a wide range of regularly updated women's fashion items. Although men's ultra-fast fashion consumption is growing, it remains lower than women's due to fewer purchases and fewer product options (MarketResearch.biz, n.d.).

In South Africa, e-commerce growth is outpacing physical retail, with online sales rising by 35% in 2024 and projected to exceed R130 billion in 2025, accounting for approximately 10% of total retail sales (Dube, 2025). According to reports by the Localisation Support Fund, Shein and Temu generated approximately R7.3 billion in sales in South Africa in 2024, making up a substantial 37% of total online clothing sales (Moneyweb, 2025). Figure 1 below shows the e-commerce market share by unique customers amongst South African consumers.

Figure 1: E-commerce market share % by number of unique customers (2004-2025)



Source: Reveal Insights (Moneyweb, 2025).

The main demographic participating in online shopping is young, urban consumers between the ages of 18 and 34; however, studies have also shown that middle-aged and middle-income consumers are becoming fast adopters. Women are highly engaged in online groceries and

fashion purchases, while men are active in electronics and general retail (Dube, 2025). While the economic appeal of ultra-fast fashion is justified from a consumer perspective globally, several concerns have been raised with regard to environmental sustainability and ethical practices. Studies have linked the model to exploitative labour practices, unsustainable production methods, and excessive consumption (Garcia-Ortega, 2023; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Aponte et al., 2024).

Despite increasing awareness of these issues, consumer demand continues to grow, creating a notable tension between ethical concern and actual purchase behaviour (Bläse et al., 2023). This tension is particularly evident in emerging markets such as South Africa, where little academic research has explored how consumers perceive or rationalise their engagement with ultra-fast fashion. Local clothing retailers like Mr Price, Truworths, The Foschini Group and Woolworths are also affected, as they face pressure to match the price and speed of international entrants (Research & Markets, 2024).

Nevertheless, in terms of consumer attitudes, their beliefs, motivations, and underlying values associated with ultra-fast fashion literature in the South African context remain under-examined. This research, therefore, responds to both a practical and theoretical gap. This research will offer insights into how South African consumers think and feel about ultra-fast fashion, why they engage with it, and how these attitudes relate to broader patterns of consumption and digital influence. In doing so, the study contributes to emerging literature on fashion, ethics, and consumer psychology, while informing more locally grounded responses from policymakers and retailers.

1.3 The Research problem

In South Africa, the ultra-fast fashion model has gained remarkable traction, especially among younger, digitally active consumers. Retail platforms like Shein have become increasingly dominant by offering affordability, variety, and frictionless online shopping attributes that resonate with South Africans and the extensive use of mobile phones. Consumers now have access to fashion that is trending globally and not limited to what is being sold locally; often, the clothing ranges brought to South Africa by international retailers such as H&M and Zara are outdated or not as broad as those being offered in wealthier countries (Msomi, 2024; E-commerce.co.za, 2025). However, despite growing awareness of the social and environmental damage associated with ultra-fast fashion, many consumers continue to shop from these platforms. This indicates a deeper attitudinal tension, commonly referred to in the literature as the attitude and behaviour gap, in which consumers' ethical concerns do not

always translate into ethical purchasing decisions (Bläse et al., 2023; Diddi et al., 2019; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021).

In light of this, this study aims to explore and describe South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion and, subsequently, to establish the factors influencing these attitudes. The study is based on female consumers, given that this is the target market for ultra-fast fashion retailers. Furthermore, in South Africa, online fashion purchases are driven primarily by women. These insights are vital for developing more effective and ethical marketing strategies, policy responses, and consumer education initiatives tailored to local socio-economic realities.

1.3.1 Theoretical anchor

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) will be used as the primary theoretical anchor in this study. The TPB framework is commonly applied in consumer and behavioural research, making it appropriate for this study. The TPB framework explains how an individual's intentions influence overall behaviour, in which intentions are driven by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes, which form a central construct of this study, are based on an individual's overall evaluation of a behaviour which could be positive or negative (Katz, 1960; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). To further unpack the attitudinal component of TBP, the Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive (ABC) model of attitudes will serve as the basis for the study. The three dimensions of attitudes include the affective, conative or behavioural and cognitive. The affective component deals with the emotions one experiences towards a product or subject. The behavioural aspect entails the actions performed based on the outcomes of the attitude, and the cognitive component refers to what one knows about the product or subject (Katz, 1960; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

1.4 Research question

The research question guiding the study is: **What are the drivers of South African females' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion?**

1.5 Research aims

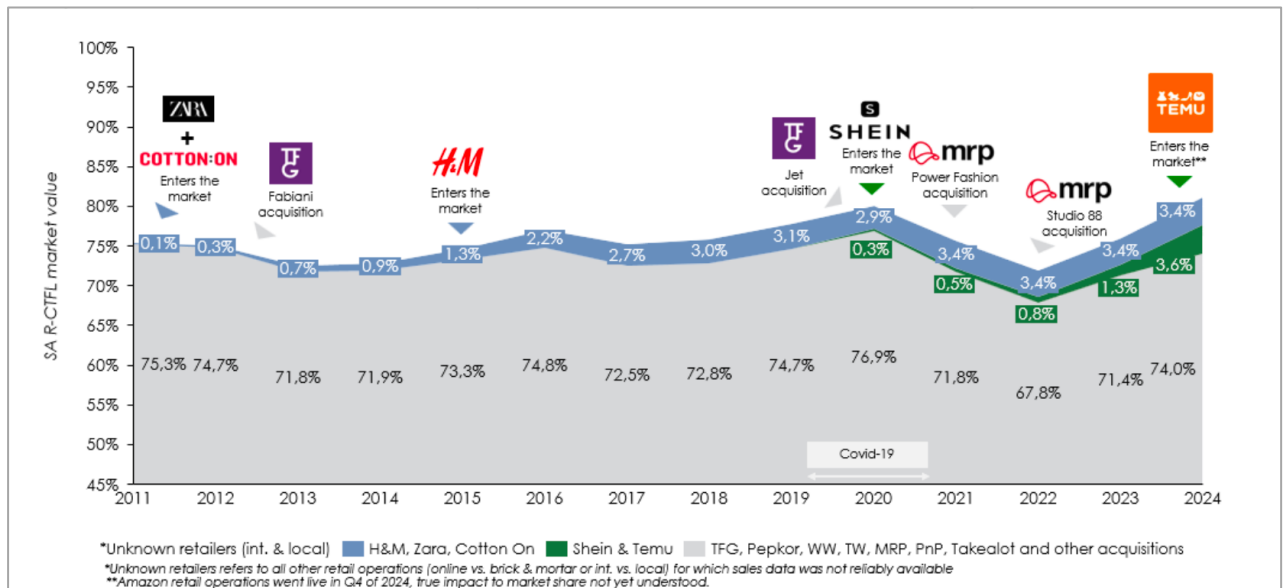
This study aims to explore and describe South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion and, subsequently, to describe how these attitudes are shaped, identifying the predominant influencing factors, including pressing issues such as digital influences, affordability, and ethical concerns.

1.5 Business relevance

The rise of ultra-fast fashion is part of a broader pattern of market disruption driven by digitalisation, affordability, and speed, trends that are also transforming other South African industries. In the banking sector, digital banks such as TymeBank and Discovery, as well as other FinTech's, have disrupted traditional models, offering low-cost, mobile-first banking services that appeal to digitally savvy, cost-conscious consumers (Hesse, 2022). Digital streaming service Netflix had a significant impact on Pay-Tv such as DSTV, with subscriptions in decline (Muller, 2022). Similarly, the automotive industry is being reshaped by the influx of affordable, feature-rich Chinese-manufactured vehicles, which have gained traction in the local market despite initial scepticism (Standard Bank, 2024). These examples highlight a structural shift in consumer expectations, where affordability, accessibility, and speed are valued over legacy brand loyalty or product origin (Barney, 1991; Russo, Mola & Giangreco, 2023). This shift has significant implications for domestic industries, which include fashion, that can compete not only on product quality but also on responsiveness and digital presence (Pereira et al., 2022; Research & Markets, 2024).

Ultra-fast fashion retailers, specifically Shein and Temu's disruption to local and international traditional fashion retailers such as The Foschini Group, Mr Price, Truworths, Woolworths, H&M, Cotton On and Zara, have several implications for the local economy. International traditional fast fashion stores have a physical presence and, as such, contribute to the economy through investment and job creation. Locally, the entry of ultra-fast fashion retailers like Shein and Temu has far-reaching consequences, such as revenue leakage in local retailers, impact on local manufacturing and job losses. As per Figure 2, Shein and Temu gained a combined 3.6% share of the Retail, Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather (R-CTFL) market since 2020, with Temu only entering the market in 2024 (LSF South Africa, 2025).

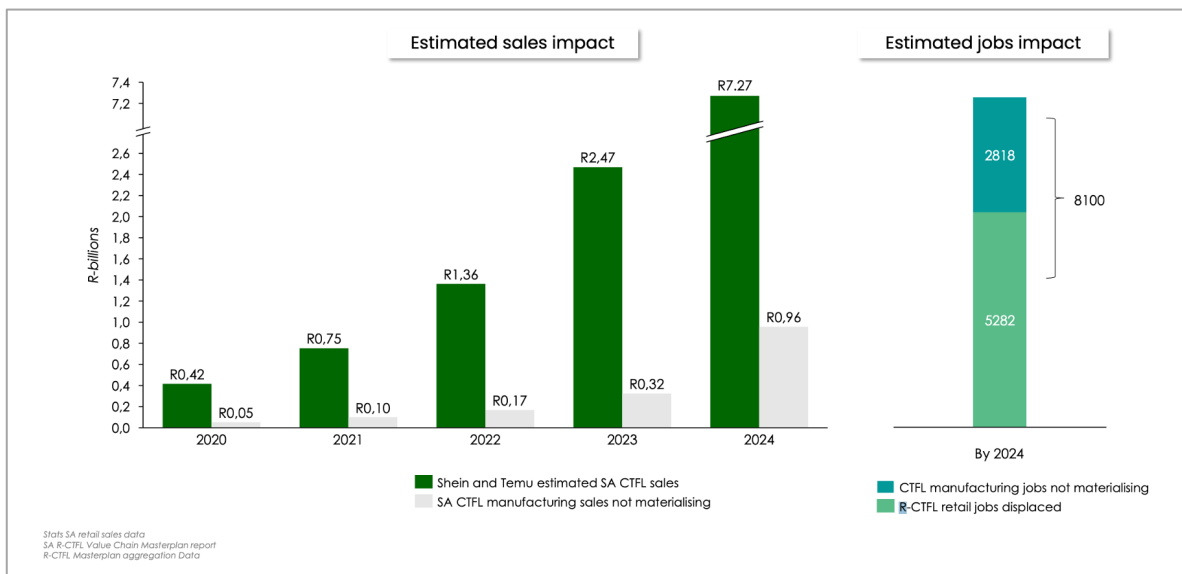
Figure 2: Relative market share trend SA CTFL



(Source: LSF South Africa, 2025)

This rapid growth is associated with an estimated loss of R960 million in local manufacturing sales for the local economy. From an employment perspective, 2,818 manufacturing jobs were lost, and 5,282 retail jobs did not materialise over the period 2020 to 2024. Should this trend continue, projections indicate that 34,000 manufacturing and retail jobs are at risk and cumulative lost manufacturing sales amounting to R6.2 billion by 2023 (LSF South Africa, 2025). Figure 3 below shows the total estimated impact on jobs within the CTFL sector by ultra-fast fashion retailers.

Figure 3: Shein and Temu sales and jobs impact



Source: LSF South Africa, 2025

Retailers also voiced concerns about the customs charges applied to goods imported from Shein and Temu, as they believed these companies were exploiting tax rules to keep merchandise costs low. Recently, the South African government has subsequently amended the rules to ensure that these purchases are subject to customs charges. However, in terms of the change, customers now have visibility of the charges upfront, which removes concerns about unknown fees. While the intention was to deter customers from ultra-fast fashion platforms, this might inadvertently encourage sales as it removes the uncertainty of unknown costs (Libera, 2025).

Given the substantial impact on local R-CTFL companies in South Africa, these businesses need to identify the key factors influencing customer purchasing decisions, particularly in the context of ultra-fast fashion. While brands like Shein and Temu continue to grow, local retailers face increasing pressure on pricing and the speed at which new, trendy fashion is made available to consumers, while also raising consumer awareness of ethical fashion (Msomi, 2024; Moodly, Christie, & Strydom, 2023).

1.6 Conclusion

The introduction of fast fashion by retailers such as Zara and H&M was a defining moment for the industry as it democratised fashion by making catwalk trends accessible to a broader audience. More recently, the fast fashion model has evolved into a relatively new concept known as ultra-fast fashion, which is currently dominated by Shein and Temu. The ultra-fast fashion model utilises technology and AI to identify and produce trends at a much faster pace than traditional stores, resulting in a continuous supply of in-style trendy fashion, which is particularly appealing to females and the younger generations.

Within a brief timeframe, ultra-fast fashion retailers have achieved significant commercial success, evidenced by their growing global market share. A similar trend is playing out in the South African market, as research indicates an increasing popularity of the platforms. The rapid growth and innovative business model of ultra-fast fashion retailers have highlighted a profound shift in consumer priorities, favouring affordability, convenience, and speed over traditional brand loyalty and product origin.

While the benefits to consumers are justified, there are several negative consequences related to the ultra-fast fashion model. The industry has faced considerable criticism due to its effects on the environment and concerns over unethical labour practices. Furthermore, in the South African context, the consequences for domestic retailers and the broader economy are

significant, particularly with respect to lost revenue and potential job losses. Against this backdrop, this study aims to evaluate South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion as well as the predominant factors influencing their attitudes. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is a widely used framework for understanding consumer behaviour and will thus provide the theoretical foundation for this study.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two presents an overview of key findings and existing literature on the topic as it relates to ultra-fast fashion and consumer attitudes. Section three defines the research questions, and Chapter Four outlines the research methodology approach. Chapter Five aims to provide an in-depth view of the research findings. Building on the results, Chapter Six analyses the findings in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical anchors. The conclusion reflects on the study in its entirety, outlining the limitations, recommendations and potential contributions of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The rapid rise of ultra-fast fashion has significantly influenced global apparel trends; the impacts are long-term, affecting not only product and consumption but also environmental sustainability and consumer behaviours. This literature review critically synthesises existing literature on several topics closely related to the research question, such as the evolution of ultra-fast fashion, the South African fashion and apparel industry and online shopping trends. The aim is to ground this study within a robust conceptual framework that examines the consumer attitude construct, focusing exclusively on the cognitive, affective, and conative components, framed in terms of Ajzen's 1991 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

2.2 History of fashion

2.2.1 What is fashion?

As a prelude to the history of fashion, it is key to outline what fashion is, as it forms a critical base of this research. While there are several definitions of fashion, as it applies to this research, fashion includes all items that are worn on the body, along with embellishments added to the body, and covers all various items of attire, garments and accessories (Magwegwe & Shaik, 2024). Furthermore, fashion has several values attached to it, such as identity, lifestyle, social status and beauty (Niinimäki 2010; Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

2.3 Fashion over time

Fashion has evolved, and this has been influenced by human creativity, identity, as well as strong links to social and cultural phenomena (Fontana and Miranda, 2016). While ancient societies such as Egypt, Japan and China have rich historical ties to fashion, literature on the topic has been concentrated to the Western world; therefore, a key reference point is the Renaissance period. During the Renaissance period, with the emergence of the bourgeoisie and capitalism in Europe, fashion became closely associated with class distinction used to convey wealth and power (Aspers & Godart, 2013). In the early days, fashionable clothing was mostly accessible to the upper classes, as they were made locally and was considered unaffordable to the ordinary citizen. However, over time, several advances in production methods and the opening of trade, which made a variety of textiles and other inputs more available, made fashionable garments more accessible to all, despite societal hierarchy (Aspers & Godart, 2013).

Asian fashion history is characterised by an extensive array of vibrant garments that have developed over many centuries, with each region owning its own distinctive style representing the uniqueness of each culture (Bradley, 2023). During the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, integrated European-style official uniforms into their military, police, and governmental institutions. In the 20th century, as fashion moved effortlessly from fashion shows to large retailers, as well as further advancements through the fast fashion model, the Asian countries shifted away from traditional attire due to Western influence (Aspers & Godart, 2013).

With regard to Africa's fashion origins, which entail adapting to the natural environment through the use of naturally available resources. Early clothing, therefore, included animal skin and bark cloth, which functionally addressed the African climate. In addition to this, fashion was also influenced by tribal cultures where clothing signalled status, age, tribe and spiritual beliefs (Africa Fashion Tour, n.d.). Fabrics were introduced to the continent through trade and later colonisation. Over time, following independence, African fashion developed into its present form, marked by increased creativity and diversity.

African clothing has distinctive features, including bright colours and bold prints, and is designed to be functional and adaptable to the environment. The rise of Africa Fashion Week has elevated Africa's fashion creativity and innovation talents, taking African-inspired designs to the global stage. Looking to the future, African fashion shows considerable potential for growth as younger generations embrace culture and heritage, combining them with history and further pushing the limits of creativity. In Africa, fashion is not just about clothing; it is an embodiment of culture, history and identity (Africa Fashion Tour, n.d.).

The 18th & 19th Industrial Revolutions marked a turning point in the history of fashion due to rapid advancements in textile manufacturing and the development of machinery, which enabled mass production. In addition, the rise of department stores played a significant role in shaping consumer culture. By the 20th century, fashion began to shift rapidly, influenced by cinema, music, war, youth culture, and global media. Designers such as Coco Chanel and Christian Dior became cultural figures, and fashion houses began to influence public taste on an international scale (Arnold, 2001).

From the mid-1970s onwards, there was a democratisation of fashion, as fashion brands began replicating fashion shows trends at lower costs and within months, with the result that the trendiest and exclusive fashion items were now made accessible to all (Zhang et al., 2024).

In recent decades, the expansion of global supply chains and digital platforms has led to the rise of fast fashion, where speed, affordability, and trend replication are prioritised. This development has culminated in the ultra-fast fashion model seen today, characterised by the use of social media, data analytics, and influencer marketing to drive consumption cycles and constantly stimulate demand (McKinsey & Company, 2023; Camargo, Pereira, & Scarpin, 2020).

2.4 Fast fashion

In order for a company to be classified within the category of fast fashion, the following key characteristics need be evident, this includes quick response time, frequent changes in the variety offered and affordable prices (Caro & Martinez-de-Albeniz, 2015).

Fast fashion is based on inexpensive, readily available and up-to-date fashion garments, a business model which has fundamentally reshaped consumers' purchasing behaviour and consumption habits. The term "fast" indicates the speed at which retailers are able to produce styles from fashion shows in stores and ultimately make them available to consumers, thereby allowing consumers to keep up with the latest trends (Bick et al., 2018). Prior to the fast fashion model, the turnaround time from clothes seen on fashion shows to consumers was approximately six months, with this being drastically shortened to a matter of weeks with the implementation of the fast fashion business approach led by companies such as Zara and H&M. The fast cycle of turnaround ensures that customers return as the retailers are continuously introducing new trends (Joy et al., 2015). Early case studies illustrating successful implementation of the fast fashion business model include Zara, TopShop and Benetton (Carmago, 2021).

The success of the fast fashion model relies heavily on an efficient supply chain to deliver trendy clothing within short lead times (Carmargo et al., 2020) and in addition to this, another key component is a fashionable product design capability (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). To achieve short lead times, advanced information and inventory systems, local production, and efficient, sophisticated distribution strategies were enabled (Cachon & Swinney, 2010). To ensure that the designs are relevant and up to date, the companies employ real-time customer feedback or monitoring strategies (Cachon & Swinney, 2010).

2.4.1 Fast fashion's impact on consumer behaviour

From a consumer perspective, the fast-fashion model has encouraged impulse buying through its constant supply of increasingly appealing merchandise (Joy et al., 2015). Despite being

aware of the environmental and sustainability issues, consumers still engage in buying from fast fashion stores driven by the allure of low prices and trendiness (McNeil & Moore, 2015). In a study done by Joy et al. (2015) it was shown that fast fashion also promotes the behaviour of more frequent wardrobe updates and the acceptance of wardrobe churn. Furthermore, it has also made clothing more disposable in the mind of the consumer, therefore normalising disposability (Joy et al., 2015 and Niinimäki et al., 2020). According to Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010), due to the trend-based designs, fast fashion also drives consumers to chase instant gratification, and long-term value is not taken into consideration.

2.5 Ultra-fast fashion

By 2010, a new era of fast fashion, known as ultra-fast fashion, emerged from companies such as ASOS, Boohoo, Fashion Nova, and Shein, which focused on shorter production cycles and faster trend cycles (Camargo, Pereira, & Scarpin, 2020). Ultra-fast fashion builds on the fast fashion model by accelerating design, production, and distribution through the use of AI, vertical integration, and social media analytics (Camargo, Pereira, & Scarpin, 2020). In recent years, online-only retailers such as Shein have become dominant players by introducing thousands of new styles each week, responding almost instantly to online trends (Plé & Yacoub, 2024). Traditional retailers like Zara and H&M take three to six months to design and deliver a range, while Shein does this in seven to 10 days, thereby democratising fashion and creating fashionable trends at an affordable price, which appeals to consumers, particularly the younger generations (Siu and Ubale, 2025).

Unlike traditional fast fashion brands that rely on seasonal collections and physical stores, ultra-fast fashion operates primarily through digital platforms. In addition, ultra-fast fashion has achieved significantly shorter production cycles, producing merchandise in roughly three days and loading over 10,000 new styles onto its e-commerce platform daily (Camargo et al., 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2025; Esposti et al., 2024). These platforms use real-time consumer data to manage micro-inventory cycles and eliminate waste, creating an illusion of abundance while keeping costs low (Pereira et al., 2022). The speed, affordability, and constant novelty of these offerings appeal especially to younger consumers who seek self-expression and social visibility through clothing (Bläse et al., 2023).

The ultra-fast fashion business strategy is based on a direct-to-consumer strategy, whereby the focus is on providing clothes to consumers on an on-demand basis. This is done through technology and advanced data analytics to gain insight into consumer purchasing behaviours extracted from social media platforms. There is an emphasis on and reliance on social media

consumer strategies, which include social tagging and even the employment of trend-watching scouts (Camargo, Pereira, & Scarpin, 2020).

In terms of existing literature, ultrafast fashion is a relatively new concept which has not been studied in detail yet therefore in many instances ultra fashion retailer strategies, concerns, consumer attitudes and behaviours and other key concepts are covered under the wider theme of fast fashion (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Oblój, 2023).

2.5.1 Fast and ultra-fast fashion concerns

Fast fashion undoubtedly reshaped consumers' purchasing behaviours and attitudes, leading them to embrace fashion as a form of self-expression and an extension of their identities. Furthermore, fast and more so ultra-fast fashion has played a significant role in making fashion accessible to all types of consumers, not just the wealthy. This particularly holds in a country like South Africa, in which the majority of the population are found to be low-income earners. Whilst there are numerous benefits of fast and ultra-fast fashion, due to large-scale manufacturing, supply chain, and logistics operations. There is also a dark side that tarnishes the industry's profitability. This entails unsustainable environmental impacts and unethical labour practices. From an environmental sustainability perspective, climate change, natural resource depletion, and water waste are among the primary challenges confronting humanity. Fashion is considered one of the most polluting and resource-intensive industries (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Aponte et al., 2024).

In terms of the link to ultra-fast fashion, the ultra-fast fashion model drives impulse buying due to the perceived low cost and quality. Consumers, therefore, view these garments as perishable, which in turn leads to wastage (Centobelli et al., 2022). The manufacturing process of garments is made up of multiple processes and layers, which include the cultivation of cotton crops for the raw materials, spinning and production of yarn, as well as fabric dyeing, weaving, cutting and stitching to get to the final product (Aggarwal & More, 2021). The accelerated garment life cycle in the fast fashion model, i.e. production, use and disposal in a shortened time frame, requires vast amounts of resources, which hurts the environment (Centobelli et al., 2022). In addition to the environmental degradation issues, the model has also given rise to several social problems, specifically unethical labour practices (Aponte et al., 2024).

2.5.1.1 Environmental concerns

The environmental impact of the fast fashion industry arises from the manufacturing process as well as the wastage generated through overconsumption. Amongst the key concerns in the manufacturing process are the high levels of water required to produce textiles, the use of chemicals and the industry's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions (Bailey et al., 2022; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Aponte et al., 2024).

2.5.1.2 Water usage

The clothing manufacturing process consumes large amounts of water and generates substantial wastewater. The industry utilises 79 trillion litres of water each year and is responsible for approximately 20% of industrial wastewater (Bailey et al., 2022). Textile production entails starting with the basics of making natural and synthetic fibres. Polyester, which is a synthetic fibre made from cotton and oil, is commonly used as the fabric of choice due to its low manufacturing cost; however, the production process entails high water usage and the use of pesticides, which are harmful to the environment. Another important step in the production process entails fabric dyeing, which poses additional environmental risks as the paint wastewater containing heavy metals and other toxic substances is discarded into the water systems (Bick et al., 2018).

2.5.1.3 Chemicals

According to Niinimäki et al, 2020, chemical usage in textile production is high, with 15,000 different chemicals utilised in manufacturing. Furthermore, estimates indicate that significant pesticides and other agricultural chemicals are used in cotton crops. When these chemicals are released into the soil, water and air, they cause significant harm to the environment as well as several health issues such as cancers, respiratory diseases, neurological and reproductive problems (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

2.5.1.4 Greenhouse gas emissions

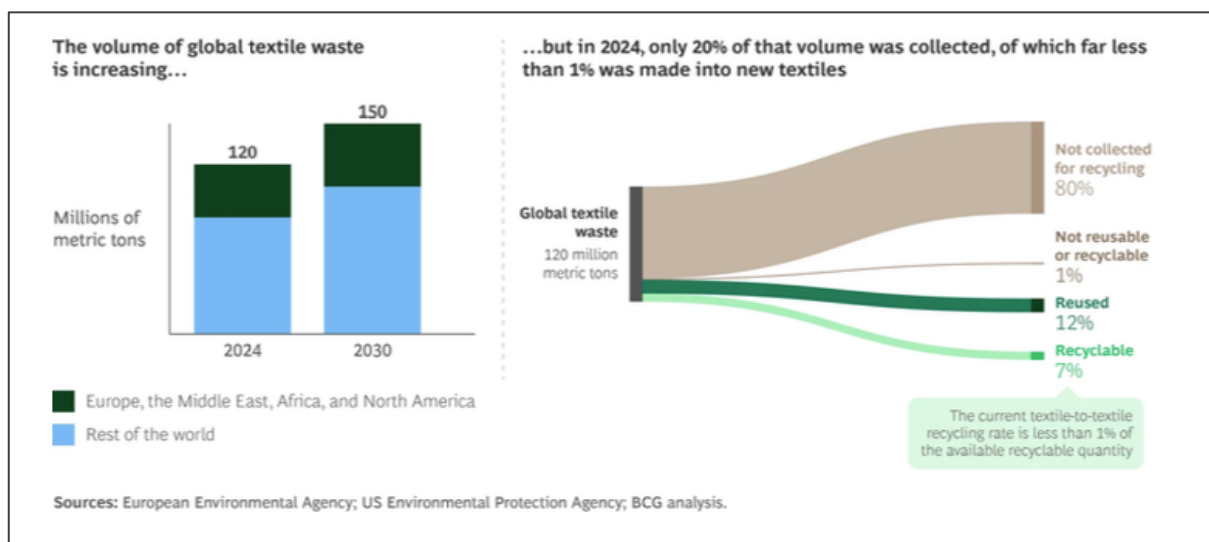
The industry is a major contributor to the planet's carbon footprint, which is measured by greenhouse gas emissions, also known as Carbon Dioxide CO₂ emissions. According to research, it accounts for approximately 4% - 10% of total global emissions (Bailey et al., 2022 and Centobelli et al., 2022). This is particularly concerning given that greenhouse gas emissions are a significant contributing factor to climate change and global warming, which causes extreme weather conditions such as flooding and droughts (Centobelli et al., 2022).

The industry's carbon footprint is influenced by both its high energy consumption and the locations where manufacturing occurs. Textile production in China relies on energy derived from coal, and as such, this leaves a 40% higher carbon footprint than locations in Europe (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

2.5.1.5 Wastage

A 2024 report from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) estimates that the world discarded enough clothing in one year to fill 200 Olympic stadiums, demonstrating the scale of textile waste globally (Sajdeh et al., 2025). Elevated production levels of garments, as well as the fast fashion consumer culture, whereby clothes are disposed of faster, have resulted in an ever-increasing waste problem. The wastage is two-fold, arising from the production waste (pre-production waste) as well as wastage due to garments being prematurely discarded by consumers (post-production waste). According to a single study, fabric waste during the production process was estimated at 15%, originating from the cutting stage of garment production. Furthermore, another category of production waste is deadstock, which refers to new, unsold stock that is classified as waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020). According to BCG, 120 metric tons of clothing were discarded worldwide in 2024. Of this amount, approximately 80% ended up in landfills or incinerators, 12% was reused, and less than 1% was recycled. This breakdown is shown in Figure 4 below

Figure 4: Volume of growing textile waste



Source: (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Such waste imposes a considerable strain on the environment, as incineration and landfill disposal further contribute to emissions challenges (Sajdeh et al., 2025). Furthermore,

depending on their material composition, garments can remain in landfills for up to 200 years and over time, chemicals and dyes from these items may leach into the soil, leading to additional environmental and health concerns (Williams, 2022).

2.5.1.6 Social concerns

From a societal perspective, several concerns have been cited, including unsuitable working conditions as well as child labour, which is more prevalent in developing countries (Williams, 2022). The low pricing strategies characteristic of fast and ultra-fast fashion models exerts significant pressure on offshore manufacturing facilities. To remain competitive, these factories may resort to cost-cutting measures that can impact production standards. This, in turn, gives rise to health, safety, labour and human rights violations (Drennan, 2015).

The widely reported Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013 drew significant attention to the hazardous working conditions faced by sweatshop employees, resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 workers and injuries to more than twice that number. The event highlighted deficiencies in safety protocols and audits, as well as concerns regarding the notably low wages paid to employees (Drennan, 2015). Another frequently cited risk is that of factory fires. For example, in 2012, a factory fire in Bangladesh resulted in the deaths of more than 100 people, as workers were locked inside the facility. Like the Rana Plaza incident, this tragedy might have been prevented if appropriate safety protocols had been implemented (Williams, 2022). Poor working conditions also contribute to a myriad of health concerns among employees, as exposure to hazardous chemicals occurs without adequate protective equipment (Lambert, 2014).

A well-known issue of the textile industry is that of child labour, which is particularly common in developing countries. Child workforces are expected to work long hours, in some cases in underground factories, given that it is illegal in many countries. In 2021, the U.S Department of Labour uncovered 77 countries violating international labour standards. The appeal of child labour is that children are considered to be obedient and cheaper as they are paid below minimum wages (Lambert, 2014).

2.6 South African fashion context

The South African fashion landscape is a blend of the traditional African styles, global fashion influences, and large local retailers. The fashion industry is known to be multidimensional, incorporating a combination of luxury and affordable, formal and street, and mass and made-to-order production. A large number of designers operate as independent labels that specialise in limited runs and sustainable materials, with designs aimed at niche and conscious

consumers (Hewitt, 2024). At the same time, South Africa has large fashion and apparel chains in Mr Price, Foschini, Woolworths and Truworths, which serve a mass market and compete directly with other international retailers like H&M, Zara, and CottonOn (Geetanshi, 2025). These are local retail chains that tend to balance out the international trends and the local relevance; therefore, their clothes match the shape and size of a typical South African consumer. However, digital-first global retailers, including Shein, increasingly threaten the competitiveness of domestic players by offering low-cost, trend-responsive apparel and rapid delivery.

2.7 South African clothing industry

The clothing and textile industry remains a significant contributor to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment, particularly in manufacturing hubs such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape (Research & Markets, 2024). Government interventions, such as the Clothing and Textile Competitiveness Programme (CTCP), have sought to improve the sector's resilience and promote local production. In South Africa, Clothing, Textiles, Leather and Footwear (CTLF) are viewed as a collective by the government for sector development and performance assessment. The industry plays a significant role in job creation, employing approximately 210,000 individuals, of which 120,000 fall into retail and the other 90,000 into manufacturing (ENSafrica, 2024). Unsurprisingly, the recent rise in ultra-fast fashion, spearheaded explicitly by foreign companies like Shein, with Temu following, has raised concerns as the emergent consumer trends are in direct conflict with local job creation (ENSafrica, 2024).

2.8 South African consumer fashion culture

South African youth culture is largely shaped by fashion, as 41% of young South Africans find self-expression through fashion (Sunday Times, 2023). This is also largely influenced by their active social media engagement and the pressure to keep up with local and global fashion trends. With regards to the younger generations, such as GenZ (or Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012), their higher level of awareness towards climate change and environmental sustainability is driving support for pre-loved fashion. However, while there are large segments of the population that are aware of the environmental issues, cost remains a barrier as slow fashion is seen to be less affordable (Moody, Christie, & Strydom, 2023). Affordability, driven by economic pressures, plays a significant part in consumer purchasing decisions, forcing many South Africans to seek out value when shopping (Africa Business, 2025).

South African consumers have the choice between in-store and online shopping, with in-store shopping offering instant gratification, while online shopping provides a wider variety and convenience. Market research shows that while a large portion of consumers still value in-store shopping, over 33% prefer exclusively shopping online (KLA, n.d.). Given the significance of affordability for South African consumers, they have shown growing interest in the fast fashion model, following a global trend toward accessible and affordable clothing. The market has noted increased activity with the introduction and expansion of international fast fashion brands such as Shein and Temu (KLA, n.d.). The appeal of these platforms lies in low prices, frequent new product releases, and targeted social media marketing, particularly among Gen Z and young women. Shein has increased its presence by collaborating with African fashion influencers such as Mhlali Ndamase and Sphokuhle Ntshalintshali, while Temu is currently using TikTok micro-influencers to enhance its visibility (Sagaci Research, n.d.).

2.8 Fast and ultra-fast fashion in South Africa

Research by consumer insights company KLA has shown that the adoption of ultra-fast fashion retailers in South Africa has been positive, driven by style-conscious and budget-aware consumers. Specifically, Shein and Temu have emerged as significant players (KLA, n.d.). Whilst consumers are given access to global fashion trends at an affordable price point, it comes at a cost, which is to the detriment of local retailers who contribute to the economy through local investments and job creation. Simply put, the local retailers are unable to compete with the ultra-fast fashion business models due to the structural realities, as they are competing with platforms engineered for scale, speed and consumer segmentation expertise (DMN, n.d.).

2.9 South African female consumers

According to StatsSA, the total population of South Africa is estimated at 63.1 million in 2025, of which 51% or 32.2 million are females (Statistics South Africa, 2025). According to a survey conducted by a digital shopping platform, the primary reason women shop online is for convenience. Women are also more actively engaged in shopping, as 89% of female shoppers will delay purchases until an item goes on sale, with around 55% saying they will regularly check the retailer's website for sales. With regards to online shopping, females, the most common categories include clothing, entertainment, education and events. With online fashion purchases, incorrect sizing and return policies were raised as concerns (Bizcommunity, 2019).

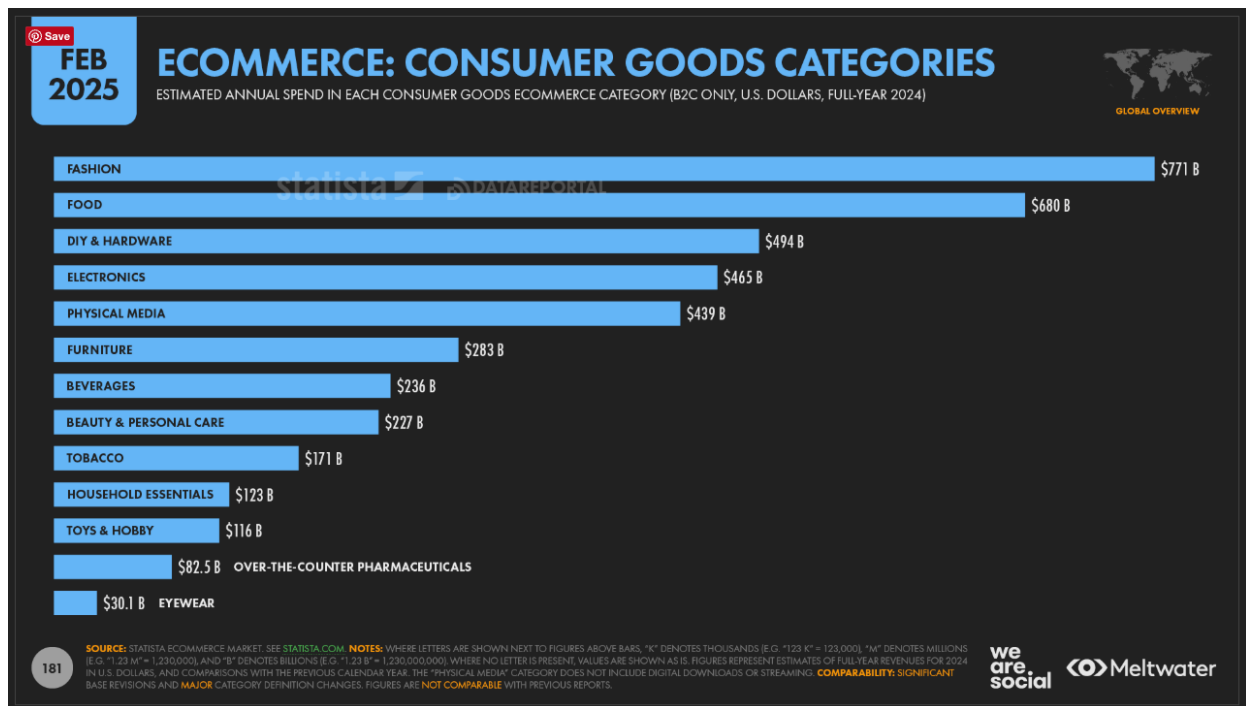
Over 80% of women shoppers indicated that they opt to buy products for functional purposes; however, emotions also drive their purchases. Female consumers are also conscious about prices and budgeting, and smart spending is an important feature; 82% actively seek out discounts. This reinforces the fact that price and perceived value are driving factors in purchasing decisions. However, women see smart spending as a form of empowerment, as they want to make smart choices for their households and families (KLA, 2025).

2.10 E-commerce

E-commerce, which is short for electronic commerce, simply referring to online shopping, i.e. over the internet; however, the broader definition includes other business activities such as selling and hiring, which can take the form of Business-to-Consumer (B2C) or Business-to-Business (B2B) (Schnieder, 2015). While e-commerce dates back to the early part of the 1960s, it only started gaining traction in the 1990s as the internet became more popular, with Amazon being one of the first e-commerce websites. E-commerce revolutionised shopping, created a global marketplace, changed consumer shopping behaviours, and redefined the way companies sold their products and services (Niu and Zhao, 2023).

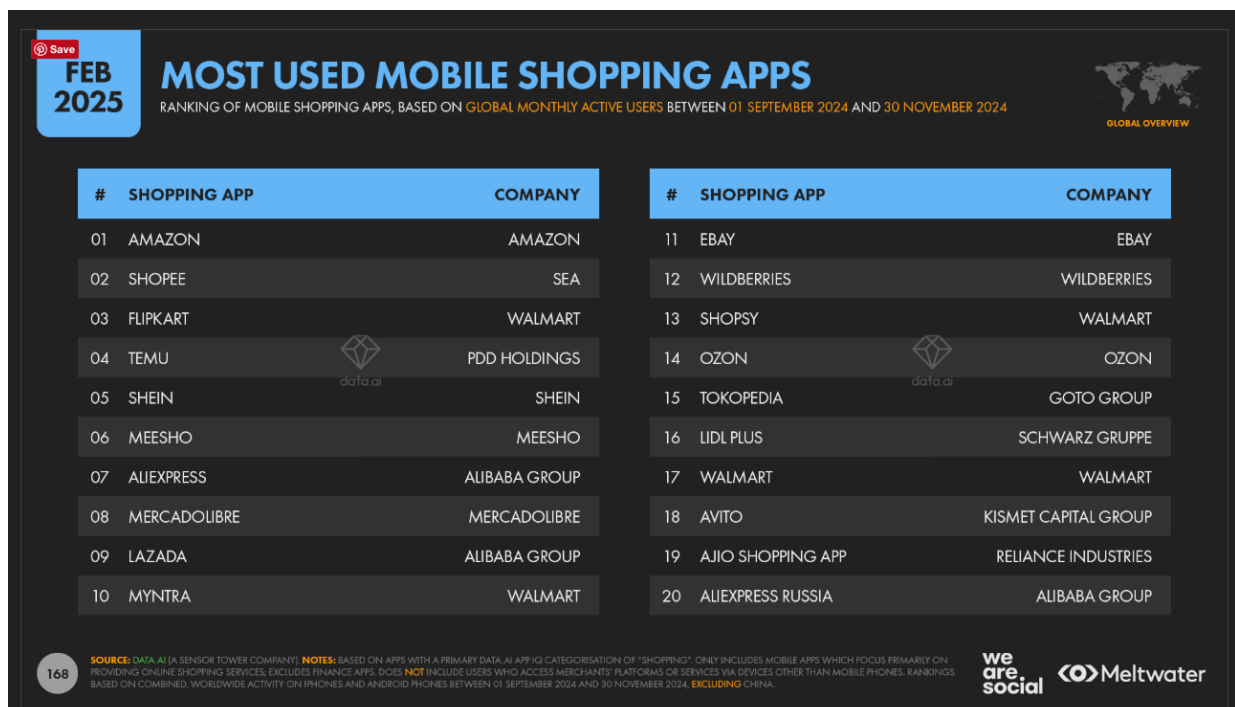
In 2024, online shopping contributed 20.1% of total consumer spending, which is forecast to grow to 22.6% by 2027 (Statista, 2024). Statista reports further alludes that the number of consumers making online purchases exceeds 2.5 billion. Furthermore, in terms of spend categories, fashion was in the number one spot at 771 billion USD, followed by food at 680 billion USD (Kemp, 2025). Figure 5 below shows the top global ecommerce spend categories for consumer goods, led by fashion. Figure 6 presents a view of the top 20 shopping apps used, where Temu and Shein are in positions four and five, respectively, once again indicating the popularity of ultra-fast fashion platforms.

Figure 5: E-commerce spend categories



Source: (Kemp, 2025).

Figure 6: Most used mobile shopping applications



Source: (Kemp, 2025).

The e-commerce consumer appeal allows consumers the convenience of being able to shop from anywhere at any time, in contrast to shopping at a physical store, which is restricted in

terms of shopping hours, but also the variety of merchandise stocked at a particular store. From a business perspective, e-commerce has provided businesses with access to a global market, eliminating the need to set up a physical store (Niu & Zhao, 2023).

A McKinsey (2025) report, on a global consumer insight study, found that consumers have a preference for digital platforms, which play a significant role in purchase behaviour. As a subset of e-commerce, m-commerce, or mobile commerce, refers to concluding transactions through a mobile device (Nui & Zhao, 2023). According to e-Marketer estimates, m-commerce would reach roughly 69% of total retail e-commerce in 2024. In addition to this, another growing channel is social commerce, whereby consumers make purchases directly from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

Boardman and McCormick (2018) found that shopping preferences by channel varied across age groups, and multi-channel shopping behaviour was more prevalent among older shoppers. E-commerce was found to be the overall winner in terms of channel popularity, amongst 20-year-olds, while m-commerce is the preferred channel, whereas individuals over 60 years opt for an in-store shopping experience (Boardman & McCormick, 2018).

2.10.1 E-commerce in South Africa

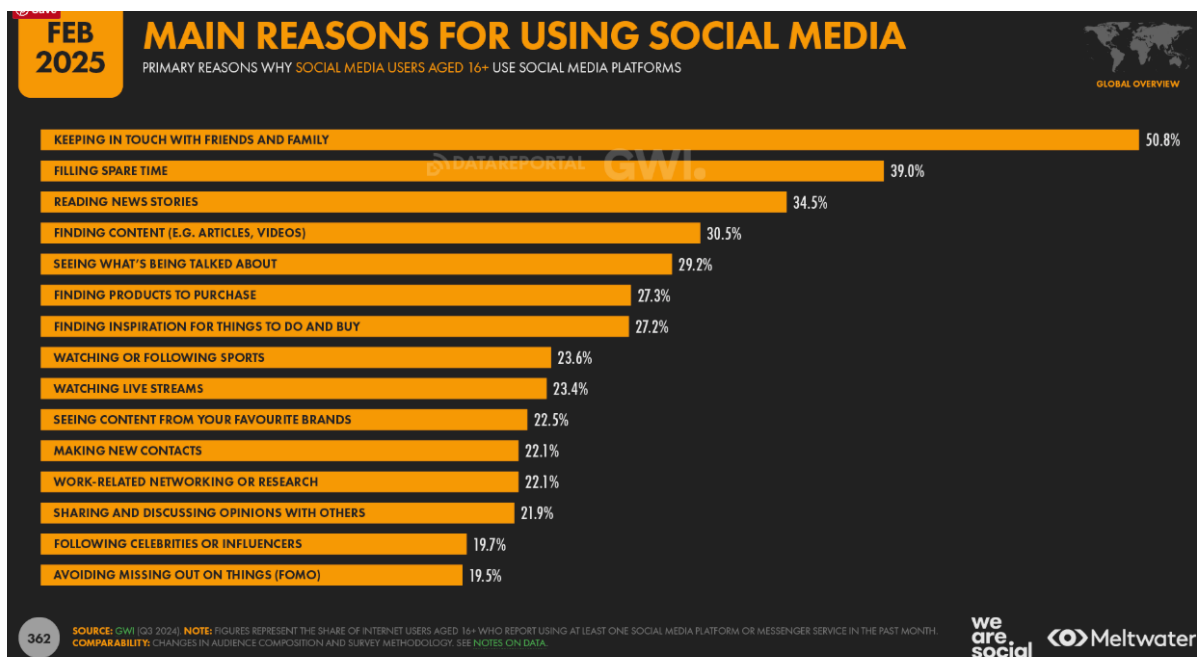
According to research on online shopping in South Africa, over 50% of internet users over the age of 16 are shopping online every week. While the global benchmark for online shopping is at 56% of online users, in South Africa it is at 50.1%. In terms of the breakdown of categories driving online shopping, fashion is in the top spot at 32%, followed by toys, hobbies and DIY at 27%. As of September 2024, it was found that the most popular online store was Takealot, followed by Shein. Most users prefer using their mobile phones to shop, with over 77% using smartphones (Mashamaite, 2025).

2.11 Social media culture and ultra-fast fashion

Over the past decade, social media has become an integral part of everyone around the world, with user adoption and engagement growing exponentially. Popular social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook have become an integral part of daily lives. It has changed how people worldwide communicate and access information, and has influenced behaviour, especially among younger and middle-aged groups where technology use is more prevalent. It has also created new business models and fundamentally changed the way brands and retailers connect with audiences.

Global active social media users are estimated to be at 5.24 billion, with the average daily time spent on these platforms at two hours and 20 minutes. Research indicates that the main reasons for using social media platforms are keeping in touch with friends and family, filling spare time, and reading news, as shown in Figure 8 below (Kemp, 2025). Apart from this, “Seeing what’s being talked about”, finding products to purchase and finding inspiration for things to do and buy feature within the top ten; some can safely assume these categories feature fashion and beauty-related content.

Figure 7: Main reasons for using social media



Source: (Kemp, 2025).

Social media platforms allow users to interact with friends and like-minded individuals through various forms of content, including as images, video or text. Thereby allows users to share their experiences seamlessly and instantaneously across the world, allowing for a wider reach. By doing so, it also enables users to share not only personal experiences, which include product experiences, the outcomes of which allow one’s network of friends, connections or followers to reflect and potentially act on this (Onofrei et al., 2022).

The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed the marketing of fashion items, enabling rapid brand recognition as well as accelerating sales from product launches, achieving wider global reach in a shorter time frame. This has been a key success factor for ultra-fast fashion companies, given their lack of physical presence. As mentioned, social media platforms are perfect for disseminating visuals and interactive content, which is

essential for the fashion sector. Through these platforms, brands can use appealing imagery, videos and live streams to showcase their products in a creative and appealing way, prompting an instant reaction from consumers (Miller, 2022).

Within the context of ultra-fast fashion, social media plays a key role in shaping consumers' behaviour in that it speeds up the discovery or research phase, and it encourages impulse buying, which is a key characteristic of ultra-fast fashion. In addition to this, the combination of social media and fashion links back to an individual's desire for social acceptance. A key social media marketing strategy utilised in the ultra-fast fashion industry is that of content creators or social media influencers. A study by Kharuhayothin and Patarapongsant (2023) found that consumer interest in fast fashion is positively associated with brand popularity among influencers, who leverage endorsement strategies (mostly on social media) to build relationships with potential customers.

2.12 Social media influencers

Ultra-fast fashion retailers such as Shein, Temu, Boohoo and Fashion Nova are heavily reliant on social media influencers. These influencers are seen to represent a social standard in which their style choices, authenticity, and perceived relatability lead consumers to believe that ultra-fast fashion products are both trendy and accessible. Influencers drive engagement through YouTube video content such as “hauls” or “GRWM” (Get Ready With Me”) and “unboxing” content to normalise frequent, low-cost purchasing behaviour.

Given the popularity and exponential user growth of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, a new marketing phenomenon known as social media influencers has emerged. These are individuals who have attracted substantial user following and established fan bases. Their influence enables them to shape fashion trends and consumer brand perceptions (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Given the significant impact these influencers have on their global audiences, brands have adopted influencer marketing strategies to drive brand awareness and sales of their products (Shamim et al., 2024).

This type of marketing strategy has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention within the ultra-fast fashion industry as it builds trust with consumers, influencers are more relatable than stereotypical billboard celebrities and models, as well as drives emotional engagement with consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki et al., 2019). According to Lou and Yan (2019), the perceived credibility of the influencers as well as the quality of the message conveyed, has a direct impact on consumer purchase intention. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that

consumers' intentions to purchase fashion items are directly affected by the persuasive influence of social media influencers in presenting products and styles.

2.13 Impulse buying and the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Social media plays a significant role in driving impulsive buying behaviours, which is a key characteristic of ultra-fast fashion models. Impulse buying refers to purchasing behaviour whereby consumers lack control despite the negative consequences, such as overconsumption, overspending and getting themselves into debt (Nyrhinen et al., 2024). The nature of content shared on social media platforms entails sharing of experiences and products that may relate to products or services, feelings or personal life experiences. Influencers and brands, through their marketing efforts, may create a perception of scarcity for their products or the need to acquire the product to keep up with trends or social pressures.

Studies have shown that types of engagements and content sharing with social media platforms have been shown to have a strong relationship with user behavioural tendencies and contribute to impulse buying (Aragoncillo & Orús, 2018; Munnukka et al., 2019; Xiang et al., 2016). Research also points out that the younger generation of consumers is more susceptible to impulse purchasing than older consumers, who are more likely to have higher levels of discipline (Iyer et al., 2020). Specific research examining the impact of Instagram on impulsive buying behaviour revealed that there are several motivating factors that trigger consumers, which include promotional advertising, highly visual content, as well as recommendations from networks and influencers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Another phenomenon arising from the use of social media is the “Fear of Missing Out”, or more commonly known as FOMO (Dinh & Lee, 2021). According to Buglass et al. (2017), FOMO refers to the emotional response associated with social exclusion or missing out on positive experiences, as well as a pronounced desire to remain continually informed. The FOMO phenomenon fuels consumer anxiety to keep up with trends and drives consumers to purchase products, thereby potentially increasing impulsive buying behaviour (Çelik et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2019).

In contrast to other consumption behavioural theories, Stern argues that e-commerce could potentially result in impulsive buying as consumers are exposed to a broader range of products which are easily accessible (Madhavaram & Laverie, 2004). In addition to the wide range, other factors, such as personalised offers and easy payment options, also contribute to impulsive online shopping. In light of these factors, as well as the abundance of information

provided to consumers constantly, social media platforms which have shopping functionality embedded into them play a significant role in driving impulsive buying (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2018).

2.14 Ultra-fast fashion case study: Shein

Given Shein's rapid rise over the last five years and its global popularity, this section presents an overview of its business model and strategies. Shein epitomises the ultra-fast fashion model, a term which is still new and not as widely explored as fast fashion.

2.14.1 History

Pronounced as “She-in”, Shein was founded in 2008 by Chris Xu. When it first started selling in 2012, it focused on wedding dresses for the Western markets but later expanded into women’s apparel to provide cheap clothing to the middle-class consumers (Plé & Yacoub 2022). In recent years, the company expanded its offerings to include men’s and children’s clothing, shoes, cosmetics, accessories, handbags, and even household items. From its early days around 2010, it prioritised exporting its products, starting with the United States and thereafter moving to Spain, France, Russia and Germany, avoiding the Chinese market altogether (Plé & Yacoub 2022). Today, Shein’s presence spans across more than 200 countries. The online-only fashion retailer benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic, with sales surging from 10 billion USD to 100 billion USD between 2020 and 2022 (Rajvanshi, 2023). In 2022, the ultra-fast fashion gained the top spot as the most popular fashion brand, valued at more than Zara and H&M combined. In 2023, Shein had approximately 88.8million active users, of which 17.3 million were from the US market (Curry, 2025).

2.14.2 Shein’s ultra-fast fashion model

Shein’s success is built on its business model, which entails an entirely online store, extensive use of data, AI and powerful algorithms, as well as its gamification and social media marketing strategies. Shein sells its products through its website and app, which has the benefit of lower costs. Customer orders are delivered directly from China, and under country-specific customs and duty laws, orders under a pre-specified value are exempt from duties, thereby maintaining their low cost. However, given the rapid growth of Shein and the impact on local retailers, more recently, countries have started to re-examine this. From a consumer perspective, the wider selection and extremely low prices compensated for the longer shipping time (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023). Another key success factor entails the use of data, AI and algorithms in all aspects of its business, including design, trend analysis, sales forecasting

and marketing (Jin & Shin, 2020). Data is gathered from various sources, such as customer profiles, apps, and social media. Shein's edge in algorithm use comes from a custom tool paired with Google Trends (Li, 2021).

Initially, the company formed an in-house design team and built a multi-supplier network with 6,000 Chinese manufacturers. One of the key attributes of the model is that the company is acutely focused on identifying trending fashion styles and consumer tastes and preferences. When a promising fashion trend is identified, small-batch tests are run to see if consumers respond positively; if they do, more units are produced to meet consumer demand. Between July and December 2021, Shein introduced between 2,000 and 10,000 items to its app daily (Deighton, 2023). This approach is referred to as the "Large-scale Automated Test and Reorder (LATR) model. It was estimated that this approach generated twenty times more new items than Zara or H&M (Deighton, 2023).

The other side of the platform model is customer-facing, whereby it utilises advanced analytics and deep expertise in digital marketing to strategically position fast fashion items before targeted audiences on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, as well as its own website and mobile app. Furthermore, it leverages email marketing, influencer collaborations and paid promotional efforts to engage its intended demographic segments, initially within the United States and subsequently across a significant portion of the global market (Deighton, 2023). By 2023, the Shein app had claimed the top spot for shopping app downloads, garnering a social media fan base of over 100 million, 31 million on Instagram and 880,000 on TikTok (Zhou, 2025).

Shein's low price appeal is a key feature of its business model. Its efficient supply chain configuration allows it to deliver merchandise at an extremely low price point. When compared with traditional retailers or even other online retailers, similar items are much cheaper on Shein. The company's objective is to allow everyone to enjoy fashion irrespective of the economic circumstances. This low-price strategy appeals to their targeted group of consumers, such as Gen Z, who are both fashion-conscious and extremely price sensitive (Lui et al., 2022).

In comparison to traditional retailers and other fast fashion companies, Shein offers a wider range at a lower price. This provides consumers with an ongoing supply of updated, trendy fashion, thereby boosting its popularity through recurring sales. The variety offered also includes a wider assortment of sizes, as plus-size clothing accounts for 19% of their stock, being the highest when compared to its peers (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023).

2.14.3 Shein's marketing strategies

Shein's target market is primarily young women and Gen Z customers who are price sensitive but also fashion and trend-driven in their consumption habits (Chen, 2023). Given that Shein is an online retailer, a key success factor is its marketing strategy.

2.15 Social media

The key aspects of Shein's social media marketing strategies include user-generated content and influencer marketing. User-generated content strategies aim to bring to life people's shopping experiences by showing off their purchases. With regard to Shein, this was done through YouTube video content such as "haul videos" or "product unboxing". By doing this, the brand and merchandise come across as more authentic, as the content posted on social media is created by regular Shein customers, making it more appealing and realistic (Huang, 2024). Apart from collaborating with well-known celebrities, Shein also adopted an aggressive social media influencer strategy to drive more personalised and targeted advertising. For example, when entering a new market, they would utilise local influencers who are more relatable and well-known in those regions.

The focus was on a micro-influencer strategy whereby they utilised influencers without large followings but who were impactful in targeting certain groups. In addition to this, the company used sponsored ads on TikTok and Instagram with promotional codes. This subsequently helped the influencers become more popular as sponsored advertisements are a paid-for service which increases visibility/ ranking, placing the advert in front of the targeted audience. The *#shein* hashtag videos received over 26.3 billion views on TikTok alone by April 2022, higher than any of its competitors. Influencers were also allowed to earn commissions when a follower purchased an item based on a recommendation – this is known as an affiliate marketing programme, commonly used by companies like Amazon and AliExpress (Fong, Wang & Huang, 2022).

2.16 Loyalty programmes and gamification

Anyone opening the Shein app is familiar with the "Spin the wheel" feature. Once a user clicks to spin the wheel, they are offered a prize in the form of a discount. Shein actively employs gamification strategies and loyalty programme tactics to keep customers engaged and drive recurring purchases on its website and app. This also makes the shopping experience fun and engaging for consumers, keeping them on the app for longer (Sahu et al., 2025; Uchańska-

Bieniusiewicz & Oblój, 2023). Gamification elements include spin-the-wheel games, special offers, and flash sales, which also create a sense of urgency to act before the offer expires. In addition to this, consumers can earn points for simple tasks such as reviewing an item purchased or posting pictures of the item; these points then unlock further discounts on future purchases. According to research done by Heredero et al. (2025) and Kong et al. (2025), gamification strategies are shown to drive user engagement and promote impulsive buying behaviour.

2.17 Concerns

Despite Shein's success and strong resonance amongst consumers, several concerns have been raised, including tax violations, disregard for intellectual property rights, and undesirable environmental and social issues (Bhattacharya & Agnihotri, 2025). Despite the company's rapid growth and basically democratizing fashion by making it accessible to a broader group of consumers globally, Shein continues to receive criticism on a range of issues, such as intellectual property rights infringement, tax violations, and environmental and social concerns.

Given that Shein's model is based on replicating trending fashion, they have been accused of copyright infringement on several occasions (Fong, Wan & Huang, 2022). In some regions, copyright laws do not offer protection for the entire garment design but just the creative elements, offering little protection to smaller up-and-coming designers, local designers and local fashion industries. In the most high-profile cases, Shein was accused of copying designs belonging to Dr Martens, a well-known shoe brand, Levi's and Ralph Lauren.

2.17.1 Tax infringements

Authorities around the world have accused Shein of exploiting tax loopholes that allowed customer purchases to avoid import customs and duties. By doing so, Shein maintained its price competitiveness compared to local retailers who were subject to a larger cost structure (Bhattacharya & Agnihotri, 2025).

2.17.2 Environmental and social concerns

The fashion industry is reported to be one of the most highly polluting industries in the world, and as such, Shein's rapidly growing business has come under scrutiny. The lack of available information by the company with regard to sustainable practices drives further speculation around the production of the garments and the impact on the environment (Bhattacharya & Agnihotri, 2025).

2.17.3 Social concerns

According to a Greenpeace International study, random testing was conducted on a sample of 47 Shein items. The results revealed extensive use of toxic chemicals in 15% of the samples tested, which breached European Union regulatory limits. The use of toxic chemicals has a two-fold impact: it can cause health issues and negatively affect the environment (Bhattacharya & Agnihotri, 2025). Furthermore, a report published by the company in 2021 provided insight into the working conditions at the factories supplying Shein. It revealed that employees were working 75 hours a week with only one day off a month, in violation of local labour laws that prescribed 40 hours a week. In the Sustainability and Social Impact report, it was found that most issues were related to poor working conditions, as 14% of the violations pertained to long working hours and 28% to safety standards (Lui, 2022).

2.18 Consumer attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion

The present study frames consumer attitudes through the Affective Behavioural Cognitive (ABC) model of attitudes.

2.18.1 Affective Behavioural Cognitive (ABC) model of attitudes

An individual's attitude refers to the tendency to evaluate something specific in their environment in either a favourable or unfavourable manner, i.e. the outcome is either positive or negative. Attitudes are made up of three primary dimensions: affective, conative or behavioural and cognitive. The affective component encompasses the emotions or feelings associated with the product or subject, the behavioural part deals with the actions one takes based on the attitude formed and the cognitive component refers to what the individual believes to be true or knows about the product (Katz, 1960; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

2.18.1.1 Affective

Affective attitudes are the emotional responses consumers associate with ultra-fast fashion. For many young people in South Africa, buying these products is a source of empowerment, self-assurance, and pride. The possibility to keep up with global trends facilitates expression of the identity and drives social acceptance, especially in the digital age of Instagram or TikTok. Strong positive emotion is intensified by drivers, such as the fear of missing out (FOMO). The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) psychology construct aims to explain consumer behaviour in the context of social media influence. The construct states that an unrestricted, continuous exposure to information on social media platforms puts pressure on individuals in

that they need to keep up with the latest trends, which often span across several categories, of which fashion is one of the key ones (Blase et al., 2023).

Wojdyia and Chi (2024) found that Gen Z consumers are driven by a desire for status, which is associated with feelings of empowerment and social belonging. This, in turn, makes ultra-fast fashion very appealing to this group. Studies indicate that clothing consumption can be influenced by various emotional states, including excitement, the desire for self-reward, and efforts to cope with a low mood (Didi et al., 2019).

2.18.1.2 Cognitive

In terms of beliefs, the most prevalent research is based on the awareness levels of consumers with regard to sustainability concerns in the ultra-fast fashion industry. Zhang et al (2021) found that consumers are aware of the various issues around sustainability and ethics in fast fashion. Additionally, a study by McNeill and Moore (2015) also found awareness of sustainable and ethical consumption. Didi et al. (2019) reported that participants viewed sustainable clothing as costly and unaffordable.

2.18.1.3 Affordability and variety

In a study by Esposti et al. (2024), it was found that consumers choose to purchase from Shein due to highly affordable prices and a wide variety of merchandise. In addition to this, it was also found that the availability of sizes catered for all body types and therefore viewed it as being inclusive and empowering to females.

2.18.1.4 Behavioural

The most cited behavioural aspects of ultra-fast fashion include impulse buying, overconsumption and sustainable purchasing habits. According to Diddi et al. (2019), social media influence and the affordability of ultra-fast fashion merchandise result in overconsumption, particularly amongst young adults. Similarly, these factors also promote a culture of impulsive buying (Diddi et al., 2019). With regards to the overconsumption, Lundbland and Davies (2016) found that fast fashion consumption behaviour is considered the norm and socially accepted, particularly with younger shoppers, as they are unaware of the undesirable consequences of overconsumption.

2.19 Sustainable consumption behaviours

Zhang et al. (2021) found that awareness does not necessarily translate into positive habits, i.e a shift to sustainable options. McNeill and Venter (2019) noted that while there is a general consumer concern about sustainability issues, such as environmental concerns, buying behaviours are not reflective of this, as stronger motivating factors, such as affordability and quality, influence decisions. Furthermore, it was found that consumers' strong desire for the product drives them to purchase, outweighing any ethical concerns (McNeill & Venter, 2019). Several other academics are in agreement that awareness alone does not result in sustainable behavioural outcomes, fashion purchases are rather driven by other factors such as cost, quality accessibility as well as subjective motivators such as beliefs, attitudes, social norms and emotions (Bläse et al., 2023; Bock et al., 2021; Miranda & Roldán, 2024; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021).

This phenomenon, whereby sustainability awareness does not translate into positive habits such as reduced consumption or sustainable buying practices, is known as the attitude-behaviour gap (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Didi et al. (2019) further substantiate this in their study, that although there is general awareness of sustainability, participants were unable to associate this knowledge with their own consumption behaviours. Where consumers engage in sustainable consumption, this is often in the form of exploring substitutes, such as thrift shopping, thereby not addressing the issue of consumption levels (de Koning et al., 2024).

2.20 Theoretical frameworks

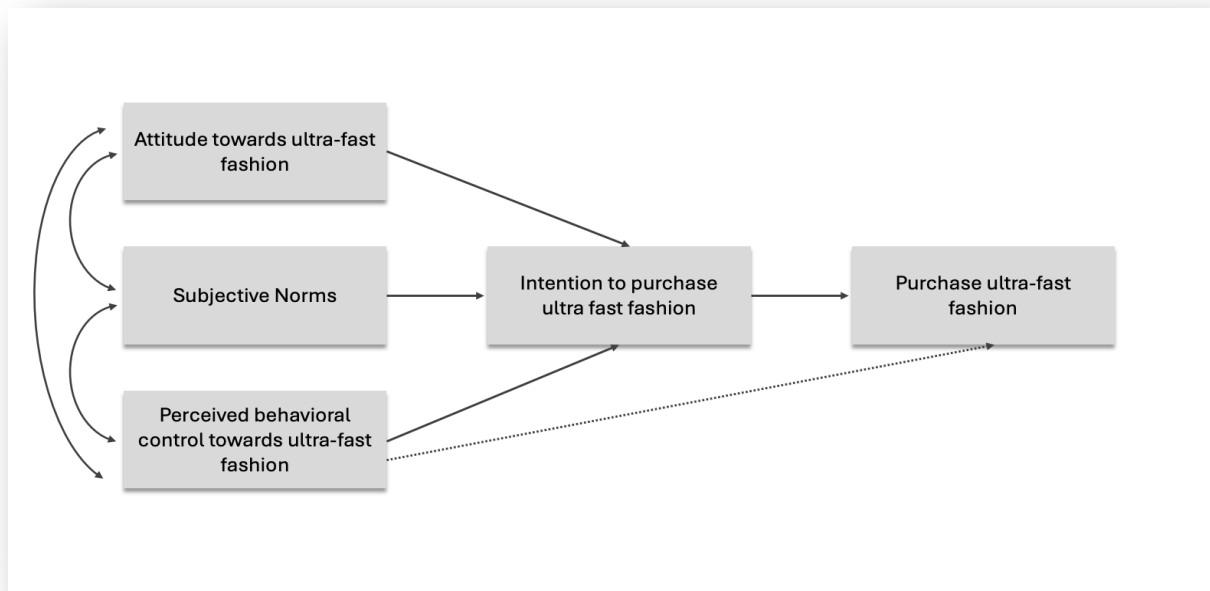
In order to comprehend the multifaceted nature of the attitudes of South African consumers to ultra-fast fashion, it is necessary to base the research on well-known theories and frameworks related to the field of consumer behaviour, fashion marketing, and sustainability. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was identified as the most suitable framework for the research context.

2.20.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a well-established and widely used framework in the field of psychology used to explain and predict human behaviour across several diverse areas such as health, consumer outcomes and actions related to sustainability. According to Ajzen (1991) the theory states that human behaviour is driven by intentions; however, these intentions are influenced by three key components, namely: (1) Attitude towards the

behaviour, (2) subjective norms and (3) Perceived behavioural control. Figure 8 below shows the relationship between behaviour, intentions and the three components driving intention.

Figure 8: Theory of Planned Behaviour in ultra-fashion consumers



Source: Adaptation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour applied to ultra-fast fashion consumers (Own elaboration based on Azjen, 1991)

The attitude towards the behaviour as a driver of intention refers to the extent to which an individual has a positive or negative view towards the outcome (Azjen, 1991). Therefore, if an individual views the outcome in an optimistic light, this results in a positive attitude (Nam, Dong, & Lee, 2017). A consumer's attitude towards ultra-fast fashion can be either positive, which indicates satisfaction, or negative, which reflects disapproval or unfavourable perceptions.

In ultra-fast fashion, the attitudes dimension refers to the consumers' opinion of how favourable the experience of purchasing from ultra-fast fashion platforms appears to be, considering variables such as variety, affordability and trendiness versus the unfavourable aspects, such as lead time for orders, uncertainty around quality and size, the returns process, as well as unsustainable and unethical practices. Furthermore, within the context of South Africa, research shows that in times of economic hardship, consumer demand for cheap fashion options is high, which makes ultra fashion more favourable for consumers, given its affordability (Richardson et al., 2022).

The second driver of intention is based on the social aspect, subjective norm is the opinion of other individuals who are important to the individual, specifically their views with regard to performing the behaviour (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressures that may influence individuals' decisions regarding purchasing from ultra-fast fashion brands. In a country like South Africa, given the appreciation for economic hardships and the desire to be fashionable, ultra-fast fashion is encouraged and widely accepted, as it enables consumers to stretch their income.

The third factor contributing to intention is that of Perceived Behaviour Control (PBC), which is based on the perceived level of difficulty in performing the behaviour. The level of difficulty may be based on past experiences or anticipation of future difficulties associated with the behaviour (Azjen, 1991). When applying this to the research, it considers consumer access to the ultra-fast fashion platforms (such as Shein and Temu), which encompasses several factors such as internet connectivity, ease of use of the platform in terms of product selection and the checkout process, as well as the availability of suitable payment options, customs and duties, and the delivery process.

2.21 Conclusion

The introduction of fast fashion was a pivotal moment for the industry, as it made clothing from fashion shows and the catwalk accessible to the broader population. However, through rapid advances in technology, the introduction of ultra-fast fashion has taken this further by making trendy apparel affordable to everyone irrespective of their economic backgrounds, akin to the disruption seen in other industries. The literature reviewed provides a historical overview of fashion and the transition from fast fashion to ultra-fast fashion. In addition to this, it highlights how the evolution has impacted consumer attitudes and behaviours, specifically with regard to overconsumption. While ultra-fast fashion has democratised access to the latest fashion trends, making it affordable to all, it has also introduced significant environmental and social challenges, which include excess pollution, increased waste and unethical labour practices. The literature has provided evidence on the role of social media in shaping consumer behaviour and fuelling impulse buying behaviour.

From a South African perspective, the ultra-fast fashion industry has experienced significant growth over a short period, impacting local retailers and ultimately the economy. Females and the younger generations are attracted to the appeal of convenience, affordability and the ability to update their wardrobes more regularly. The literature also provided evidence that while in

developed countries there is an increasing awareness of the environmental and ethical implications of ultra-fast fashion, practical considerations such as affordability, convenience and the large selection of trending fashion take precedence in the decision-making process.

The application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a robust conceptual framework that seeks to understand the drivers of purchase intention by investigating the interplay between attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Aligned to the overall study, which examines consumer attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion, the ABC model of attitudes is utilised to get a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes. The next chapter will delve deeper into the understanding of the research questions that this study seeks to answer

Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the research problem articulated in Chapter 1, as well as the literature provided on the topic of ultra-fast fashion in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the research questions that directed this study. According to Bell et al (2019), “a research question provides an explicit statement of what it is the researcher wants to know about” (p.09).

3.2 Research Questions

Ultra-fast fashion consumption in South Africa can be seen as a double-edged sword; on one hand, it provides female consumers access to affordable and trendy fashion, which is a key driver of one’s identity construct and self-image. On the other hand, the repercussions of ultra-fast fashion business models are wide-reaching. In light of this, the research questions that underpinned the study are:

RQ1: What are South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion?

The study will aim to ascertain whether South African female consumers' attitudes are positive or negative.

RQ2: What are the predominant factors that influence or shape consumers' attitudes?

Given the outcome in RQ1, the factors influencing the outcome will be identified through the study.

3.3 Research Aims

This study aims to explore and describe South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion to indicate whether they are positively or negatively inclined toward it. The second aim is to also describe how their attitudes are shaped, identifying the predominant influencing factors, of which several are mentioned in the literature, such as digital/social influences, affordability, and ethical issues.

3.4 Conclusion

The questions presented in this chapter formed the basis of this research. Following this, chapter four details the research methodology utilised for the purposes of this research, with

the chosen method guided by the researcher's intended outcomes. Building on this, based on the research questions and the methodology, Chapter five presents the research findings.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to explore the main drivers of South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion. The study aims to gain an understanding of the attitudinal components, i.e. cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings/emotional) or conative or behavioural (intentions), and to ascertain which of the three is the most dominant in influencing consumers' attitudes. While quantitative methods prioritise measurement and generalisation, qualitative research is centred on understanding human experiences, meanings, and the contextual factors that influence them (Walliman, 2011). This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate as it enables an in-depth examination of participants' beliefs, emotional responses, and behavioural intentions, dimensions that are central to the concept of attitude as defined in consumer psychology (Ajzen, 1991; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This chapter further elaborates on the specific methodological choices made in this study. It will discuss the research paradigm guiding the inquiry, the sampling strategies employed, the data collection instruments and procedures, and the analytical techniques used to interpret the findings. Ethical considerations and measures to ensure trustworthiness and credibility will also be addressed. By adopting a robust, context-sensitive qualitative methodology, the study aims to generate meaningful insights into the multidimensional nature of consumer attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion in South Africa.

4.2 Choice of methodology

4.2.1 Research approach

In research methodology, two main approaches are commonly employed: qualitative and quantitative, each serving distinct purposes and guided by different philosophical underpinnings. The quantitative approach is rooted in positivism, emphasising objective measurements, numerical data, and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and establish patterns that can be generalised to larger populations (Creswell, 2014). It is most effective in research contexts where variables are clearly defined and measurable, and the goal is to quantify relationships or test theoretical models. In contrast, the qualitative research approach chosen for this study aligns with interpretivism and focuses on understanding human behaviour and the meaning people attach to their experiences. It emphasises depth over

breadth, allowing researchers to explore complex social phenomena, subjective experiences, and context-specific understandings that cannot be gleaned from numbers alone.

In this study, the qualitative research approach has been purposefully selected because it aligns with the central aim of exploring which is the primary attitudinal driver (cognitive, affective, or conative) of South African female consumers towards ultra-fast fashion. Attitudes are multi-dimensional, stemming from emotions, values, and goals which are influenced by individual contexts, social norms, cultural backgrounds and economic circumstances (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2017). These subjective and context-dependent dimensions are not easily captured through quantitative surveys or numeric data. A qualitative approach provides the tools to engage with multiple layers of complexity and uncover the meanings participants attach to their consumption behaviours, especially within a developing country context such as South Africa.

Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to explain *what* is happening and *how often*, qualitative research seeks to understand *why* something is happening and *how* individuals experience it. For example, consumers may be aware of the ethical and environmental criticisms surrounding ultra-fast fashion, yet continue to participate in it due to affordability, peer pressure, or aspirational lifestyle values. These contradictions between values and actions, awareness and behaviour are often difficult to quantify but are central to the study of attitudes. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to investigate these tensions through methods such as in-depth interviews, using open-ended questioning, and thematic analysis, which provide space for participants to articulate their thoughts, reflect on their choices, and share personal views that might reveal hidden motivations and influences.

4.2.2 Research paradigm

The research in the current study is grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm, a philosophical perspective that generally examines how individuals make sense of and construct meaning from their experiences and social contexts. Interpretivism argues that reality is not one objective truth that exists independently of human observation but is socially constructed through culture, context, language, and individual consciousness (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). This ontological stance is perfectly aligned with the study's key objective, which is to investigate the drivers of South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion. Since attitudes are multi-dimensional psychological constructs, the interpretivist paradigm offers a suitable approach to study how these components intersect in actual experiences.

Furthermore, interpretivism makes it perfectly acceptable to use qualitative methods like in-depth interviews, focus groups, and looking for patterns in people's responses. These techniques are useful for getting to grips with the ins and outs of what consumers really think and feel in real-life situations, as they help gather rich, detailed stories about their experiences.

4.3 Exploratory study

An exploratory study investigates "what is happening" (Saunders et al, 2009). Therefore, this research is considered exploratory in nature as it aims to explore the "what" and the "how".

4.4 Level and unit of analysis

Subsequent to data collection, the data is aggregated and prepared for the analysis stage. The level at which the data is aggregated is referred to as the unit of analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, the unit of analysis is the individual South African consumer, specifically, females over the age of 18, who frequently engage with ultra-fast fashion platforms. Each participant represents a distinct data point; therefore, the unit of analysis is the individual level. This level of analysis aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and the study's qualitative design, prioritising subjective meaning-making and contextual depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

4.5 Sample selection criteria and sample size

The population for this study comprises South African female consumers aged 18 years and older, particularly those who are familiar with or engaged in the consumption of ultra-fast fashion products. Several sampling techniques can be utilised in qualitative research; these include purposive sampling, snowball sampling, self-selection sampling, and convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2009).

Purposive sampling entails adopting a strategic approach to sampling in that the participants are not sampled on a random basis, but rather participants are selected based on relevance to the research study (Bell et al., 2019). Purposive sampling, therefore, allows for the researcher to use judgment in selecting participants who are most suitable to answer the research question (Saunders et al, 2009). In this study, purposive sampling was utilised as the primary sampling technique. This non-probability sampling method allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants who are knowledgeable about or have direct experience with the subject under investigation. The focus is not on statistical representativeness but on the

depth and relevance of insight. The sample set was recruited through the researcher's network to recruit across three age categories, ensuring a broad representation of age groups:

- Category 1: 18 years to 30 years,
- Category 2: 31 years to 45 years, and
- Category 3: older than 45 years.

The study anticipates recruiting 17 participants, final numbers guided by the principle of saturation (Saunders et al., 2016). The sampling strategy was therefore reflective of a population that engages with the purchase of ultra-fast fashion items and a sample set that also engages with social media platforms.

4.6 Research instruments

Based on qualitative interview techniques, the applicable research instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview and an interview guide, also referred to as an interview schedule. The interview guide underpinning the semi-structured interviews was based on a predetermined set of themes (Saunders et al., 2019) to assist the interview process, thereby allowing the interviewer to gain insights into the specific themes identified. This construct also facilitated data analysis.

The semi-structured interviews are unstructured interviews which allow for in-depth questioning and are guided by a set of themes. They also allow flexibility, as additional questions can be asked to gain deeper insights (Saunders et al., 2009). Under this approach, the interviewer has a set of questions known as the interview guide; however, the interviewee is free to deviate from it (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, this approach allowed the interviewer to pose questions which may not be on the interview guide (Bell et al, 2019).

The interview guide for the study was prepared with open-ended questions; care was taken not to pose leading questions or to influence the participant's responses in any way. To test the possible range of questions in the interview guide, the guide was tested with the researcher's supervisor. This allowed the interviewer to get valuable feedback on the interview technique and a sense of whether the participants could make sense of and respond to the questions (Bell et al., 2019).

The interview guide was prepared using the three components of Attitudes, which are cognitive, affective, and conative, as per the theoretical frameworks presented in the literature

review section. Each component is made up of three or four open-ended questions aimed at determining what factors underpin the three attitudinal components. Furthermore, additional concepts such as understanding of ethical considerations and the impact of social media were incorporated into the questionnaire under the applicable attitudinal component. The interview schedule used in the study is presented as Table 1 in **Appendix 1**.

4.7 Data gathering process

Qualitative data collection methods include interviews, observations, existing documents, audiovisual or social media sources of information, all of which are open-ended in nature, whereby participants share their experiences or views freely as opposed to being constrained by predetermined measures or tools, which is the case in quantitative studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Primary data refers to data obtained by the researcher to address the problem at hand. As a result, this data is tailored to address the particular issue under investigation. In this study, primary data were collected post-receiving ethical clearance (ethical clearance must be attached as an **Appendix 3**), with the interviews conducted over a week. Upon receiving ethical clearance, the participants were sourced through personal and social networks. Meetings were set up accordingly, and participants were requested to sign an informed consent form as shown in **Appendix 2**, which is in line with the University of Pretoria's rules. The consent form was administered via an online tool called Signwell and by email.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which enabled open-ended questioning and facilitated the collection of in-depth insights. The interviews were conducted directly with individual participants to surface underlying motivations, beliefs, and emotions related to ultra-fast fashion buying experiences. The tone was conversational, whereby the researcher asks questions and listens, and the participant answers the question with further discussion being built upon.

The study followed a deductive approach, where an interview guide was prepared prior to the interviews to structure the conversation with participants. The interview was semi-structured and sectioned into three categories in line with the ABC framework of attitudes.

The interview began with getting to know the participant's age, occupation, etc. Thereafter, section one covered the cognitive (beliefs or awareness) dimension of attitudes, which tried to ascertain what the participant knows about ultra-fast fashion. The following section covered the emotional aspect of attitudes, aiming to uncover aspects of ultra-fast fashion that either

excite or concern the participant. The final category covered the conative or behavioural tendencies.

The aim was to conduct 15 interviews; however, two additional interviews were undertaken to ensure data saturation. The interviews (n = 17) comprised 10 to 14 questions and, on average, were 45 minutes in length. There are several options for the medium used to conduct the interviews: face-to-face, telephonic, or online meetings through platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Of the 17 interviews, 14 were conducted telephonically via WhatsApp, and three were conducted on the Zoom meeting platform. Telephonic meetings were recorded on an iPhone, and Zoom meetings were recorded on the platform. The interview recordings were then transcribed using the well-known online transcription tool Otter.ai. Both recordings and transcriptions are stored without identifiers in a safe, accessible location in the cloud, with Google Drive as the chosen option.

4.8 Qualitative data analysis approach

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data analysis and interpretation were carried out using thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2019). Thematic analysis is an approach used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes in the data and as such serves to organise the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis employed followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: data familiarisation, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Each theme identified aimed to extract valuable insights from the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Inductive and deductive analysis: An inductive or bottom-up approach allows themes to emerge from the data itself and is therefore a process of coding without preconceived coding frames (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductive analysis, by contrast, is driven by theory. The approach followed allowed both inductive coding of the raw data and deductive interpretation grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the FOMO constructs. Themes were analysed in relation to the cognitive, affective, and conative components of consumer attitudes, with attention to ethical tension, digital influence, and affordability considerations. The combined use of inductive and deductive methods enhances analytical rigour and relevance (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014). Figure 9 below shows the steps involved in thematic analysis.

Figure 9: Steps involved in thematic analysis

Step 1: Data familiarisation	Step 2: Initial coding	Step 3: Theme identification	Step 4: Theme review	Step 5: Theme definition	Step 6: Report writing
• Read and re-read the transcripts	• Code or sort through the data to organise into groups	• After sorting through and coding the data -start to analyse the themes • Look for broader themes - main themes and sub-themes.	• Review at the level of coded data • Look into the validity of the themes in relation to the data by re-reading the data set	• Identifying the core of what each theme is about • establishing what aspect of the data the theme pertains to	• Once the final themes have been decided upon – start documenting the analysis and writing the report.

Source: Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006).

4.9 Research quality and rigour

Validity: refers to the robustness of the findings derived from the research (Bell et al., 2019). Reliability concerns whether the research results can be replicated (Bell et al., 2019), thereby ensuring that the data collection and analysis methods utilised will produce consistent results (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reliability and validity can be ensured through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility: The aim of establishing credibility is to ensure that good research practices are used in the study. Credibility can also be sought through member or respondent validation and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is the process of using multiple methods or sources of data. This study included a broad representation of females across different age categories, therefore preventing any bias that might arise from a single group. A well-articulated research process was followed, aligned to good practice under the guidance of an experienced supervisor. The study also conformed to the institution's ethics process, adding further credibility to the data collected. Interviews will continue until no new concepts/themes emerge.

Transferability: Transferability ensures that research findings can be applied to other or similar contexts (Bell et al., 2019). Given the nature of qualitative studies, which are based on in-depth research, Geertz (1973) recommends that researchers provide what is referred to as thick description. With regards to this study, detailed interview transcripts were provided, and interviews were conducted to the point that participants had nothing further to contribute.

Dependability: As per Lincoln and Guba (1985), the concept of dependability involves an auditing process, whereby the research design, research question formulation, participant selection, interview transcripts, and data analysis are appropriately documented, cross-checked, verified for correctness, and accessible if needed. The ethics chapter in this research document addresses the requirements outlined above, while the research design, question formulation and participant selection are provided in the sections above.

Confirmability: Confirmability ensures that the research is as far as possible free from bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is why a broad age group is intentionally recruited, and the questions were designed to avoid leading participants in a particular direction.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Ethics is a critical part of any research and aims to protect the subjects used in the study. Saunders et al. (2009) state that research ethics relates to how research is designed; however, in addition to this, and more importantly, it refers to the access, collection, processing, storage, and analysis of the data underpinning the research. Due to the qualitative nature of the research and its dependence on one-on-one interviews, caution was exercised regarding consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection (Saunders et al, 2009). The research aims to comply with the University of Pretoria/GIBS Research Ethics Committee rules, and accordingly, the proper process has been followed, ensuring the rights of all participants were protected.

4.11 Anonymity of the participants

To provide confidentiality and anonymity, everything that could identify a participant, like names, places, or direct references that may disclose a participant's identity, was removed and substituted with codes, ranging from P01- P15, etc. In addition to this, as a further layer of protection, the data has been stored without any personal identifiers and will be kept for 10 years without identifiers in a protected file.

4.12 Informed consent

Before commencing the questions as per the interview schedule, participants were provided with an overview of the interview process and the topic to ensure they understood the nature of the study. Participants were also advised that participation is voluntary, allowing them to opt out at any time. All participants completed the standard informed consent letter prior to the interview; personal identifiers were removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

4.13 Interview platform and recording

Interviews were conducted by telephone and via Zoom. To maintain integrity, interviews were recorded and transcribed; this will form part of the final submission. This process also ensures compliance with the University of Pretoria/GIBS' ethics rules.

4.14 Data and storage

All required data and storage rules have been adhered to; the researcher takes full responsibility for storing the data for 10 years in a password-protected location on a cloud-based platform such as Google Drive, which can be easily accessed if and when required.

4.15 Research limitations

The research is based on females over the age of 18 and therefore excludes males entirely, which could be a limitation, as the primary attitudinal driver may differ for males. In addition, the research is based in South Africa, a developing country, and the results obtained from this study may not apply to other countries, particularly those considered developed or first-world.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

The study aims to explore the opinions, knowledge levels, emotional responses and behavioural tendencies towards ultra-fast fashion among female consumers in South Africa. Manual thematic analysis was chosen as it allows flexibility, helps reveal many themes and provides a way to systematically observe patterns in the participant responses. Using thematic analysis is suitable for understanding the participants' views and opinions on ultra-fast fashion, the benefits and long-term impact of online shopping on the regional industries and the South African economy. This chapter presents the results of the interviews conducted with South African female consumers exploring the main drivers of attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion brands such as Shein and Temu.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed to identify patterns, ideas, and meanings across the participants' responses. The eight key themes emerged that describe factors influencing consumer attitudes of the participants: 1. convenience; 2. affordability; 3. quality; 4. variety and clothing options; 5. sizing; 6. ethical awareness; 7. social media influence; 8. collective buying practices and delivery fee qualification. Throughout the chapter, direct quotations are included to demonstrate the range and depth of perspectives shared. These are presented with anonymised participant codes (e.g., Participant 1,2, etc.) to maintain confidentiality while providing transparency and traceability.

5.2 Sample population

The sample consisted of South African female consumers between the ages of 18 and 54 residing in Durban and Johannesburg, representing a wide range of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those who are familiar with or engaged in the consumption of ultra-fast fashion products. Table 1 below provides a list of the participants together with the ages, race group and occupation of each participant. Geographic location is not deemed to be relevant and was therefore omitted.

Table 1: List of Participants

Participant	Race	Age	Occupation
P01	Indian	25	Working/ Studying part time
P02	Indian	35	Housewife
P03	Black	37	Working – Teacher
P04	Black	32	Working – Financial Manager
P05	White	39	Working – Risk
P06	Black	19	Student (matric)
P07	White	46	Working – Procurement Manager
P08	White	22	Working – au pair
P09	White	52	Working – Executive Assistance
P10	Coloured	18	Student (matric)
P11	Black	34	Working – Comms specialist
P12	Coloured	54	Working – Executive Assistant
P13	Indian	41	Working – self employed
P14	Indian	19	Studying/ part-time work
P15	White	35	Working – Banking Customer Experience
P16	Coloured	19	Studying/ working
P17	Black	29	Working – Lecturer

5.3 Familiarisation with the data

Familiarisation with the collected qualitative data is the first phase in manual thematic analysis, which helps to get deeply involved with the data to understand its material and broad meaning. For the study, qualitative data were gathered through interviews using unstructured questionnaires. The data presented was obtained through semi-structured interviews with 17 female participants aged between 18 and 54, representing a range of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those who are familiar with or engaged in the consumption of ultra-fast fashion products. 18 open-ended questions in an unstructured questionnaire aimed at getting comprehensive insights from the participants to explore the attitudinal drivers (cognitive, affective and conative) of South African female consumers towards ultra-fast fashion.

5.4 Key themes

The eight key themes are detailed below according to the research questions – namely, the factors that influence South African consumer attitudes and the factors that influence/ shape ultra-fast fashion purchases.

5.4.1 Factors that influence South African female consumer attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion

5.4.1.1 Ethical awareness

Awareness of ethical issues surrounding ultra-fast fashion was mixed. While some participants mentioned hearing about exploitative labour practices, few indicated that these concerns altered their shopping behaviour:

"I do know also rumours that did start out. I can't say that, okay, it was so true and stuff. I've just heard rumours about, you know, the Shein, Shein factories in like Bangladesh that have been employing underage kids and paying them like little to nothing and exploiting them just to get faster production and things like that. I've never done proper research about it, but that's all that I've heard. I do understand that they have, like, massive factories that are, like, really, like, producing clothing items, like, at an extreme rate compared to a normal store, yeah, but that's about that's about it" (Participant 1).

"I mean, only from what I see on social media, nothing that I've also seen being verified, like in terms of documentaries and stuff. But I do believe that it is like, you know, mass production in factories. I'm not too sure about labour laws. That's the stuff I see on social media that makes me feel a little bit conscious about my purchases, but yeah, it's just like real factory, mass production, and not a lot of ethical practices." (Participant 15)

"I feel like no one needs to work long, hard hours just for my convenience. I think it's very unethical, and I'm very much about ethics" (Participant 16).

Additionally, various participants expressed that they lacked familiarity with ethical issues in the ultra-fast fashion industry:

"I have no clue. And I must admit that I try not to understand it, because it will make it easier for me to buy without knowing about the ethics." (Participant 4).

"I don't actually know a lot about it, to be very honest with you. I do know that there, it's a little bit taboo.... It's just because of hearsay and what I've been informed and, you know, like, what happens to the stuff?" (Participant 5).

“...you gotta kind of trust that the countries and have the right labour practices, etc, and the right, right regulations to monitor those things. I don't think it's in the scope of us to be able to evaluate it, you know. And again, when I started to look at it, it's like a rabbit hole. South Africa's labour laws are 13. You can work from 13, you know, and that's, that's approved, that's within the labour law. So, so, you know, is that child labour, etc?” (Participant 7)

“Well, it's exciting for speed as well as choice and accessibility. It's also deeply concerning for sustainability as well as ethics, and how it reshapes our relationship with fashion, because I think fashion lose a lot of artistry and originality, becoming just endless trend chasing, yeah. They and they, they work so hard to get into their fields, and then, you know, they're not appreciated.” (Participant 8).

“...maybe, like, the issue of child labour and stuff like that. But, I mean, you know, is it true? We don't know. You just see all these, all the social media around it” (Participant 12).

Awareness of ethical issues within the ultra-fast fashion industry was generally limited, with the majority either avoiding learning more or dismissing such issues as beyond their control. Overall, the responses indicated that ethical considerations have minimal influence on consumer behaviour.

5.4.1.2 Social media influence

Social media emerged as a prominent influence on awareness and purchasing behaviour. Participants described being constantly exposed to Shein and Temu advertisements, particularly through influencer reviews and ‘haul’ videos across platforms like Instagram and TikTok. However, some participants indicated that they maintained their individual style preferences despite the prevalence of these advertisements:

“The marketing strategies are so aggressive. I mean, even if you download a game, and if you're playing a game and an ad comes up, so far, all of my ads have been Shein and Temu and advertising and things at the end, like, even if you try and click the exit button, you take it directly to the app if it's already downloaded on your phone.” (Participant 1).

“...all amplified by the convenience of social media platforms...I'm not easily influenced, so I will buy according to my style or season or sometimes even what I need at that point in time. So social media doesn't really affect my decisions that in that way. Okay, cool” (Participant 8).

“...social media things is not really a driver for me.” (Participant 9).

“...your haul that does, does play in effect, especially when I think about my feed on Instagram and the type of videos that I get back. It's actually people trying on different outfits from Shein, yes. And then you can say, Oh, actually, I want to get that specific code of what she's wearing, and I want to see what it looks like on sheen. So, there is a push from social media as well.” (Participant 11).

“I think it plays a big role, because keeping up with their trends, obviously, like you see TikTok, Instagram, what's the other one? Pinterest. So, my sister uses Pinterest at times. I know my friends use Pinterest. I'm not really for the Pinterest, but, like, they have an effect on what to buy, because you see, oh, this chick is wearing these shoes. Okay, now I must look into these shoes, because I don't have these shoes. Or this girl has these jeans. Okay, maybe I should look into these jeans, you know” (Participant 14).

“Sometimes, when it is ultra-fast fashion and everyone is trying to keep up with the same trends, especially with social media, the concern is, I'm going to show up wearing the exact same with everyone else, so it also takes your personal identity away.” (Participant 15).

“I don't actually feel like it plays a very big role, because I can see people dressing up in other clothes, and I'm like, it's not for me, or it doesn't really have a big impact on me” (Participant 16).

Social media not only shaped perceptions of product quality but also reinforced social norms around consumption and appearance. Many participants linked their awareness of trends directly to online content, noting that aggressive marketing strategies effectively maintained brand visibility. Others, however, expressed resistance, asserting their independence from online trends.

5.4.1.3 Collective buying and delivery concerns

While most participants were satisfied with delivery timelines, customs duties, and delivery reliability were recurring concerns. However, recent improvements - such as transparent customs calculations within the apps have mitigated many frustrations. Some participants mentioned combining orders with friends or family to meet minimum purchase thresholds for free shipping.

“...how quick the delivery is done. The moment something is a trend, it's automatically on Shein. If you order, within three days a ships from China, within 10 days, you have it in your hand.” (Participant 2).

*“...because then you also get the free delivery sometimes, if you make up an order for 1050”
(Participant 3)*

“The past couple of instances, the customs duty that I paid was almost close to what I paid for the items. Oh, so, yeah, I don't like that. I mean, I know, I know the tariffs have increased, and which, it's funny you should offer, because now I'm more inclined to go look at them as the prices or the customs and stuff” (Participant 12).

“So, the last time that I did a Shein order, it was myself, my sister and my cousin that did an order together... Yeah, we wouldn't put an order in if we're ordering two items. We'd only do an order if we know we're gonna order quite a few items, you know, I also feel like it's not worth it paying for one or doing an order for one thing, and then your delivery and customs are much more expensive than the item itself. You know, then you might as well just buy it in store” (Participant 14).

“...if I'm like shopping and I see that I have to hit a certain limit in order to get a free delivery, I'm going to match that limit, right?...Delivery time is a big influence for me. So before, if I were to use ultra-fast fashion, I really have to plan in advance, because it wouldn't come as quickly because of customs and all of that stuff that happens. But lately, they really upped their game, so I kind of like them a little bit more. But if I, but if I really, I could just, like, simplify it for you. It would be an easy-to-use and simple platform. Yeah, and then the delivery. And if there are fees involved with the delivery, it does also influence where I shop.” (Participant 15).

*“Yes, because, like, for example, sometimes in the office, like, someone will literally just say, like, Hey, I'm doing an order? Do you want to put something in? Because maybe they don't want to buy for, like, the full one. So people just like, join in so that they can make a cart.”
(Participant 15).*

“So, I know there's a minimum value that you make free delivery... so I will do, like a big Shein haul, maybe, like twice, three times a year, max” (Participant 17).

“..it also gets very prevalent, because sometimes someone would even say, look, I only want a few items on Shein. Let me know when you, when you are checking out.” (Participant 17)

Overall, participants expressed general satisfaction with delivery efficiency, frequently highlighting the speed and improved reliability of shipments from Shein and Temu. However, customs duties remained a recurring frustration, with some participants noting that import costs sometimes exceeded the value of their orders. Several participants reported adopting cost-cutting strategies, such as collective ordering with friends or family to qualify for free

shipping. Moreover, transparent customs calculations within the apps were widely appreciated.

Overall, the themes within this section show that participants' attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion are shaped by a blend of limited ethical awareness, consistent social media exposure, and financial considerations around delivery. While many participants had heard about ethical concerns, this issue led to minimal behavioural impact. Social media served as a powerful space for trend visibility and brand reinforcement, although several participants asserted their independence from online influence. Additionally, delivery-related frustrations and collective ordering practices further shaped perceptions.

5.5 Factors that influence or shape ultra-fast fashion purchases

5.5.1 Convenience

Convenience emerged as the dominant theme for several participants, where the ease of online shopping and the ability to make purchases without visiting physical stores were consistently highlighted. This convenience was often described as particularly beneficial for individuals with busy lifestyles or family responsibilities. Participant 2 remarked:

"I can lie in bed at 11 o'clock at night and buy, and I don't have to get up and dress up..." and "...that it's convenient when you need something now to get it now, yeah, but if you don't need it now, you can always wait for your shipment."

The convenience of browsing and purchasing at any time of the day also contributed to positive attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion. Participant 1 also highlighted:

"...convenience of sitting in your own home and chilling on the couch in your pyjamas."

Several participants noted that online shopping allows them to multitask, manage their time more efficiently, and avoid the stress associated with busy malls:

"I don't want to be standing in stores. I don't want to be standing in a line where people are breathing on me, especially after COVID. I don't want to be somewhere where I know 15 other people have changed in the change rooms" (Participant 1).

"Like I live between the Mall of Africa and Sandton City. So, if I can't find something I in the Mall of Africa, I have to go to Sandton City. So, I don't like that, yeah"(Participant 3).

"I am not a person that goes shopping or to the malls, like, I think last time I went to a shopping mall was a good six months ago, and that's, I think that's why I like head just to Shein, because it's just, I don't have to now go to a mall" (Participant 5).

"You just go online, you buy what you want. You don't have to go to multiple stores, and it's not as time-consuming as where I have to go to a mall and walking through the mall just to find a specific item, where I can just search it on Shein, and then it will pop up immediately." (Participant 8).

Participants also commented on the innovation and accessibility of the platforms:

"It's just accessibility to such stores." (Participant 4).

"...the accessibility of it when I put something in my cart..." (Participant 11).

The ability to browse and purchase items at any time, often from the comfort of home, was repeatedly cited as a major advantage, particularly for those balancing work, family, or limited leisure time. This flexibility extended beyond comfort to practicality, as many participants linked online shopping to time efficiency and reduced stress, avoiding crowded malls and queues. The platforms' user-friendly design and rapid product accessibility further enhanced their appeal.

5.5.2 Affordability

Affordability was repeatedly identified as a significant driver that influences purchasing decisions. Participants described ultra-fast fashion as offering significantly cheaper alternatives compared to South African retailers:

"...suggestions from fast fashion platforms, because it's affordable..." (Participant 15).

"If you compare the prices from Shein to YDE, it's a little bit more affordable, even though it's mass-produced" (Participant 16).

"...but there are a lot of affordable dupes." (Participant 17).

Several participants emphasised the cost-effectiveness of the offerings, noting the advantage of purchasing multiple items at a reduced price.

"I think the excitement of like going online and seeing how cheap stuff, I think you can get very carried away by the prices. I mean, who could have thought you could buy like, five hair clips for R15" (Participant 1).

“...50 water bottles were like, gonna be like 700 or 800 rand in Durban, and I think it cost like 400 using Shein” (Participant 2).

“They’re quite reasonable, and I can purchase a lot of things with R1000, rather than, if I go to, you know, to other shops, it may cost me a lot.” (Participant 3).

“So, so you get an evening gown online for 300 bucks. Okay... It looked sleek. It looked beautiful, really stunning. An equivalent dress here is easily two R3000.” (Participant 7).

“...biggest benefit is affordability. So, there's more money to do other things.” (Participant 17).

This price difference was deemed as empowering, enabling consumers to purchase more frequently and experiment with trends they might not otherwise afford. However, a few acknowledged that low prices could encourage overconsumption, with participants noting the temptation to buy unnecessary items simply because they were inexpensive.:

“...the over consumption okay, because of the cheaper prices, you just want to buy everything because it's affordable.” (Participant 6).

“...it's a good thing in the short term, because it's cheap and trendy and there's like, access to all clothing, but in the long term, it's not really good for consumers because it kind of encourages overspending” (Participant 8).

The majority viewed Shein and Temu as financially accessible alternatives to local retailers, frequently describing them as affordable and reasonable. For many, the low prices allowed them to explore trends and expand their wardrobes without financial strain. However, participants also recognised the potentially negative consequences of such affordability, with several admitting that cheap prices encourage impulsive or excessive spending.

5.5.3 Quality Perceptions

Perceptions of quality varied among participants. Some described the products as surprisingly durable given their low cost, while others viewed quality as inconsistent. Many participants reported satisfaction with the quality relative to cost, while others expressed caution and reliance on online reviews. Participant 7 mentioned:

“We've been extremely happy. So, the quality of all the goods, everything from clothing to shoes, belts, hair, bags, etc... But as an example, my daughter, we bought her quite a few evening gowns, and I cannot fault the quality at all”

“Well, from my experience, I think it's good quality” (Participant 9).

“And some were really cheap, like cheap there as well, and also very good quality” (Participant 12).

However, participant 12 also expressed her dissatisfaction with the poor quality of some items purchased previously:

“...Those are also concerns. And, like, just quality standards, because, like, again, going back when we were in clothing, when I was in clothing, one of the things that you have to do is every garment has to pass a quality control and have to go through needle detection and all of these things so that you know, kids clothes doesn't have a broken needle. And you question yourself, have these things pass through these quality processes, because the quality, I think, sometimes takes, your quality checks take longer than the actual production of the garment.” (Participant 13).

Participant 14 noted that while previous clothing purchases were adequate, they are still willing to buy fast fashion items despite concerns about quality.

“It's, it's okay. Like, I've had a few, so when we bought from Temu once, the outfit was nice, but the material was not what we expected. And sometimes, like, you know, you, you prefer to waste certain, what's the word, material? Like, some material where it's, like, weight sticks on you, and then, like, in the picture, it wasn't sticking on the girl, you know, you get me. It's, it's not bad. It's fair, I would say fair.” and

“I would rather go to Shein or Temu, if it's something that I really like, and in the store, it's like 1000 bucks, but on Shein, it's like 200 bucks, and it's the exact same thing. Obviously, the quality may not be the same, but I would rather go to Shein”

Additionally, Participant 15 stated that the quality of ultra-fast fashion items is dependent on the price:

“So, if I am going cheaper, like, let's say I use a cheaper platform, then the quality is going to be cheaper.”

Participants often relied on product reviews and customer photos to assess quality before purchasing. This peer-driven validation process reduced uncertainty and enhanced trust in the platform. Even when quality was perceived as slightly lower than traditional brands, participants justified it based on affordability and convenience.

“I like to look at the reviews and the photos, and I like to buy from specific places, like, if I know I put jeans there, maybe the tops are nice... They take pictures of it, and they'll tell you, yeah,

they'll tell you, Okay, it's true to size or whatever. So, it's quite cool. They use a lot of their own customers to provide feedback on their product, which is quite smart, right?" (Participant 9).

"...with Shein, 100% I always rate, you know, you can go in like, rate items, and whenever you review your items... I hate that fabric, so, so I do look at the reviews" (Participant 15).

Most participants expressed satisfaction relative to the low price point, describing Shein and Temu products as surprisingly durable and well-made, particularly when expectations were adjusted for affordability. For many, value for money outweighed perfection in craftsmanship. However, others emphasised inconsistency, with some items failing to meet expectations. Despite these reservations, participants often compensated by consulting customer reviews and photos, using peer feedback as a quality assurance mechanism that increased trust in their purchases.

5.5.4 Variety and trend responsiveness

The variety of product options and responsiveness to global fashion trends were key attractions for participants. Many appreciated the wide range of styles, colours, and themes, as well as the rapid introduction of new items:

"I mean, on Shein and Temu, there's so many varieties and styles" (Participant 1).

"So, I think it's the fact that there's so much, and there's an abundance of it, and there's so makes you want to buy all the time" (Participant 2).

"They have a variety of things. So, it's not just limited to the recent trends. They have different brands under; there are shops that cater to different styles and some of the things you might not usually find in on like a physical store in South Africa" (Participant 4).

"I do shop most of the time online, just because it's more convenient and also there's a wide variety, then going in store" (Participant 6).

"...look what's on the app, and as well as the variety, and it's not as expensive as going to the shop and using petrol or Uber" (Participant 10).

Participants highlighted that the ability to shop across seasons is another distinct advantage. This year-round access to diverse styles reinforced Shein and Temu's appeal over traditional retailers constrained by seasonal cycles.

“You cannot get evening wear in May because evening wear is for November. So, like, you know, stores become difficult, like, with evening wear as well. It's the accessibility to evening wear, you know, throughout the year” (Participant 13).

“But if there's like, an event like tonight, it's my cousin's graduation and I'm like, “Oh, should I go get something from Zara?” And surely not. There's something in your wardrobe... I'm always someone wearing Christmas clothing” (Participant 17).

The extensive range of products, styles, and colours - paired with rapid turnover and responsiveness to global trends created a sense of excitement and constant novelty. This continuous stream of new products encouraged repeat browsing and impulsive purchases. Participants also appreciated that Shein and Temu cater to multiple aesthetics and unique preferences. Additionally, year-round access to seasonal clothing, such as being able to buy Christmas wear at any time, further enhanced consumer satisfaction.

5.5.5 Sizing and fit

Sizing and inclusivity emerged as an influencing factor for many participants, who noted that online platforms cater to a wider range of body types compared to South African stores. For several participants, variety and sizing are considered together as some of the women highlight the lack of sizing options in “trendy” clothing items sold in local stores:

“...I learned that I normally try South African sizes because very similar to Shein. Okay, I feel like South African clothing sizes are similar to Shein. So, what I would do is try it on, yeah, but just to be safe, I buy one size bigger, and generally that works for her and with me” (Participant 2).

“Yes, I cannot shop at Zara because, like, they only go out to a certain size, so I know that I can find the size that I'm looking for, guaranteed on Shein” (Participant 5).

“But then again, if I look at platforms like Shein, they have a tall section, because I'm quite tall, but I'm very small built. So, when I go to the tall section, I can still buy my size, and it will fit my length. Whereas I go to and cotton on or an H&M, I have to buy bigger sizes, because otherwise it's gonna be too short, but then it's too big” (Participant 8).

“I could actually search. I could put that description in, and it threw actually, upsizes, up out for me, and I could choose up to a very, very large, and it gave specifics” (Participant 9).

“...you'll also understand your size. So, for instance, if you're regarded as a medium, you would know, because it's a Chinese brand, you're actually a large, so you actually are able to navigate the quality and the sizing more adequately.” (Participant 11).

“And also, the variety. So yes, obviously I have many, many sizes and stuff like that” (Participant 12).

Several participants also highlighted the challenge with selecting the correct size option as you are not able to try them on in person:

“...the last purchase I did. I normally buy size small pants, but the last purchase pictures I did, the pants were very small, and I was so disappointed. So, you can never really be sure when it comes to Shein sometimes.” (participant 3).

“Sometimes it can be disappointing because of the size range, because I know Shein and sizes are a bit different to the sizes we have here” (Participant 6).

“...I've bought sandals from Shein...they say you're a size four. Now the size four is too big, and you're slipping the whole night, you need a size three, like my normal shoe size is size five, but my shoes are only a size three because it's a big cut” (Participant 10)

Participants also valued the detailed size charts, measurements, and customer reviews with body data and photos, which made selecting the right size easier. However, a few still expressed frustration with inconsistent sizing across items and brands. Participant 1 remarked:

“...but you can always look at the review, so not trying it on doesn't stress me out. I would much rather go according to my measurements”

Participants expressed appreciation for the accommodation of a range of body types by Shein and Temu compared to traditional South African retailers. Many participants praised the platforms' ability to cater to diverse shapes and heights, noting that features such as “tall,” “curve,” and “plus-size” categories make online shopping more accessible and inclusive. Participants also highlighted that detailed size charts, customer reviews, and body measurements helped them make more informed purchases, reducing uncertainty when buying online. However, several acknowledged inconsistencies described frustration when sizing varied between items or differed from South African standards. Despite these issues, consumers demonstrated adaptability, often learning to “buy one size bigger” or rely on peer feedback to navigate differences.

This section demonstrates that consumers' purchasing behaviour is primarily driven by the functional benefits offered by ultra-fast fashion platforms namely, convenience, affordability, clothing variety, and inclusive sizing. Participants consistently emphasised the ease of online shopping, the financial accessibility of products, and the anticipation generated by the regular influx of new trends. Although issues such as inconsistent quality and sizing emerged, consumers adapted by relying on reviews, measurement charts, and past experiences. Collectively, these factors illustrate that purchasing decisions are shaped not by ethical or sustainability considerations but by value, accessibility, and the ability of these platforms to meet diverse personal needs efficiently.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter illustrate an understanding of how South African women engage with ultra-fast fashion platforms such as Shein and Temu. The themes reveal that participants are primarily motivated by convenience, affordability, and the range of options that these platforms provide. These factors have redefined traditional shopping behaviour, shifting purchases from physical retail spaces to digital environments where immediacy and accessibility dominate purchasing decisions.

Participants noted an awareness of how these platforms align with their lifestyles, schedules and individual needs, providing agency in how they shop. While consumers are not entirely oblivious to the ethical implications of ultra-fast fashion, these concerns remain secondary to the personal satisfaction and economic relief that these online platforms provide. The study further highlights the emergence of a digitally literate consumer, one who actively engages with reviews, product photos, and brand reputations to ensure quality and fit. The next chapter will compare and contrast the results of this study with existing literature.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The primary objective of the study is to ascertain what South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion are, and to identify the predominant factors that influence these attitudes. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings of the study in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework underpinning the research. Attitudes, as described by Eagly and Chaiken (1993), reflect an individual's tendency to evaluate an object, issue, or behaviour with varying degrees of favour or disfavour. This definition provides a useful starting point for understanding the largely positive attitudes expressed by South African female consumers toward ultra-fast fashion platforms such as Shein and Temu.

The analysis of the data from the interviews revealed several factors shaping these attitudes, which include: convenience, affordability, variety, sizing inclusivity, social media exposure, and delivery experiences. These findings are discussed in the context of the ABC model of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), which served as the theoretical anchor of the study and can be differentiated between the cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings), and behavioural (actions or intentions) components that emerged across participants' responses.

While the themes are discussed individually, the overall pattern of behaviour is later interpreted through the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which argues that behaviour is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Overall, this chapter highlights how the interplay between personal preferences, social influences, and practical considerations produces largely favourable attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion, even when ethical concerns or quality inconsistencies are acknowledged.

6.2 South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion

The findings from the study suggest that South African female consumers' attitude towards ultra-fast fashion is generally positive, particularly towards platforms such as Shein. This overall positive attitude is shaped by practical considerations such as convenience and affordability, as well as by concrete factors like variety, sizing options, and social media exposure. Even when concerns were raised about ethics, quality, or delivery, these issues did not appear strong enough to change participants' overall views or purchasing behaviour. The sections below discuss each theme in relation to the literature and the ABC model of attitudes.

6.3 Consumers' ethical awareness and concerns

The study showed that most participants had limited knowledge regarding the ethical concerns commonly associated with ultra-fast fashion. Several participants explained that whatever information they had come from social media or general rumours, and they were unsure about the accuracy of these claims. A few participants acknowledged that the industry might have problematic labour practices, but even in these cases, this did not seem to influence their purchasing decisions. The general pattern was that participants continued to buy from Shein despite any uncertainty about its ethical practices.

This finding contrasts with studies conducted in Western contexts, where consumers appear more aware of environmental and labour-related issues associated with fast fashion (Zhang et al., 2021; McNeill and Moore, 2015; Esposti et al., 2024). In countries where sustainability is a prominent part of public discourse, ethical awareness is naturally higher. In the South African context, however, many consumers prioritise more immediate concerns such as affordability, employment, and personal safety.

Even in cases where consumers in other countries are aware of unethical practices, previous studies show that this awareness does not always lead to any behavioural change (Diddi et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021; McNeill & Venter, 2019). The same pattern appeared in this study: although participants had some cognitive awareness of possible ethical issues, it did not translate into negative attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion.

Using the ABC model of attitudes, ethical awareness primarily falls under the cognitive component, as it relates to what consumers know or think they know. The affective component, which involves emotions and feelings linked to the shopping experience, seemed far stronger than any discomfort about ethics. Behaviourally, participants did not indicate any intention to reduce their purchases because of ethical concerns.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), this suggests low perceived behavioural control. Even when ethical issues are known, consumers may feel that avoiding Shein will not make a difference or that they cannot afford more ethical alternatives, which makes it unlikely that awareness alone will change their behaviour.

6.4 The influence of social media on consumers' purchase behaviour

The findings showed that social media plays a noteworthy role in shaping how participants engage with ultra-fast fashion, though it does not influence everyone the same way. Several participants mentioned that they are constantly exposed to advertisements, influencer reviews, and “haul” videos on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. For some, this exposure made them curious about certain items or trends and occasionally encouraged them to search for specific products they had seen online. Others, however, felt they could maintain their own preferences and were not easily swayed by what they saw on social media.

The influence of social media on fashion choices has been widely noted in the literature. McNeill and Venter (2019) explain that fashion often serves as a way for individuals to construct or communicate their identity, and social media enhances this by showcasing how clothes are worn and styled in everyday contexts. Studies focusing on influencer marketing have also highlighted that influencers help build trust and emotional connection with brands, which can lead to increased interest in fast fashion products (Lou & Yan, 2019). More recent studies have found that social media content can shape brand perceptions and encourage trend-following behaviour (Choudhury et al., 2024).

Some research also shows that feelings of “missing out” on trends can lead to impulsive purchases, a pattern associated with FOMO-driven behaviour (Blasé et al., 2023). In this study, the role of social media aligns most strongly with the affective component of the ABC model of attitudes. Participants described social media content as exciting, visually appealing, and inspiring, even if they did not always intend to follow trends directly. For those who were influenced, the attraction seemed less about pressure and more about the excitement associated with discovering new styles and imagining how these might fit into their own lives.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the influence of social media aligns with the concept of subjective norms. Even when participants said they were not directly influenced, the constant visibility of certain trends and the volume of fashion-related content online create a sense of what is popular or acceptable. This can subtly shape what consumers pay attention to, what they consider stylish, and what they eventually purchase.

6.5 Collective buying and delivery concerns

The findings showed that collective buying was fairly common among participants. Several women explained that they often combined orders with family members, friends, or colleagues

to reach the minimum required for free delivery. This practice was described as practical and convenient, especially because delivery fees and customs charges were seen as unnecessary expenses when ordering only one or two items. Although some participants were initially hesitant about delivery times or customs duties, most reported that recent improvements on the platforms have made the process more predictable and less stressful. As a result, delivery issues did not appear to negatively influence their attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion.

Collective buying is not widely discussed in international literature, likely because most studies focus on consumers in developed countries where delivery fees, customs charges, and import costs are not significant concerns. In the South African context, however, combining orders is a logical response to economic constraints and the high cost of delivery for small parcels. This behaviour aligns with the broader theme of affordability seen throughout the study and reflects how consumers adapt to the structural barriers of online shopping in a developing economy.

Within the ABC model of attitudes, collective buying is most closely associated with the behavioural component. It reflects how consumers act to secure lower delivery costs and avoid additional charges. The practice is not only about saving money but also about making the overall shopping process feel worthwhile. Even participants who were wary of customs costs explained that these concerns did not prevent them from buying; instead, they found ways to work around the issue.

In relation to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, collective buying links to perceived behavioural control. Participants described delivery and customs as factors that could influence their choices but also noted that improved delivery times and transparent customs calculations have made the process easier to manage. When consumers feel that they can navigate or counteract these logistical challenges, the perceived barriers are reduced, and their intention to continue shopping on platforms like Shein remains unchanged.

6.6 Factors influencing ultra-fast fashion purchases

6.6.1 Convenience

The study found that convenience was an important factor influencing participants' decisions to purchase from ultra-fast fashion platforms. Most participants explained that online shopping fits easily into their daily routines, especially because they can browse and buy at any time without needing to visit a physical store. This was particularly relevant for female consumers with busy schedules who preferred the flexibility of online shopping.

Broader trends in e-commerce support these findings. The rapid expansion of online shopping, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has reshaped consumer habits, with many people preferring digital platforms instead of traditional retail stores. Reports estimate that fashion remains one of the strongest categories in global e-commerce (Kemp, 2025). Research also shows that consumers value the ability to shop from anywhere at any time, which strengthens the appeal of e-commerce channels (Niu & Zhao, 2023). South African consumer data reflects similar trends, with a significant proportion of internet users engaging in online shopping. A local survey found that women often choose online shopping because it is convenient, particularly for clothing and entertainment purchases (Bizcommunity, 2019).

Within the ABC model of attitudes, convenience is closely linked to the affective component. Participants described feelings of relief, satisfaction, and enjoyment when using platforms like Shein because the process is simple and allows them to avoid the time and effort of in-store shopping. From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, convenience relates to perceived behavioural control. When consumers feel that online shopping is easy and manageable, they are more likely to intend to use and continue using these platforms.

6.6.2 Affordability

Affordability emerged as one of the strongest motivating factors in the study. Participants frequently emphasised that Shein's pricing was significantly lower than what they would find in traditional South African retail stores. For many, this meant they could buy more items within their budget or update their wardrobes without feeling financially strained. Some participants also admitted that the low prices encouraged them to buy more than they needed, often without any guilt, because the financial risk felt minimal.

The importance of affordability aligns with previous studies. For example, Research by Esposti et al. (2024) found that low prices were one of the main reasons consumers preferred Shein. This trend is particularly notable among young consumers and those living in contexts where financial constraints shape shopping behaviour. McNeill and Venter (2019) similarly found that although consumers may express concern about sustainability, price and quality remain stronger influences on actual purchase decisions. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) also noted that fast fashion consumption is driven by quick access to cheap, fashionable items. Affordability also relates to impulsive buying and overconsumption (Diddi et al., 2019), both of which were raised in this study. The low prices can lead consumers to justify buying additional items, sometimes beyond what they originally intended.

In terms of the ABC model of attitudes, affordability relates to both cognitive and affective components. Cognitively, participants know that Shein offers cheaper clothing than most local retailers. Affectively, the low prices generate positive emotions such as excitement and satisfaction, especially when consumers feel they are getting good value. There is also a behavioural link, as the low prices contribute to impulsive purchases and increased buying frequency. From a TPB perspective, affordability reinforces perceived behavioural control. When consumers feel that they can afford multiple items without financial strain, they are more likely to act on the intention to purchase.

6.6.3 Sizing and fit

Sizing and fit emerged as an important factor influencing participants' shopping decisions. Many women noted that traditional retail stores tend to cater to narrow or Western-centric body shapes, which often leaves out consumers who are taller, shorter, curvier, or plus-sized. Participants explained that this lack of inclusivity in local stores made it difficult for them to find suitable clothing. In contrast, they felt that Shein offers a broader range of sizes and styles that accommodate different body types.

Although online shopping does not allow consumers to try on clothing beforehand, most participants felt that Shein's sizing guides, measurements, and customer reviews helped them choose the correct size. Several participants said that, over time, they learned how to interpret the sizing information and select items that fit well. Research by Esposti et al. (2024) supports the importance of inclusive sizing and shows that consumers value brands that acknowledge diverse body shapes. Historically, clothing for larger body types was often unfashionable or limited, which restricted self-expression. Participants in this study expressed that having access to inclusive, trendy clothing positively influenced their confidence and sense of identity. This aligns with other research indicating that fashion can play a meaningful role in self-expression and emotional well-being (McNeill & Venter, 2019).

Sizing and inclusivity relate primarily to the affective component of the ABC model, as participants described positive feelings about finding clothing that fits and flatters their bodies. Feelings of empowerment, acceptance, and excitement were commonly expressed. This theme also touches on the cognitive component, as participants actively recognised that Shein caters for different body types more effectively than many South African retailers. In terms of the TPB, sizing and fit again connect to perceived behavioural control. When consumers feel confident that they can find clothing that fits and can use tools such as reviews and size guides, the perceived difficulty of buying online is reduced, making them more inclined to purchase.

6.6.4 Variety and trend responsiveness

The findings showed that variety and trend responsiveness were strong motivating factors for participants. Many explained that they preferred Shein because the platform offers an extensive and constantly updated range of styles, allowing them to find almost any item they are looking for. Unlike traditional South African retailers, which tend to stock seasonal collections, Shein offers a wide selection of clothing year-round. Participants felt that this made online shopping more enjoyable and allowed them to keep up with current trends at their own pace, and the existing literature supports this pattern.

Shein's business model relies heavily on algorithms, customer data and rapid production cycles, which allow the retail platform to introduce new trends much faster than conventional retailers (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023). Studies have found that this pace appeals especially to younger consumers who are drawn to novelty and the ability to reinvent their style continuously. Joy et al. (2015) also note that the immediate availability of new trends gives consumers a sense of gratification and allows them to express their identities in ways that feel current and relevant.

In terms of the ABC model, variety and trend responsiveness relate to both the cognitive and affective components. Cognitively, participants know that Shein's catalogue offers a broad range of items, which reinforces the perception that they are likely to find what they want. Affectively, the wide range of options creates excitement, especially when consumers imagine how they might style new pieces or experiment with different looks. This emotional appeal seems to play a significant role in shaping positive attitudes.

Regarding the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this theme connects to both perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. The constant availability of new styles makes it feel easy and accessible for consumers to follow trends, reducing the effort required to stay fashionable. At the same time, the visibility of trends on social media and among peers influences perceptions of what is "in style," which can subtly shape purchasing intentions.

6.6.4 Quality perceptions

Quality perceptions among participants were mixed. Some were satisfied with the quality of items they purchased, while others felt that the quality could be inconsistent. Although concerns were raised, most participants said they used customer reviews, photos, and product ratings to gauge quality before buying. These features helped them manage their expectations

and make more informed decisions. Overall, most participants felt that the quality was acceptable given the low price point. This finding aligns with existing literature. Fast fashion relies on inexpensive materials and rapid production methods, which often result in short-lived garments (Niinimäki et al., 2020). However, despite these limitations, fast fashion continues to grow, suggesting that consumers value access to new styles more than long-term durability. Joy et al. (2015) also found that consumers are willing to overlook lower quality if it allows them to update their wardrobe frequently and keep up with trends at a low cost.

Within the ABC model, quality perception primarily falls under the cognitive component. Participants recognised that quality may vary, yet this understanding did not deter them from making purchases. Many appeared to accept the trade-off between quality and price. Reviews and customer images also played a role in shaping behavioural decisions, as participants often relied on these cues to minimise the risk of disappointment. From a TPB perspective, quality perception links to both subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Seeing other customers' reviews and photos can shape beliefs about product quality and reassure consumers that a purchase is safe. At the same time, the availability of these reviews reduces uncertainty and increases consumers' sense of control when deciding what to buy.

6.7 Summary

Based on the findings from this study, it can be concluded that the attitude of South African female consumers towards ultra-fast fashion is generally positive. The factors influencing their attitudes include convenience, affordability, variety and trend responsiveness, sizing and fit and quality of merchandise. In addition to the tangible evidence, intangible factors include a feeling of excitement fuelled by social media exposure and usage, the thrill of scrolling through the app, as well as the confidence gained by wearing fashionable clothes that fit. With regards to ethical awareness, it appears that consumers are not well informed about the pressing issues such as harsh working conditions, child labour and the negative environmental impact. In instances where consumers are aware, they are not fully certain, and there is no intention to stop engaging in ultra-fast fashion purchases as other factors such as affordability, convenience, and variety take precedence.

6.8 Limitations

As with most qualitative studies, there are several limitations to acknowledge. The study drew on a relatively small sample of South African female consumers. While the sample size was sufficient for identifying patterns and generating adequate insights, the study does not allow

for broad generalisation. A larger sample may reveal additional nuances or differences across demographic groups, income levels or regions.

The study also focused exclusively on women; therefore, the findings do not reflect the views or experiences of male consumers or other gender groups. For future research, the inclusion of a more diverse sample could strengthen the understanding of how attitudes toward ultra-fast fashion vary across the population. In addition, the study was limited to South Africa, despite Shein and similar platforms being widely used in other parts of Africa. Extending the research to neighbouring countries may provide a more complete picture of how social, cultural and economic contexts influence consumer attitudes. Finally, the findings were also based on self-reported experiences, which may be affected by memory, social desirability or personal interpretation. A mixed-methods design, or a larger qualitative sample, could help validate or expand on these findings in future studies.

6.9 Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight several areas where South African retailers, policymakers and industry stakeholders can intervene to strengthen the local fashion sector and better respond to consumer needs. Local retailers may benefit from understanding why consumers are drawn to ultra-fast fashion platforms such as Shein. Affordability and variety were strong motivators in this study and echo earlier findings that fast-fashion consumption is driven by access to inexpensive, constantly updated products (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Improving local pricing strategies, offering more frequent product refreshes and extending size ranges may help South African brands compete more effectively.

Affordability also relates directly to economic realities in South Africa. Participants in this study justified overconsumption because the cost of individual items was low, which aligns with findings by Diddi et al. (2019), who showed that lower prices reduce feelings of guilt and encourage higher purchase volumes. Retailers could respond by offering value-based product lines that remain competitive with international ultra-fast fashion platforms while still supporting local employment and production standards.

The study also found limited ethical awareness among participants. Research on ethics and sustainability in fast fashion highlights serious environmental and social costs associated with the industry (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Given that this knowledge does not automatically discourage purchasing, as confirmed in similar studies, there is an opportunity for policymakers and consumer bodies to increase transparency around clothing production.

Public campaigns or retail labelling systems about garment origins, textile impacts, or labour practices could help bridge the gap between ethical concerns and actual behaviour.

In addition, social media played a significant role in shaping perceptions. Influencer-led marketing has been shown to affect trust, desirability and purchase decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). South African retailers may therefore benefit from collaborating with local influencers who reflect diverse body types and styles, reinforcing familiarity and trust among consumers while promoting a stronger sense of local fashion identity.

Finally, this study reinforces the need to improve competitiveness in the local clothing sector. Consumers in this study valued Shein's extensive catalogue and trend responsiveness, which is facilitated by rapid data-driven design cycles. Research on ultra-fast fashion, including recent analyses of Shein's model (Esposti et al., 2024), highlights how the brand's speed and scale disrupt traditional retail structures. Strengthening local manufacturing capacity, improving production turnaround times and encouraging innovation in fabric sourcing and design may help South African retailers reduce reliance on imports and support local job creation. Collectively, these recommendations highlight strategies for South African retailers and policymakers to respond more effectively to the appeal of ultra-fast fashion. Addressing affordability, inclusivity, ethical awareness and digital marketing strategies may help local brands compete more effectively while contributing to domestic economic growth.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this research presents the findings and implications for key stakeholders in the retail fashion industry in South Africa. The study investigated the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control of South African female consumers in relation to ultra-fast fashion. Attitudes were also analysed by examining their affective, behavioural, and cognitive components. Drawing on the research findings and acknowledging the limitations of study, this chapter provides insights and recommendations for fashion retailers and key stakeholders, including policymakers, in addressing challenges presented by ultra-fast fashion companies such as Shein and Temu.

7.2 Findings

- **South African female consumers' attitudes towards ultra-fast fashion**

An analysis of the findings showed that South African female consumers have a positive attitude towards ultra-fast fashion. This was evidenced through their responses on ethical awareness and concerns, the influence of social media on consumer actions and their behavioural tendencies with regard to collective buying and delivery concerns. From an ethical awareness perspective, the findings showed that most of the participants were unaware or uncertain of the ethical issues related to ultra-fast fashion, and hence, it did not deter them from engaging in purchasing from Shein.

While consumer awareness in this study was low in most instances, participants who did indicate a level of awareness indicated that they would continue purchasing from ultra-fast fashion platforms for various reasons. These findings are consistent with existing studies related to the topic of consumer attitudes towards sustainability in ultra-fast fashion. However, a distinction is noted between emerging economies and developed nations. In developed countries, the level of awareness is high; however, in emerging economies, the level of awareness is lower. However, in both instances where awareness is noted, consumers indicated that they would continue purchasing from Shein.

- **The influence of social media on consumer actions**

The findings revealed that participants were influenced by social media in terms of what constitutes trendy and up-to-date fashion. In addition to this, Shein's social media marketing strategies heightened awareness and appeal of ultra-fast fashion merchandise. While participants noted their own personal style preferences prevailed, they indicated that social media allowed them to keep up to date with current trends. These findings are consistent with the numerous studies done on social media influence on fast and ultra-fast fashion purchasing decisions, with many studies citing a link to identity construct, driving a phenomenon called FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), as well as noting the correlation to impulsive buying behaviour.

- **Collective buying and delivery concerns**

While participants were initially hesitant about delivery and customs charges, once tried and tested, they were satisfied with the outcome. Furthermore, many indicated that they welcomed the newly added feature regarding transparency of the customs duty, because it removed the anxiety associated with unknown charges. The findings also showed consumers often combine orders with colleagues, friends or family so that the order is substantial enough to qualify for free delivery. This phenomenon is a factor of the socio-economic conditions in South Africa, whereby consumers are programmed to be cost-conscious and savvy with their income. In comparison to existing literature, collective buying is not widely studied, nor is it a documented behavioural feature associated with ultra-fast fashion. However, it is very relevant in South Africa and is aligned with the broader theme of affordability.

7.3 Factors shaping attitudes

The key factors shaping South African female consumers' attitudes include convenience, affordability, variety and trend responsiveness, sizing and fit, as well as quality of the merchandise. The research highlighted convenience as a key factor influencing their actions. Ultra-fast fashion platforms provided them with the flexibility of being able to shop from anywhere and at any time, saving them the effort of visiting a shopping mall. This finding is consistent with existing literature and is supported by statistics showing the increasing adoption of e-commerce in South Africa. Given the economic climate in South Africa, consumers are shifting their behaviours to more affordable options, thereby allowing them to stretch their incomes. Affordability emerged as one of the predominant influencing factors shaping consumer decisions. This finding is consistent with existing literature, even in cases where there are conflicts of interest, such as ethics, affordability takes precedence.

The large selection of items on offer, as well as the speed at which trending fashion is made accessible on the ultra-fast fashion platforms, was found to be another key motivator. Participants highlighted the appeal of having a large variety to choose from, in comparison to the traditional stores, which updated their ranges less frequently. This finding is consistent with existing research, which showed variety and trend responsiveness to be a key factor influencing consumer behaviours. Sizing options offered on ultra-fast fashion platforms were found to be more inclusive, catering for diverse body shapes and sizes. The participants appreciated this and noted that the traditional stores cater for more Western-centric body shapes and were, hence, limiting.

These findings were once again consistent with existing literature. With regards to the quality, the findings showed mixed reviews with participants acknowledging there are instances where the quality is sub-par; however, given the price point of the garments, it did not deter them. In addition to this, participants through experience and by perusing the reviews had learnt how to navigate around the quality issues.

7.4 Limitations

The study was concentrated in highly urbanised geographic locations, primarily Johannesburg, with a few participants from Durban. Given the diverse backgrounds within South Africa, the study should be expanded to include participants from other Provinces as well as participants outside of urban areas, such as townships. In addition to this, the study can be more targeted in terms of age groups, such as Gen Zs and Millennials, as this will provide rich insights into the motivational drivers for ultra-fast fashion for particular segments of the population. Furthermore, apart from females' fashion, ultra-fast fashion also caters for kids' clothing. The current study focused on age groups above 18 years; therefore, a study can be conducted on kids and teenagers, specifically teenagers who are more driven by social media and peer pressure.

Another limitation of the study is that the sample set focused on female consumers; a more comprehensive study should include both males and females. While research has shown that females predominantly shop online and more frequently for fashion, this limitation is not material within the context of ultra-fast fashion. Research indicates that in South Africa, male online shopping activity is predominantly focused on electronics. However, further investigation into the underlying drivers and motivations influencing men's online shopping behaviour would be valuable.

7.5 Contribution

Although the research focused on the fashion industry, the research contributes to sectors broader than the fashion industry as it focuses on consumer attitudes and what influences these attitudes, ultimately resulting in the consumer purchasing or not purchasing. The core takeouts will apply to most industries dealing with the retail segment of the market and as such will serve useful to marketers targeting this segment.

Rapid advancements in technology, improved access to connectivity, and increasing social media engagement have resulted in changes in consumer behaviour. Within the younger and middle-aged consumers in South Africa, digital adoption is becoming more prevalent, as evidenced in earlier chapters. Furthermore, the efficiency of platform-driven businesses such as Netflix and Uber, as well as Checkers 60Sixty, has also resulted in evolving customer preferences as consumers expect simplicity, efficiency and personalisation. Against this backdrop, the research offers insights into what are the motivating factors that drive consumers to engage with digital platforms versus traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

South Africa's economic climate has been challenging over the last few years, driven by high interest rates and overall cost-of-living inflation. The research highlighted how consumers adapt to these circumstances by becoming more price sensitive, thereby offering insights into the value versus price trade-offs. Finally, the study emphasised how much consumers value personalised experiences and staying connected with worldwide trends, which is mostly applicable to the fashion industry.

In addition to the above, the study also provides an overview of the key success factors responsible for Shein's rapid growth trajectory, which entails using data and AI across all aspects of its business, from trend discovery to manufacturing and sales, as well as driving demand through gamification and social media influencer and marketing strategies. Retailers aiming to replicate this kind of success with a platform-based business will find these insights valuable.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide

Time to complete approximately 45 mins – 60 mins

Component	Questions
Introductory questions (get the flow going)	Tell me about yourself (age, occupation etc.)
Cognitive (beliefs, awareness) Ask questions on the cognitive understanding of where ultra-fast comes from	What do you know about ultra-fast fashion? What is your opinion of the quality of ultra-fast fashion items What do you know about the manufacturing processes and origin of ultra-fast fashion items? What makes you excited or concerns you about ultra-fast fashion in general? How would you describe the difference between ultra-fast fashion and other fashionwear? Why, do you think, is it called ultra-fast fashion?
Affective: Emotional responses How do they feel about ultra-fast fashion compared to other traditional retail stores?	Which characteristics of ultra-fast fashion make you excited? Which characteristics of ultra-fast fashion might concern you? What are the biggest benefits that ladies can derive from purchasing ultra-fast fashion on their media platforms? In your opinion, is ultra-fast fashion a good thing for consumers like you, and why?

Conative: behavioural tendencies	Tell me about your clothing purchases in general: where, how why, when... What role does social media play in your buying decisions? What are the top three reasons that drive your decision to buy (or not to buy) from Ultra-fast fashion platforms? How willing are you to buy ultra-fast fashion online, compared to purchasing from traditional retail stores, when comparing the purchase processes?
Concluding questions	What are the overriding factors that motivate you to buy from fast fashion platforms (or not) compared to traditional retail stores? Would you recommend friends to buy ultra-fast fashion, and why?

APPENDIX 2: Informed Consent for Interviews

Dear participant

I am conducting research as part of the pre-requisites for my MPhil degree at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. My topic of interest is ULTRA FAST FASHION, and the underlying reasons for females' support (or not) of this type of fashion products.

Our interview is expected to last approximately 45minutes. **Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty if you decide not to continue.** However, no personal questions are asked and you will remain anonymous and information is confidential. Only aggregate data will be captured in the final report, using code names to distinguish different contributions. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded;
- The recording to be transcribed;
- Verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Avika Prithipal

Email: 24126382@mygibs.co.za

Phone: 072 565 7204

Research Supervisor name: Alet Erasmus

Email: ErasmusA@gibs.co.za

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3: Ethical Clearance

Ethical Clearance Approved External Inbox x



Masters Research <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>
to me, Masters ▾

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Avika Prithipal,

Please be advised that your application for **Ethical Clearance** has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance [Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

APPENDIX 4: Codes

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
1	No, not really. I just know it's Chinese... that's all I know about the manufacturing.	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
2	Ah... I'm not sure." (when asked about how items are made)	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
3	No, not really. I just know it's Chinese... that's all I know about the manufacturing	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
4	I still don't know how they are produced... so it doesn't change my buying behaviour	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
5	they have the label made in China... but I don't really know what the factory looks like, how it's set up, how many people...	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
6	the rumors that I used to hear about like underage kids being exploited	Unverified knowledge	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
7	I think they use a lot of like, lower low-income employees... I don't even think they receive minimum wage.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
8	do know that... it's a little bit taboo... it's not ethical.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
9	honestly, not much. I do know also rumors that did start out. I can't say that, okay, it was so true and stuff.	Unverified knowledge	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
10	I've never done proper research about it	Prefers to not know	Ignorance	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
11	I do understand that they have, like, massive factories that are, like, really, like, producing clothing items, like, at an extreme rate	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
12	think many people know, and sometimes we don't really like, feel the need to do the research	Prefers to not know	Ignorance	Ethical Awareness	RQ1
13	I have no clue. And I must admit that I try not to understand it, because it will make it easier for me to buy without knowing about the ethics.	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1

14	I don't know anything about the manufacturing process	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
15	I say it's unethical, but I don't know all the information around that I don't right. It's just because of hearsay	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
16	So I know about is as much about how she manufactures as I do any other brand, okay, which is very little.	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
17	I couldn't tell you how the Shein stuff is manufactured either.	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
18	Do you carry on supporting them or not? And I suppose where we landed was, you know, you gotta kind of trust that the countries and have the right labor practices, etcetera, and the right, right regulations to monitor those things. I don't think it's in our scope to be able to to evaluate it,	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
19	is some 10 year old being worked to death in the, you know, creating this for me, but that so that is always in the background, really when you buy	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
20	I think I'll buy more. Okay, so, yeah, I'm probably the worst person from an environmental perspective.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
21	Very happy. If something major globally changes, maybe it'll change my buying power, but not right now.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
22	I think the items usually come from small scale factories in China and similar places	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
23	So, so I don't, I can't speak a lot to that, and I think I did it on purpose, because it's kind of like, once I know what I know, I feel guilty.	Prefers to not know	Ignorance	Ethical awareness	RQ1
24	But I'm also just worried about the state or the factories and stuff like that, that side.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
25	Oh, just the environment and just how it's difficult for other fashion brands to keep up cool and what are the expectation who, who's making these clothes and how much they're getting paid?	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1

26	nothing that I've also seen being verified like in terms of documentaries and stuff. But I do believe that it is like, you know, mass production in factories	Unverified knowledge	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
27	What concerns me is that I don't always know where it comes from. And back to the ethics part, you know, like, when you're shopping locally, I know what I'm contributing to	unaware	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1
28	Well, you know, you read these articles about child labor and all of these things, and you try not to, you really don't want to support these things, but you don't, you don't really know where these things are coming from.	Ethical Conflict but Purchasing Anyway	Conflicted	Ethical awareness	RQ1
29	And the thing that comes to me about this is the labor, because labor is expensive, produced garments like this, you question it. What price of labor, did it cost, or is it fully automated?	Unverified knowledge	manufacturing process	Ethical awareness	RQ1

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
30	everywhere you turn, or like on social media, there's always different fashion trends	Trendying on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
31	I think the big difference is also social media about, like, how aggressive the Shein and Temu and things that they are, like, the advertising and things are there to, like, grab people's attention	Shein and Temu marketing	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
32	I think a very big role. I think, in this day and age, everybody is on social media, no matter how old you are.	Trendying on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
33	like Shein and Temu, the marketing strategies are so aggressive.	Shein and Temu marketing	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1

34	it's kind of cool when you see people ordering something new. And they also put like the clothing ID. So if you see, like a dress that's, like, really pretty and floral, and you've been looking for something like that, it's nice to see how it looks in an actual person, yeah, instead of just like a regular model	Influencers	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
35	since I am on social media, mostly Instagram and Tiktok, you get a lot of information on shein and Temu from influencers. So basically it's people that have a large followers group like 35,000 to 45,000 and international and local influences that buy from Temu and Shein, and they open their packaging parcels and they show what they got and how it puts them and what they feel about the material.	Influencers	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
36	So I think I'm learning more on the ultra-fast fashion through influencers for Shein and Temu, basically	Influencers	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
37	I think it's more you're watching influencers, you get influencers popping up, even if you're not following them, it's like ad, I don't know that's how it works on Instagram. And then you see them wearing such nice stuff and styled it in a way that you would never thought of, so it makes you want to go buy	Influencers	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
38	I think it plays a big role, especially when it comes to, let's say, trendy styles, like when you go on, on Tik Tok, you're gonna know what's what's trending	Trending on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
39	over consumption. There is a problem. I think social media is to blame for it as well.	Trending on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
40	yes, it influences people, most of the time, okay	Influencers	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
41	So and because of the social media, and because it picks up what you like and what you buy and what you look at, you see new offers all the time	Algorithm	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
42	And we do see lots of things like trending, you know, different types of earrings.	Trending on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1

43	The, you know, I often see, oh, geez, that's nice. I think that would look like nice of me. And then I go and shop, and one item turns into 10 items, you know. So they are so absolutely, definitely makes me buy more	Trendy on social media	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
44	they'll see things trending, yeah, and then they'll, they'll go and look and on Shein to see, okay, is it there?	Trendy on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
45	I'm not easily influenced, so I will buy according to my style or season	Personal style	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
46	So social media helps me a lot, especially because I'm genuinely a very busy person.. So for me, it's the kind of how I understand what's happening with the world. And I seen a lot of adverts will pop.	kept in the loop	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
47	I think that's an algorithm	Algorithm	Social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
48	Online, platforms like, let's use Temu, for example, with ultra fast fashion, they now gamified the shopping experience	gamification	social media marketing	Social media influence	RQ1
49	I mean, I, like, the only thing I really take away, I would say, from, like, trend type of, you know, pieces that come out, it's just silhouettes	Trendy on social media	Social media	Social media influence	RQ1
50	So you know, it's what on tik tok you see, by some influencer, they are able to replicate	Influencers	Social media	social media influence	RQ1

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
51	I think the only thing that will concern me is the package not getting here on time	Delivery time	Delivery	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
52	I mean, lots of my cousins lots of my family members order of Shein together	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1

53	I used to have a concern with the taxes, yeah, but now the taxes is done on the app, so before you pay, they work out how much your taxes, your taxes include on your payment.	Customs charges	Delivery	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
54	the moms at school, all eight of us buy from Shein	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
55	And we are network such, by like, let's say I ordered from Shein, and I must start something. I'd be like, I'll ask my sister, you order? She'd be like, yes. And then we must get it through that person's order.	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
56	I've never had problems with delivery.	Delivery not an issue	Delivery	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
57	Because at work, we used to like, if somebody wants, let's say what, like one item, and then another person like, I also need just one item, and we would combine. And then when the delivery fee comes, which is, if it's 300 Rand, maybe each one of us ended up paying, let's say 50	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
58	I must say that during non-busy times, they are very efficient in terms of delivery	Efficient delivery	Delivery	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
59	whereby even my partner would be like, do you want to go check out things for Shein?	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
60	and it's also fast now for delivery.	Fast delivery	Delivery	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
61	because sometimes someone would even say, look, I only want a few items on Shein. Let me know when you, when you are checking out.	Buying with others	Pooling orders	collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1
62	someone will literally just say, like, Hey, I'm doing an order? Do you want to put something in? Because maybe they don't want to buy for, like, the full one. So people just like, join in so that they can make a cart.	Buying with others	Pooling orders	Collective buying and delivery concerns	RQ1

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
63	You know, yes, convenient for most people. So it's a bit too easy	Ease of shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
64	People don't really want to waste time waiting in queues or going and driving to the mall and wasting that fuel.	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
65	But how much more convenient is it to just order off the app? And I feel like people are now doing that with clothing items as well	online shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
66	I think shein and temu are like the perfect thing where they can just sit in bed, take at least 15 minutes or half an hour for themselves, and just, you know,yeah, for themselves, just scroll and add to cart,	shop anywhere, anytime	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
67	because it gives you the freedom and flexibility to shop whenever and wherever you want to.	shop anywhere, anytime	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
68	I think it's just the convenience. Yeah, I think it's just all about convenience nowadays, because everybody's trying to look for a shortcut for everything	Ease of shopping	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
69	And then it's very easy. I can lie in my bed at 11 o'clock at night and buy and I don't have to get up and dress up, and I'm getting the same quality, the same delivery, and everything's done so easily	shop anywhere, anytime	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
70	The fact that I don't have to go from shop to shop to look for the item that I want	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
71	I don't like having to go from one shop to another just looking for one item, yeah, well, at least on Shein I know it's just, I just have to type what I need and scroll down and look for what, what's what suits me,	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
72	it's quick and convenient.	quick and convenient	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
73	I think that's why I like head just to Shein, because it's just, I don't have to now go to a mall.	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2

74	it takes the pressure off you when you go into the store that you don't have to, like, hunt around.	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
75	Well, the fact that I just don't have to into a store at all is a deciding factor.	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
76	They stay fashionable, and it's more convenient shopping online than in store. And also, there's more trendier clothes, and again, more affordable and all that	online shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
77	I do shop most of the time online, just because it's more convenient	online shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
78	You don't have to go to multiple stores, and it's not as time consuming as where I have to go to a mall and walk through the mall just to find a specific item	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2
79	The convenience is just, yeah, it's mind blowing, actually, in my opinion.	Ease of shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
80	Okay, so sitting online and getting what I need is great, but then the store is also nice, because it's an experience.	online shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
81	, a lot of my shopping is done online, so my first impression with any platform I use is just how easy the UX is	online shopping	more convenient	Convenience	RQ2
82	and I get irritated with is in store is you don't have the flexibility	in store tedious	Flexibility	Convenience	RQ2

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
83	like the trends and the prices are also much lower than your normal retail stores,	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
84	I think the prices are like the main, main difference, because if you go on Shein and Temu, I can get a pair of jeans for, hypothetically, like, 200 rand, whereas I walk into Woolworths and I have to pay 800 rand	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2

85	I think the excitement of like going online and seeing how cheap stuff, I think you can get very carried away by the prices	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
86	Personally, I think the prices are absolutely amazing. I think they get me the most excited. And like and then after, yeah, and the like, the range, the variety,	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
87	Because who would have thought you could get 10 items for 1000 rand, you know? So I think, yeah, yeah. That's just very exciting, just the whole process of it.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
88	I think a lot of people can get carried away as well, especially when they see prices, it'll be like, over consumption	Overconsumption	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
89	I would much rather shop on Shein or Temu then walk into Mr. Price and spend that same 1000 rand on like two items, you know.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
90	But I think the other thing that excites me is the price of it. You have good quality and much cheaper, and you not even waiting for week two. It's like, I think the delivery is now 10 to 12 days.	Cheaper prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
91	So with Zara, the price is very different to what Shein has, and Shein has clothing that looks almost identical to Zara. Yes, there is a store in Shein that you see that could be a Zara store.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
92	You buy something for 100 rands, but this is actually good quality.	Cheap prices and good quality	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
93	I think with Shein, the prices are quite I think they're quite reasonable and I can purchase a lot of things with 1000 rands, rather than, if I go to, you know, to other shops, it may cost me a lot.	Overconsumption	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
94	The cost, let's say cost number one, trendy style. The yeah style, yeah. And also, maybe the availability of the item.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2

95	in the current economic climate, I just feel like everything that is local is expensive.	Local is expensive	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
96	I think if you take care of the clothes, then you get as much buck out of it, and you get it at a lower price, which means that you don't have to spend so much of your money on fashion.	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
97	So, because it's so accessible, you feel that it is not a splurge when you're buying,	Accessibility	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
98	I think it's because it's cheap, variety, which we don't get, And you can also get inspired by items	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
99	I enjoy buying from Shein because it's more affordable than all the other shops and more convenient because it's online.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
100	I feel like what makes me more excited is the affordable prices at Shein	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
101	Probably the over consumption okay, because of the cheaper prices, you just want to buy everything because it's affordable.	Overspending	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
102	because you get more with your income.	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
103	Okay, so I have found that the tariffs and the taxes and that do affect you, but even then, it's still worth it buying shoes, so clothing, it's definitely worth it, but say by a third cheaper, at least by a third.	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
104	I bought her five evening gowns, okay for one event, and it was the total of the five was probably what I would have paid for one here	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
105	So it allows us to buy more it it's affordable. It allows us to have flexibility in what we wear. You know, you're not always wearing the same thing.	Cheaper prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
106	But the price is extremely cheap,	Cheap prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
107	it kind of encourages overspending.	Overspending	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2

108	But also what's exciting is from an economic perspective as well, it's affordable, you know, you look at your Shein haul, and it can be 4000 Rand, and in that 4000 Rand, you have gotten more than 40 items,	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
109	Biggest different price, and I think ultra-fast fashion.	Pricing	Lower Prices	Affordability	RQ2
110	So a bargain makes me excited. Looking cute makes me very excited	More value for money	Lower Prices	Affordability	RQ2
111	So there's more money to do other things	Stretching income	Lower Prices	Affordability	RQ2
112	So affordability it it allows you to focus more on other things	Stretching income	Lower Prices	Affordability	RQ2
113	like I said, people who generally couldn't afford can now afford to also be trendy	Inclusive pricing	Lower Prices	Affordability	RQ2
114	what excites me is that it's accessible, sometimes it's affordable	Cheaper prices	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
115	You do tend to shop more because they're giving you vouchers now and they're offering you things at a discounted rate.	Overconsumption	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
116	So if we're not buying it at this price point, we're going to try and buy it at a different price point, which would affect a different line in our budget.	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2
117	And with everyone budgeting every day, when something meets your budget, and you can have something funky and yes and happening within that budget	More value for money	Pricing	Affordability	RQ2

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
118	And someone can even put, like, the weight or their height, so it gives you a nice sense of judgment as well. So if somebody else is, like, 1.55 and 67 kgs, at least, I know, okay, this is how the top looks on them	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Sizing and Fit	RQ2

119	I think the apps like Shein and Temu are so advanced that when you go to your measurements, they give you the exact measurements	Sizing charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
120	I would much rather go according to my measurements and order online than walk into a store and change constantly.	Sizing charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
121	But with Shein, they have inches and centimetres, you can go and find someone who 65 kg, that's your height and weight and specifics and and then you can actually see how it fitted on them and how they felt about it. And then you can navigate from there.	Sizing charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
122	So I never had an issue with clothing being big or small.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
123	I think they are other options, where you find it's written extra. It's written tall or Curvy yeah, I kind of like that. It gives me that options.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
124	The other thing is, just by the way, is that I find that their sizing options are much better than what's available in the shops, right? for example, Zara caters for very skinny people.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
125	so I know that I can find the size that I'm looking for, guaranteed on a Shein	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
126	I know for a fact I can find a costume on Shein that'll fit me where I'll never find one anywhere else.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
127	Yes, it gives me, it literally gives me the option to purchase a multitude of things in my size.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
128	Sometimes it can be disappointing because of the size range, because I know shein and sizes are a bit different to the sizes we have here. Yeah. So that's the only downfall that I think I have, yeah.	Sizing different	Sizing issues	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
129	Yeah. So I do think they cater for all body types.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
130	You know, size wise, you know, you battle, you battle to find your size.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2

131	I like the fact that I can actually find a size quite easily, and it's not a struggle.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
132	I like the fact that so if you look at the sizing tables, it actually works, okay	Sizing Charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
133	And also, if you look at the commentary, so people say fits to size, sometimes they'll say it fits a little bit smaller	Customer Reviews	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
134	You go and try it on 15 pairs of jeans, and you can't, nothing fits (traditional stores)	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
135	there's just such an array of options and for all different body types.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
136	I find because we're restricted by the types of styles and sizing. I find it quite depressing when you go from shop to shop and you can't find what you're looking for.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
137	yes. So I'll go to the size guide, and then it'll say something like stretchy or extra stretchy. And then I will, like, go according to that.	Sizing Charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
138	what I find with it as well is that there's more size options on seeing that there aren't fit in stores,	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
139	So I find sometimes normal fashion places can be quite limiting terms of size.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
140	But I mean, I don't mind, because they have a good sizing charts on Shein as well, yeah, and I've really never missed	Sizing Charts	Size guides	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
141	And you know, you can get things in different sizes, and it's at the click of a button you can get it.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2
142	and the difference is that, you know, people can get different items for their shape and size.	Extra sizing options	More sizes	Sizing and Fit	RQ2

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
143	I think it's more trendier	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
144	because of how fast like they can keep up with, like the latest trends or the latest styles and how fast their manufacturing process is	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
145	I don't even think Mr. Price or Woollies or any other normal store will be able to keep up with them	Traditional store drawbacks	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
146	I think they go by the seasons, because you can go four times in three months, and they will have the exact same thing on the shelves, exactly since,	Traditional store drawbacks	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
147	And to just know that there's trends out there that are at your fingertips. Yeah? So the price are really low, it's convenient and it's really trendy and fast	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
148	There's always a theme. There's Christmas, there's Halloween, there's Diwali, there's, there's, there's, it's always full. It's not like I'm missing anything. So that was excites me	Variety of themes	Personalisation/Themes	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
149	And Shein has a way better style. So for me, I feel like it's more accessible to get the stuff that's trending overseas, because I think they focus on trends.	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
150	with Shein it's always changing	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
151	the moment something is a trend it's automatically on Shein	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
152	the accessibility for items that are not available where I am currently, and the personalization of it too. Okay, cool. So that excites me.	Accessibility	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
153	it's more about the fact that there's so much accessible to your fingertips, and there's so much of things	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
154	Theres a lot of options.	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2

155	I can get anything for any season if I want to buy winter clothes. Now, I will get them on Shein and like, you know, having to go to the normal fashion store I may not get them.	any season wear	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
156	I think the availability of certain things and also it's quick.	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
157	They have a variety of things. So it's not just limited to the recent trends.	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
158	I find traditional store is very boring, okay, yeah, it's the same thing, yeah, it's very boring, it's not exciting.	Traditional store drawbacks	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
159	I feel like at Shein, there's more varieties than a normal, traditional shop, yeah, and at cheaper prices as well.	Traditional store drawbacks	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
160	I feel like other fast fashion wear is more timeless designs, and then ultra-fast again is affordable and. And focuses on more of the current trends.	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
161	I love the jewelry.	Accessories	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
162	is just the quantum of offer, you know, and how, how it changes all the time	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
163	The chances of her wearing a dress somebody else has got if I go to an name brand shop, etc, is high. But on when I purchased from Shein, we've never had that problem, that nobody has ever had something that's the same	Uniqueness	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
164	Well, it's exciting for speed as well as choice and accessibility.	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
165	variety, the instant access to trends and the ability to constantly refresh your style online,	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
166	but there are a lot of affordable dupes	Dupes/ Fakes	Fake brands	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
167	So you're working on, you're like, working on trends.	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
168	So big, seasonal, big, big, big, religious holidays,	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2

169	she ran her entire wedding from shein, personalized bridesmaid things for gifts	Personalisation	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
170	we get it quickly off the runway, or replicas of the runway	up to date fashion	Trend responsiveness	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
171	when we have our year end events, we send mood boards for what you should wear, and we give you. Suggestions from fast fashion platforms, because it's affordable and you can stay on theme	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
172	when we near like, certain holidays, like, let's say, for example, it would be Easter time. I hear my colleagues literally say, like, Oh, my word, I need to go and shop for, like, the baskets or whatever their kids are using.	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
173	Now it's coming up to Halloween. So many of my colleagues are talking about, like, the outfits that they're wearing, they're all on Shein.	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
174	He likes the ones he was a Superman and whatever, yeah, or the dinosaur, you know, spikes on the back and like that	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
175	What excites me is that you get stuff I like things which are unique, and not everyone's going to have one of them all	Personalisation	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
176	My kids like, dress up, like theme. But if I go online, it's literally between Shein and Temu. I will get it in one of the two, and from the size and the variety, I'll get it in either kids size or an adult size. So if I wanted to do a matchy thing with her, I could do it, but I can't do that in store	Availability of themed clothing	Themes/ Personalisation	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
177	So what you see trending overseas, for example, on a YouTube video on someone in the US... guaranteed within a few weeks, you're going to have the knockoff version on Shein in a month	Dupes/Fakes	Fake brands	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2
178	is the reason of variety, because there's so much options.	Trendy fashion options	Trend variety	Variety and trend responsiveness	RQ2

#	Statement	Code	Categories	Theme/Themes	RQ 1/RQ2
179	So far, I think the quality has been really good	Good quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
180	I think maybe just once or twice the quality has been a bit off.	Mixed quality experience	Mixed quality	Quality	RQ2
181	I don't know how the quality is, because you rely a lot on people's reviews	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Quality	RQ2
182	reviews are quite cool because they show you, like, people put pictures of their stuff so you can judge, like, what the material is like	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Quality	RQ2
183	I mean, I've had things from Shein for like, the last four three years, and I've never had a problem with it.	Good quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
184	So honestly, with Shein, I don't have a problem with the quality, as long as you check the reviews	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Quality	RQ2
185	I never had an issue with buying from Shein and not receiving the same item.	Good quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
186	the disappointment when it doesn't meet your expectations.	quality inconsistent	quality concerns	Quality	RQ2
187	Some of the items that they do sell, you might find out of low quality. So you just need to be very thorough in terms of making sure that you do like, double check the garment composition.	Mixed Quality	Check quality	Quality	RQ2
188	If you're going to buy from like a Shein basic, which is one of their brands, you might find that it is not of as great quality. I, on the other side, prefer like the motf brand, which is more expensive. So, in terms of the quality, it is always guaranteed to be very good	caters for varying qualities	Mixed quality	Quality	RQ2
189	And then if you buy the anything under 200 bucks, you will get something that is worth 200 bucks.	Value - price vs quality	Fair for price	Quality	RQ2
190	it's a hit or miss. Some are, like, really bad, but some can be really good as well, to be honest with you. Ja, so it's a good mix.	quality inconsistent	Mixed quality	Quality	RQ2

191	it doesn't bother me too much just because of the price that I'm paying,	Value - price vs quality	Fair for price	Quality	RQ2
192	The qualities varies, because not all qualities are good at Shein. You just have to look properly for better quality. But I don't mind buying	quality inconsistent	Mixed quality	Quality	RQ2
193	So quality of all the goods, everything from clothing to shoes, belts, hair, bags, etc, if you follow the guides around sizing and things like that, and you actually, if you watch the photos of where people have reflected what the clothes look like, you can actually, you can tell straight away kind of if you're going to get the kind of quality you expect	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Quality	RQ2
194	we bought her quite a few evening gowns and I cannot fault the quality at all. Okay, material, etc, like, really, really great.	Good quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
195	but it gives you an idea because they kind of putting real people, you kind of get to see the good, the bad and the ugly, so, so that gives quite a bit of sense of what you're going to get.	Work with Customer Reviews	Customer Reviews	Quality	RQ2
196	but I'm going to speak about my experience with Shein, good quality	Good quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
197	now selling like your Nike and your label brands, so I question those	Dupes/Fakes	Fake brands	Quality	RQ2
198	it will last, like the quality is pretty decent.	Mixed Quality	Satisfied with quality	Quality	RQ2
199	but I always tell myself that what you pay for is what you get.	Value - price vs quality	Fair for price	Quality	RQ2
200	So if I am going cheaper, like, let's say I use a cheaper platform, then the quality is going to be cheaper	Value - price vs quality	Fair for price	Quality	RQ2
201	Some of it is really cheap, and, you know, one or two ways, or one or two washes, and that's it. But overall, I have been quite satisfied with what I've got	quality inconsistent	mixed quality	Quality	RQ2