



Exploring Generation Z's perceptions of and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism.

By Sophie Emma Ardé



Supervisor: Michele O'Hara

Module: RESE8419

BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Word Count: 9516

Abstract

In an era that emphasises sustainability, this study examines Generation Z's perceptions and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands. Amid a shift towards environmentally conscious practices by brands through marketing and business changes, this study aims to fill a research gap by exploring how this demographically significant group, born into a digital world and a culture of rapid consumption, reconciles their environmental awareness with their purchasing decisions. Through convenience sampling, eight participants from major South African cities provided insights via thematic analysis of a focus group. Findings reveal a generation that is informed and critical, valuing brand transparency and ethical practices, yet also influenced by economic and social media factors. This study contributes to understanding Generation Z's complex consumer profile, offering valuable implications for brand strategies in fast fashion and beyond.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Contextualisation.....	4
Rationale.....	4
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose Statement.....	5
Research Questions and Objectives.....	6
Literature Review.....	7
Conceptualisation.....	7
Theoretical foundation.....	9
Research Design and Methodology.....	17
Paradigm.....	17
Research approach and design.....	18
Population and Sampling.....	18
Data Collection Method.....	19
Data Analysis.....	20
Findings and Interpretation of Findings.....	23
Findings.....	23
Interpretation of findings in context.....	26
Implications of research based on findings.....	28
Conclusion.....	33
Validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.....	33
Implications of findings for future practices.....	34
Ethical Implications.....	34
Limitations.....	35
Recommendations for further research.....	36
Reflection.....	36
Reference List.....	38
Annexures.....	44

Introduction

Contextualisation

In an era where sustainable practices are increasingly valued, the fast fashion industry remains a significant economic force in South Africa, second only to agriculture (Yamama, 2021). This study engages with this juxtaposition by focusing on Generation Z (Gen Z) —a demographic characterised by its diversity and digital nativity (Bamboo, 2022; Meola, 2022). It investigates the consumer behaviour of Gen Z towards fast fashion, an industry often at odds with the principles of sustainability (Joy *et al.*, 2012). By examining the attitudes and purchasing patterns of Gen Z, this research aims to offer valuable insights for brand strategists seeking to align with conscious consumerism within the South African market (Kale, 2021).

Rationale

Despite the global push towards sustainable business practices, the fashion industry remains a significant contributor to the South African economy (Yamama, 2021). Fast fashion still contributes positively towards the African economy, but there may be a global mindset shift towards more environmentally conscious practices.

While previous research has explored consumer behaviour towards fast fashion, there is a lack of research on the attitudes and behaviours of Gen Z in a South African context. This research is crucial for brand strategists to adapt their communication and internal processes to stay relevant and popular within the South African market. Moreover, with the growing trend of conscious consumerism, it is vital to understand how Gen Z perceives and interacts with fast fashion brands in terms of their impact on the planet, profit, and people. Kale (2021) justifies this by stating that even though Gen Z cares about the environment and sustainability deeply, they are still under pressure to constantly keep up with trends and update their wardrobe.

However, it is essential to recognise that the world's leading consumer trend forecaster WGSN (World Global Style Network) has concluded that Gen Z is a complex and fluid generation (Owen, 2022). Therefore, this research seeks to contribute academically by offering insights into the attitudes, behaviours, and purchasing potential of Gen Z. By focusing specifically on the South African context, this study aims to serve as a foundation for unveiling the constantly evolving realities of this generation. Consequently, it will provide useful knowledge to brand strategists, empowering them to maintain relevance and effectively adapt to the ever-changing market landscape. This research hopes to advance the academic understanding of Gen Z and contribute to the field of consumer behaviour and marketing strategies.

Problem Statement

This study seeks to expand the current understanding of Gen Z's attitudes and purchasing patterns towards fast fashion brands in South Africa. Little is known about this demographic's behaviour and this study aims to shed light on whether Gen Z consumers in South Africa demonstrate awareness and concern for the environmental impact of fast fashion brands. The study aims to provide insights into the motivations and decision-making processes of this consumer group in the context of the fast fashion industry in South Africa.

Purpose Statement

The significance of this research lies in its potential to guide brand managers and trend analysts of fast fashion brands on how to effectively engage with Gen Z consumers and tailor their business and branding strategies accordingly to retain them as customers. This research holds particular importance as fast fashion sales constitute a significant portion of South Africa's retail revenue, with projections to reach over R21m in 2023 (Statista, 2023). While prior research has largely focused on understanding why Gen Z consumers sometimes avoid certain products and brands, this study aims to explore the mindset and attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards fast fashion brands in the current era of conscious consumerism. The insights gained from this study can assist brands in

developing sustainable brand strategies that cater to the long-term profitability of this consumer segment.

Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Gen Z towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism?
2. What are the buying behaviours of Gen Z towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism?
3. How do South African fast fashion brands target and market to Gen Z consumers in the era of conscious consumerism?

Objectives:

Objective 1: To explore the awareness and concern of Gen Z consumers towards the environmental impact of South African fast fashion brands.

Objective 2: To determine the factors that influence Gen Z consumers' purchasing decisions, with a particular focus on sustainability and ethical practices in the fast fashion industry.

Objective 3: To evaluate the extent to which South African fast fashion brands that prioritise sustainability and align with conscious consumerism have a competitive advantage in appealing to Gen Z consumers.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation

In the contemporary landscape of consumerism, the concept of "conscious consumption" has taken centre stage, as highlighted by Wong (2019), describing it as participation in the economy with a heightened awareness of one's choices and their broader societal impact, particularly on environmental preservation. This notion is especially pertinent when juxtaposed with "fast fashion," a phenomenon Merriam-Webster (2022) aligns with quick, cost-effective trend availability, mirroring the fast food industry's emphasis on speed and efficiency, often at the cost of sustainability. Joy *et al.* (2012) elucidate sustainability as the capacity for indefinite continuation of activities without harm, encompassing economic, social, and political well-being. These foundational concepts frame the investigation into Gen Z—a demographically large and diverse cohort, as Bamboo (2022) and Meola (2022) discuss, with burgeoning economic power and potentially transformative consumer behaviours. This literature review synthesises existing research and advances the understanding of Gen Z's interaction with fast fashion within the South African context, probing whether their purchasing behaviours align with the rising tide of conscious consumerism and sustainable practices.

Conscious consumption

Wong (2019) states that conscious consumption means participating in the economy with more awareness of how your choices impact society in a greater context. It is shopping with the intent to preserve the environment for this generation and the ones to come (Wong, 2019).

This is important to conceptualise in this research paper as the researcher is questioning whether members of Gen Z care about the impact of their purchasing decisions on society at large, specifically concerning the environment.

Generation Z

According to Bamboo (2022), Gen Z is following the millennial generation, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s. Research suggests that Gen Z is the largest population to date, and the most ethnically diverse (Meola, 2022). The reason the researcher chose this generation over others is because they have the fastest-growing income, set to increase by 140% in the next five years to \$17 trillion in 2025 (TMO Contributor, 2021).

Because this study specifically focuses on Gen Z, it is important to give context to and outline the research that already exists on members of this generation. Ideas and studies about their political, social and environmental viewpoints already exist, however, their attitudes and more specifically their buying behaviour concerning fast fashion brands in South Africa are unknown, and highlighting this key concept is important for the reader.

Sustainability

According to Joy et al (2012), “sustainability” has multiple definitions, however, the most common idea is that an activity can be continued indefinitely without causing harm. It is also understood that the concept of sustainability has an effect on human livelihoods, including economic, social and political avenues (Joy et al, 2012).

Defining the concept of sustainability is important to this research as the concept of fast fashion is inherently opposite to what sustainability stands for and it provides a benchmark against which to measure the practices and impact of fast fashion. If Gen Z is to find an alternative way of consumption, marketers and brand strategists need to present fashion in such a way that is appealing and attractive to that market, using the attitudes and behaviours discovered in this research paper.

Fast fashion

Merriam-Webster (2022) defines “fast fashion” as making trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers. In agreement with this, Vajkai and Zsóka (2019) state that fast fashion is a strategy that retailers take on in order to reflect current and emerging trends

quickly and effectively. Vajkai and Zsóka (2019) also state that fast fashion, named after fast food, means quickly updated products with short renewal cycles and speedy delivery.

It is important to contextualise the term “fast fashion” for this research paper, as the aim is to discover Gen Z's attitudes and behaviour toward the overall concept.

Theoretical foundation

To answer the research question, the researcher chose three key theories. The first is the consumer decision-making process. This five-stage model is a basic psychological process that unpacks how consumers make their decisions when it comes to purchasing products (Kotler and Keller, 2008). The consumer passes through five stages when making a decision: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decisions, and post-purchase behaviour (Kotler and Keller, 2008). This is an important model to use in the context of this research problem as the researcher is trying to discover the needs and wants of Gen Z, which leads them to have certain attitudes and behaviours towards fast fashion brands.

The second theory the researcher looked at to answer the research question is the brand avoidance theory. This is the idea that consumers actively avoid purchasing or using products from certain brands due to negative attitudes, beliefs or experiences associated with those brands (Johansson et al, 2016). There are three types of brand avoidance: experiential, identity and expectations (Johansson et al, 2016). This theory will be imperative to look at for this study. Understanding the reasons why Gen Z might avoid fast fashion brands due to ethical, sustainability or identity concerns can reveal deeper into their perceptions of these brands. Knowing why Gen Z consumers avoid certain brands might inform those brands of how they can better align their marketing strategies with the values and expectations of their target audience.

The third and final key theory the researcher chose to look at was the theory of planned behaviour by Icek Ajzen. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) suggests that people's behaviour is influenced by three factors: Attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). TPB is helpful in the context of this study as it can help the researcher understand that attitudes underlie Gen Z's perceptions of fast fashion brands, and how personal attitudes towards sustainability and social norms can influence their perception. TPB also suggests it can predict whether Gen Z will engage in purchasing from fast fashion brands by assessing their intention, which is influenced by their attitudes, the pressure they feel from their peers (subjective norms), and their perceived control over the purchase. Understanding these determinants through TPB can provide comprehensive insights into how and why Gen Z interacts with South African fast fashion brands in the context of conscious consumerism.

Defining Gen Z

Liu and Hei (2021) state that Gen Z are individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. This is backed by Kale (2021), who suggests that Gen Z is a term used to refer to individuals born between 1997 and 2012.

Owen (2019) defines Gen Z by technology, cultural aggregation, fluidity and contradiction. This means this generation has been immersed in technology since birth, which could have shaped their consumption habits. It also means that their contradictions may have stemmed from their complex upbringing of fluidity and technology. They are at once idealistic and pragmatic, socially aware yet heavily engaged in the often superficial realm of social media. They desire authenticity but participate in curated online personas (Owen, 2019).

With the increasing impact of technology and social media on our society, it is crucial to understand how Gen Z's attitudes and behaviours towards fast fashion brands in South Africa are influenced by these factors. Furthermore, the characteristics of cultural aggregation, fluidity, and contradiction suggest that Gen Z may have unique perspectives on issues such as sustainability and ethical consumerism. Liu and Hei

(2021) further define Gen Z as “more educated, well-behaved, stressed and depressed” than any other generation before them. Furthermore, Gen Z holds ‘uniqueness’ as a highly important aspect of who they are and they wish for brands to consider them similarly, and not group them (Owen, 2019). According to Kale (2021), Gen Z is typically considered socially progressive and environmentally aware. Vajkai and Zsóka (2019) similarly states that members of Gen Z are regarded as the most environmentally conscious generation. However, in opposition to this, they are known to be avid consumers of fast fashion and believe they don’t have enough information about the products they are buying and how (ethically or not) they are being produced (Kale, 2021). This is interesting as it poses the argument that although Gen Z is known for being tech-savvy and having access to a wealth of information at their fingertips, they still feel ill-equipped to make decisions with that information (Kale, 2021). Like the previously mentioned authors, Bell (2022) characterises Gen Z as an environmentally and socially conscious generation. They are also looking for more diversity and inclusion, focusing on themselves, their health, and their careers, wanting to create meaning and looking forward to a better future (Bell, 2022).

They have never known a world without technology and the internet and as a consequence, know how to use it very well (Owen, 2019). This tech-savviness equips them with the tools to research and understand the impacts of their consumer choices, especially in the context of sustainability. They explore the topics they need to educate themselves and equip themselves with the right information (Owen, 2019). This means they can readily access information about the environmental and social ramifications of fast fashion, potentially influencing their perceptions and purchasing behaviours. In agreement with this, Liu and Hei (2021) state that they are the first generation of consumers who have fully matured in the digital age. Understanding Gen Z’s digital fluency is crucial for assessing their interaction with, and response to, fast fashion.

According to Kale (2021), Gen Z will be the most self-taught generation ever thanks to a variety of online learning tools. Speaking to Gen Z, it’s also clear that many are buying from fast fashion brands from sustainable or eco-friendly ranges because they believe

these products are more ethical (Kale, 2022). Being the first fully digital generation of consumers, it is important to consider how this impacts their decision-making process and how brands can effectively reach and engage with them through digital marketing and communication strategies.

Consumption Culture

Bugday (2016) argues that a conscious consumer is someone who recognises their power in prevailing market conditions and that they can take certain anti-consumption actions that will benefit society at large. Bugday (2016) then poses the question of; does Gen Z classify as an unconscious generation in the context of sustainable consumption and the lack of knowledge they have or are they actively choosing to go against benefitting society as a whole for the sack of individual and selfish needs? Roodhouse (2013) discovered that conscious consumption resonates more widely when it aligns with products that champion causes important to consumers, suggesting that such consumption is both a proactive and responsive political expression. This statement agrees with the notion that Gen Zers will either choose or not, a political stance and that, in turn, affects their buying behaviours.

Although Owen (2019) argues that Gen Z has easy access to information online, Liu and Hei (2021) point out that customers may still be unaware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry. This means that, despite having access to information, Gen Z may not have all the necessary knowledge and awareness to make sustainable purchasing decisions, especially with regard to fashion consumption. Therefore, there may be a gap between the availability of information and the actual understanding and application of that information by consumers.

Following on from this, a Vogue survey reported by Kale (2021), found that Gen Z consumers buy the majority of their clothing from fast fashion brands, even after learning workers are paid below minimum wage. Many studies have also found that various attitudes correlate with intended fair trade purchases, such as a consumer's sense of ethical imperative in their choices (Roodhouse, 2013). However, Roodhouse

(2013) also assumes that most consumers suffer from decision-making biases that lead to suboptimal choices that are counterproductive to personal health and well-being. This backs the notion that consumers are ill-equipped with knowledge about genuinely eco-conscious products. Lastly to this point, Abu (2019) argues that the knowledge is there, they are choosing to do other things in order to be deemed 'sustainable', like turning off the tap while they are brushing their teeth but not changing their habits when it comes to fashion.

Linking to what was stated in the previous theme, Gen Z is called "Generation Green" because of its environmentally and socially responsible purchasing behaviour (Liu and Hei, 2021). Liu and Hei (2021) also argue that buying second-hand clothes may be more appealing to Gen Z than buying from brands that label themselves sustainable or are authentically rooted in sustainable business practices. Consumer opinions are changing more and more, and more people appreciate fashion companies that focus on sustainable production (Liu and Hei, 2021). This is also true for Gen Z consumers, for whom the idea of 'ethical consumption' has shaped their upbringing (Liu and Hei, 2021). In line with this, Kale (2022) found that data shows that Gen Z claims to care more about the larger environmental impact of their purchases, however, they out-consume older generations when it comes to fashion purchases. Could this be because of the readily available online shopping platforms there are nowadays compared to before? Meaning that Gen Z has more to choose from than other generations and easily so. In complete opposition to the views expressed above, Nguyen (2021) states that Gen Z seeks sustainable commitments from the companies they buy from, and they are not afraid to demand them. This has led to the frequently repeated idea that Gen Z's green habits have "killed" or significantly slowed the global expansion of fast fashion (Nguyen, 2021). These opposing ideas are fueling the idea that Gen Z is a deeply divided generation, and there is not one truth that exists for them in the fast fashion consumption context.

Vajkai and Zsóka (2019) support the idea that Gen Z is environmentally and socially responsible by describing them as individuals who think twice about what to wear and

see fashion and clothing as important tools for the acceptance and inclusion of their peers. Does this indicate that they will be more sustainable in their choices because they will be judged otherwise, or does this mean that having the latest and trendiest fashion pieces are important, regardless of the environment?

According to Kale (2021), for Gen Z, following trends is a way to reach new levels of ambition, so they consume the latest fashion trends or go to the most Instagram-worthy places. Liu and Hei (2021) agree with this sentiment, stating that they have a very brand-conscious and materialistic mindset and spend more money on fashion because assuming they are in the upper socio-economic bracket, they can use their parents' credit cards to get financial support. Supporting this, Abu (2019) states that Gen Z is fascinated by the new and latest fashion, yet passionate about the environment. Abu (2019) states that the cost of living has skyrocketed in recent years and everything is feeling precarious, so it's no surprise Gen Z is buying cheap clothes for a little cheer. A revealing quote from Abu (2019) states, "When expensive holidays, home ownership and other experiences are off the table, what do you do? You buy a £20 dress."

Social media is also accelerating the pace of consumption (Kale, 2021). YouTube and TikTok are littered with "haul" videos of people unpacking bulk orders of clothing (Kale, 2021). The youngest consumer group, Gen Z, are expected by their peers and the rest of the world to change their shopping habits for the benefit of everyone and the greater good (Nguyen, 2021). This poses the argument that it is unfair to leave the responsibility of sustainability (such an overall big task) to Gen Z when the notion of fast fashion and eco-unfriendly practices have been going on for decades. This is backed by Nguyen (2021), who states that the challenge of reversing decades of marketing tactics and environmental destruction should not be left solely to the generation born into this situation. Critical change requires action by a group of policymakers, marketers and retailers in addition to consumers (Nguyen, 2021).

The fast fashion industry

According to current estimates, the fashion industry is worth around \$2.4 trillion (Lui and Hei, 2021). This is backed by Vajkai and Zsóka (2019), who state that brands like Zara, H&M and TopShop have gained a strong market position globally. Meanwhile, Abu (2019) unsurprisingly highlights that fashion is one of the most polluting industries on the planet. Well-known fashion brands have signed the historic "Fashion Pact" to ensure that sustainable development is strongly supported in the daily operations of chains and enterprises (Lui and Hei, 2021). Nguyen (2019) suggests that while there may be improvements in the materials and labour used in creating clothing, these enhancements are insufficient to offset the entrenched cycle of consumption inherent to Gen Z. This highlights the fact that the fashion industry has a significant negative impact on the environment, and efforts are being made by some fashion brands to address this issue through sustainability initiatives. It also points to the need for understanding if Gen Z recognises the incremental improvements in sustainability and how this awareness (or lack thereof) shapes their perception and buying behaviours towards fast fashion brands.

Abu (2019) states that fast fashion is not a new concept, it is however online-only retailers that are giving the term new meaning (Abu, 2019). A digital-first business model significantly reduces overheads, so you can lower prices and allocate a budget for more targeted marketing campaigns (Abu, 2019).

Fashion is an important form of self-expression for Gen Z's world and they will soon overtake millennials as the most influential generation in future retail (Lui and Hei, 2021). From the standpoint of sustainability and Gen Z's consumer habits, Kale (2021) indicates that the vitality of the fast fashion industry is less about financial necessity and more about a culture of frequent consumption, fueled by individuals desiring new outfits weekly and influencers promoting mass purchases. This is supported by Vajkai and Zsóka (2019)'s logic of how fast fashion is democratising couture by making affordable items available to the masses. This is even further reinforced by Joy et al (2012), stating that fast fashion helps satisfy young people's deep-rooted desire for luxury fashion.

Conclusion

Concluding this literature review, it is clear that Gen Z, coming of age between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, possesses a heightened environmental awareness, potentially shaping their consumer behaviours (Liu and Hei, 2021). Despite this awareness, there is an apparent contradiction in their approach to fast fashion—a sector marred by sustainability challenges (Joy et al., 2012). Economic pressures may compel them towards cost-effective choices in apparel, suggesting a complex interplay between financial constraints and the pursuit of happiness (Abu, 2019). This research aims to directly interrogate these nuances, aiming to bridge the gap in understanding how Gen Z's ethical considerations influence their patronage of fast fashion brands in South Africa, thus responding to the core research questions and underscoring a critical area of study.

Research Design and Methodology

Paradigm

Given the focus of the research on exploring human experiences, ideas, assumptions, and behaviours, an interpretivism paradigm is deemed appropriate for this study to investigate the research questions. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the subjective perspectives and meanings of individuals' experiences and behaviours (Nickerson, 2023). In the context of this research topic, it allows for the exploration of Gen Z's perceptions of and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism, which is influenced by their unique experiences, backgrounds, and cultural influences.

Epistemology

An objective stance in epistemology is also deemed appropriate for investigating Gen Z's perceptions and behaviours. This approach assumes that knowledge is independent of individuals and can be discovered through objective observation and measurement (Hiller, 2016). It enables the researcher to obtain a clear and accurate understanding of the phenomenon, without undue influence from individual values, judgments, and experiences (Hiller, 2016). This stance allows for the generation of generalizable knowledge that can contribute to the broader understanding of Gen Z's perceptions and behaviours towards fast fashion brands in South Africa.

Ontology

In addition, a relativist approach is recognised as appropriate for this research topic as it acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and varies across different contexts and individuals (Moon, 2017). This approach recognises that South African Gen Z consumers are diverse in terms of race, culture, Living Standards Measure (LSM), and other factors that influence their perceptions and behaviours towards fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism. Therefore, the relativist approach allows the researcher to explore and understand the subjective experiences and meanings of

Gen Z's perceptions and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands in a way that acknowledges the influence of their unique backgrounds and cultural factors.

Axiology

Axiological ethics investigate and question the intellectual bases for a system of values, exploring the justifications for value systems and examining if there exists an objective justification beyond arbitrary personal preference for the existence and practice of a given value system (Hasa, 2019). In the context of this research topic, the basis for any system of values around conscious consumerism, environmentalism and fast fashion must be questioned, therefore determining whether or not there is real justification for specific buying behaviours beyond just arbitrary personal preference.

Research approach and design

Qualitative research is the best approach for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards conscious consumption and fast fashion, as well as providing rich and detailed data that can capture the complexity and nuances of their decision-making processes.

Secondary research: IIE Library, Google Scholar and EBSCOhost

Primary research: Online Focus Group via Google Meet

The researcher used a cross-sectional study to collect data from the population sample at a specific point in time.

Population and Sampling

The population parameters will be defined as all Gen Z consumers of fast fashion in South Africa.

Because the nature of the research is qualitative, convenience sampling was used. This non-probability approach involved selecting participants based on their easy accessibility and availability to the researcher. Convenience sampling was appropriate

for this research as it aimed to explore the perceptions and behaviours of Gen Z consumers towards fast fashion brands in South Africa. With this approach, the researcher assessed participants who were known to them (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022). Additionally, this approach helped to mitigate the potential for selection bias and enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

All participants selected for this study resided in major cities in South Africa. The sample included 8 participants aged between 18 and 25 years old. Because non-probability sampling was used, the participants were majority Caucasian and all female. Due to the researcher's first language being English and all focus groups and surveys being conducted in English, the participants spoke English. Because this study focuses on fast-fashion brands and the target audiences of those brands, the participants fell within the middle-class group in South Africa. The participants underwent a screening process by answering the following questions:

1. Were you born between 1997 and 2012?
2. Do you live in either Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town, or Pretoria?
3. A middle-class worker earns between R15 000 and R25 000 per month (Staff Writer, 2023). Do you fall within that income bracket?
4. Do you shop at South African fast fashion brands?

Data Collection Method

An online focus group offered participants a selection of prompts on the screen for discussion. This method of interaction provided rich and detailed information about the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of Gen Z consumers towards fast fashion brands in South Africa through a group setting. The benefit of focus groups includes the collection of evidence regarding the shared feelings and opinions of people of similar circumstances (age, class and income) (John Hopkins University, n.d). Furthermore, it provides opportunities for participants to debate the opinions expressed, offering rich discussions and debates while gaining varying perspectives (du Plooy-Cilliers et al.,

2022). A further benefit of this method of data collection is that it occurs much faster than in-depth interviews as a compilation of information from many participants is collected simultaneously (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

By gathering data from focus groups, the researcher identified key themes and issues that were most relevant to the research questions.

Refer to Annexure A for the research instrument.

Data Analysis

In the context of this study exploring Gen Z's perceptions of and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism, thematic analysis was utilised to gain deeper insight into the topic.

Thematic analysis involves examining the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of participants in the focus group discussions to gain a deeper understanding of how they participated and engaged with South African fast fashion brands (Crosley, 2021).

Thematic Analysis: **Relevance to the Research Problem**

The study was primarily aimed at understanding Gen Z's attitudes and purchasing patterns in South Africa. By employing thematic analysis, the researcher was able to delve deeply into how this demographic perceived fast fashion, including their buying behaviours and how they are influenced by fast fashion branding and marketing tactics.

Thematic Analysis: **The Themes and Meanings of Data**

Thematic analysis provided more than just surface-level responses. It offered a rich description of participants' understanding and interactions with fast fashion (Bruan & Clark, 2006). This was crucial for the research problem, which sought to uncover the "why" behind Gen Z's perceptions and actions.

Thematic Analysis: **A Holistic Approach**

Fast fashion in South Africa isn't merely about purchasing decisions; it is embedded within economic, social, and environmental contexts (Williams, 2021). Thematic analysis allowed for the exploration of these intersections by understanding shared meanings and differing perspectives (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the choice of thematic analysis as a data analysis method was aligned with the research problem. It enabled the study to delve into the intricate web of beliefs, values, and perceptions held by Gen Z in South Africa concerning the fast fashion industry, thus providing robust, comprehensive, and nuanced insights (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

Implementation of Thematic Analysis Method:

Transcription

Before delving into the analysis, the researcher meticulously transcribed the recordings from the focus group discussions. Transcription of the focus group can be found in Annexures labelled Annexure B. This step was essential to ensure that every word in the conversation was captured in written form (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022). Transcription allowed the researcher to revisit the content multiple times, ensuring no detail was overlooked.

Analysis

A deductive approach was used for data coding and analysis. This top-down approach required the researcher to bring key concepts to use when coding and interpreting the data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

With the transcribed data in hand, the researcher embarked on the process of analysis. This began by reading through the transcriptions multiple times to familiarise themselves with the overall content and to begin identifying preliminary themes. In thematic analysis, immersing yourself in the data through repetitive listening of the

recording and reading of the transcription enables the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022).

Highlighting tools and annotation methods were employed as a coding method to mark specific segments of the data systematically and allowed for an easier compilation of codes into possible themes that were relevant to key concepts named in the research (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2022). Key phrases, recurring terms, and particularly significant statements were noted and categorised into themes related to the research questions. The codebook used for analysis can be found in Annexures labelled Annexure C.

Theme Identification

As patterns began to emerge from the analysis, the researcher grouped these patterns into overarching themes and generated a thematic analysis map. These themes were identified as the perceptions of Gen Z, the buying behaviour of Gen Z and the brand influence over Gen Z.

Drawing Conclusions

Based on the identified themes from thematic analysis, the researcher concluded the perceptions and behaviours of Gen Z in relation to the South African fast fashion industry. These conclusions were aligned with the study's objectives, providing insights into the awareness and concerns of this demographic regarding the environmental impact of fast fashion brands. Included in this was the explanation of how their purchasing patterns were influenced by brand marketing. The researcher also ensured that conclusions were grounded in the research questions which were informed by the literature review and the new data, offering a clear link between the new findings and the previous research.

Findings and Interpretation of Findings

Findings

To meet the study's objectives, the first step was to explore Gen Z consumers' awareness and concerns about the environmental impact of fast fashion brands. The second goal was to understand the factors influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions. Additionally, the research aimed to determine if South African fast fashion brands gain a competitive edge by prioritising sustainability. To this end, the researcher organised the findings into themes that align with the research questions and the problem statement.

Participant's perception and understanding of fast fashion

Participants characterised fast fashion as the expedited reproduction of high-fashion trends for mass-market appeal. They highlighted aggressive marketing tactics employed by fast fashion brands. Concerns were raised regarding the low quality of the garments and the ethical implications of the production processes, particularly in relation to working conditions. Additionally, participants acknowledged the transience of fast fashion items, recognising their short life span.

Participants' environmental and ethical concerns

More than half of the participants conveyed substantial concern about the environmental repercussions of fast fashion. Three participants pointed out exploitative labour practices and cost-cutting production techniques. The ethical considerations, like cheap labour, particularly within the South African context, were also noted by two individuals. Throughout the discussions, there were prevalent concerns and uncertainties regarding the fairness of wages within the industry.

One participant highlighted that “it is a privilege to be able to buy into ethical, eco-friendly brands because the ones that are 100% for that are very pricey because they are paying their workers properly and using expensive fabrics”. This sentiment was shared between two other participants as well.

More than half of the participants recognised the importance of ethical practices in influencing their purchasing choices. Yet, all of them debated the feasibility of consistently opting for ethical brands, citing cost and convenience as significant considerations in their decision-making process.

The brands Mr Price and Shein elicited varied responses, with all participants noting their affordable prices but also raising ethical concerns. Conversely, local retailers like Pick n Pay and Woolworths received praise for their sustainability efforts and community initiatives from six participants.

Greenwashing

H&M faced criticism from three participants, with accusations of greenwashing featuring prominently in the discussions. One participant spoke specifically of the H&M clothing drive where consumers are encouraged to donate bags of old clothing in exchange for a voucher. That same participant spoke about how they heard that instead of recycling the clothing as promised, H&M are sending it to landfills.

Seven participants expressed scepticism, suggesting that brands may prioritise the appearance of sustainability rather than actual environmental stewardship. The consensus among the group was that, despite any intentions of sustainability, the primary drive for brands remains profit-centric motives.

Fast Fashion in South Africa

Six participants were surprised to learn that brands such as Zara are categorised under fast fashion. There was a dialogue regarding the relationship between the quality of garments and their price - more than half of the participants agreed that they expect a higher quality of garments if they are paying more for them. Attention was drawn to one participant who shared a story of how a pair of Zara jeans split at the seams, even after paying what they considered a decent amount of money for them, which left them disappointed. Discussions also emerged around brands like Woolworths, which have

been traditionally associated with higher quality. The group agreed that Woolworths has maintained that high quality and fair price point.

Sustainability

In the discussions, participants associated sustainability with the costs incurred during production. There was a common belief, notably all eight participants thought that fast fashion could be intrinsically at odds with genuine sustainability efforts. The group voiced a strong preference for brands to practise transparency, especially regarding their sourcing and environmental policies. One participant also highlighted the role of government, calling for regulatory measures to reinforce sustainable practices within the industry.

Consumer awareness

The entire group observed an increase in consumer awareness, with a readiness to demand accountability from brands. They recognised the economic hurdles that come with implementing true sustainability measures. Calls were made from three participants for deeper structural changes within the industry, alongside a push for more stringent regulations.

Three participants emphasised the strong impact of social media on their purchasing behaviours, discussing how brand personalities on platforms like TikTok swayed their choices to buy or not buy from fast fashion brands.

Cost

The group consistently identified cost as the primary factor influencing their purchasing decisions, making note of it in every single prompt discussion. They also deliberated on the economic challenges of ethical consumerism, noting the often higher prices associated with sustainable products. One participant noted that they would be willing to shop for something that might have been made unethically if it came at a good price. Another participant agreed with this sentiment, saying “price is the main factor” for them and another one said “price is everything” to them.

Interpretation of findings in context

Participant Perceptions of Fast Fashion

Participants' understanding of fast fashion as a mechanism to make high-end couture accessible to the masses suggests a discerning and critical view. While they acknowledge the allure of fast fashion's trend-centric and instant gratification appeal, there's also a real worry concerning the industry's ethical underpinning. This highlights an interesting dissonance; on one hand, they appreciate the accessibility, but on the other, they're aware of the potentially negative ramifications. Bugday (2016) might have labelled Gen Z as potentially 'unconscious', but the participants' understanding of fast fashion aligns more closely with Vajkai and Zsóka (2019). They don't just perceive fast fashion as mere affordable clothing; they associate it with broader socio-environmental consequences.

Environmental and Ethical Concerns

While participants exhibit a clear ecological consciousness, tension arises when weighing these concerns against actual purchasing behaviours. Roodhouse (2013) proposed that Gen Z's beliefs towards ethical and sustainable consumption dictate their purchasing decisions. Yet, the participants' insights somewhat align with Kale (2021) – there's a known ethical dilemma, but the influence of cost and convenience on buying decisions remains overpowering. The participants' ideas and opinions around the environmental and ethical implications of fast fashion indicate that they do have a keen awareness and understanding to make sustainable purchasing decisions. This is in opposition to Liu and Hei (2021), who argue that consumers may still be unaware of the environmental impact of the fashion industry.

While acknowledging ethical practices indicates an ethical inclination, participants' emphasis on cost and convenience mirrors Roodhouse's (2013) assertion that consumers often fall prey to decision-making biases, most notably, availability bias, which is the tendency for individuals to base important decisions on the information that is most easily available, and often leads to decisions that are made on superficial or limited information. The participants choose to let cost and convenience control their

decisions as those are easier than researching how a certain garment was made or what that brand's ethical considerations are.

Legality of Fast Fashion and Policy

The participants' lack of knowledge about South African labour laws and minimum wage speaks to their indifference towards policy. This directly aligns with Kale (2022), who similarly found that Gen Z will continue to shop from fast fashion brands even after learning that their workers are paid below minimum wage. However, their advocacy for stronger government intervention demonstrates an understanding that market dynamics alone may not ensure sustainable outcomes. The participants' expectation of accountability, supported by Nguyen (2021), suggests Gen Z is progressively seeking more than mere corporate lip service to sustainability. They're demanding concrete action from the government and institutions but abnegating the responsibility from themselves.

Participant Insights on Fast Fashion Brands

The revelation about Zara's fast fashion status demonstrates the complex landscape of brand categorisation and perception. While Kale (2021) indicates that Gen Z avidly shops from fast fashion outlets, there seems to be a disconnect or lack of clarity about which brands fit the bill. This is important to note, as Gen Z might not realise they are shopping at fast fashion brands and therefore may be unaware of the sustainable efforts or lack thereof that these brands are making. The mention of Woolworths and whether or not it is a fast fashion brand because of its higher price points and better quality clothing amplifies this dichotomy. Digital access, as highlighted by Liu and Hei (2021), offers a plethora of information, but deciphering and internalising this information presents challenges, resulting in potential knowledge gaps.

Brand Perception

The mixed sentiments towards brands, balancing affordability and ethics, suggest that the South African Gen Z might not fit Webster's (1975) definition of a 'conscious consumer.' However, the positive perception of brands like Pick n Pay and Woolworths

highlights the current impact of local sustainability initiatives on consumer perception, a sentiment supported by Liu and Hei's (2021) recognition of global brand efforts like the "Fashion Pact". Greenwashing, or the perception thereof, is a significant concern for these participants. Their scepticism towards brands like H&M's sustainability claims underscores a broader, global trepidation about corporate genuineness. The need for authenticity has never been more pronounced, and brands need to bridge the trust deficit.

Role of Social Media

Social media emerges as a double-edged sword. While platforms, especially TikTok, shape consumer perceptions, they also accelerate consumption rates, as noted by Kale (2021). Participants' insights revealed that a brand's portrayal on social media plays a pivotal role, not just in awareness, but in also buying behaviour. Liu and Hei (2021) speak to Gen Z being the first consumers growing up in the digital age, and the participants' agreement that social media influences their buying behaviour means this has had an effect on them and how they respond and interact with fast fashion.

Cost

Participants' constant discourse around the cost and price of garments being their top consideration when making a buying decision aligns with Abu (2019)'s sentiment that when everything else is expensive, like purchasing a home or going on a pricey holiday, you settle for a cheap, trendy garment that gives you a sense of satisfaction and instant gratification. This presents a complex juggle between financial constraints and what makes Gen Z happy. Bugday (2016) weighs in on a similar argument, posing the question of whether Gen Z is actively choosing to go against benefitting society as a whole for their own selfish needs, however the sentiment shared by participants that it is a privilege to shop eco-conscious brands at a higher price point counteracts this.

Implications of research based on findings

(Addressing the research problem, questions and objectives)

Perceptions of Generation Z towards South African Fast Fashion Brands

The findings indicate that Generation Z views fast fashion as a swift imitation of high-end couture intended for a broader audience. The aggressive marketing tactics of brands like Mr Price, Shein, H&M and Zara are noticeable to this demographic, suggesting that the brands' outreach is effective but possibly overwhelming. Furthermore, a common thread among the participants was the association of fast fashion with inferior quality and questionable working conditions. This aligns with the initial research question and previous literature regarding their perceptions, suggesting that while they are aware of the accessibility and affordability of fast fashion, they also have reservations about the industry's ethical and quality aspects.

Buying Behaviours of Generation Z towards South African Fast Fashion Brands

A crucial aspect confirmed in the findings is the evident tension between ethical considerations and practical decision-making factors like cost and convenience. Previous literature spoke to the rising cost of living being a factor for consumers to invest in fast fashion, however this study revealed that cost is the most important factor above all else to South African Gen Z consumers. This study revealed that cost was even more important than fair labour and minimum wage. Participants acknowledged the small role of ethical practices in their purchasing decisions but also debated the feasibility and privilege of consistently choosing ethical brands, especially when price and convenience come into play. This suggests a nuanced decision-making process where conscious consumerism plays a small part but is often overshadowed by other considerations for Gen Z consumers in South Africa.

How South African Fast Fashion Brands Target Generation Z

The mention of aggressive marketing strategies pertaining to sustainability and greenwashing shows that these Gen Z consumers were uncomfortable with the way they were being targeted to. H&M's 'Let's close the loop' campaign was scrutinised, among others, for promoting sustainability but not following through, or showcasing their follow-thought on promised deliverables. This highlights the need for fast fashion brands

like this to be authentic and meaningful in not just their communication, but their holistic strategy when targeting Gen Z consumers in South Africa. These consumers also feel as though the use of brand personalities in influencing their buying behaviour plays a pivotal role, so South African fast fashion brands should leverage those relationships and that trust to target them.

Solving the Research Problem

The research problem sought to delve deeper into the attitudes and purchasing behaviours of Generation Z in South Africa, particularly in relation to the fast fashion industry and its environmental impact. The findings unearth a demographic that is knowledgeable in some areas and ill-informed in others, highly critical of fast fashion brands in South Africa and their sustainability efforts, and conscious of the implications of fast fashion. While they are aware of the industry's adverse environmental effects and are concerned about the ethical implications, practical considerations like price supersede all.

By shedding light on their perspectives, this study shows that this demographic is not just motivated by trends, they are highly swayed by price. They demand transparency, authenticity, and genuine commitment to environmental and ethical concerns from brands but are not in financial positions to make the same, albeit small changes to be more sustainable in their own lives.

Addressing the Research Objectives

Objective 1: To explore the awareness and concern of Generation Z consumers towards the environmental impact of South African fast fashion brands.

The findings demonstrate an awareness and concern among Generation Z consumers about the environmental implications of fast fashion in South Africa. Discussions about greenwashing by brands like H&M, ethical denim initiatives by brands like Mr Price and

the ethical implications of fast fashion, especially in the South African context, shows a demographic that's critically engaged with the industry's impact.

Objective 2: To determine the factors that influence Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions, with a particular focus on sustainability and ethical practices in the fast fashion industry.

Factors influencing purchasing decisions for this group include ethical considerations, brand perceptions, price, and the influence of social media. The tension between ethical consumerism and the practicalities of price and convenience emerged as a significant theme.

Objective 3: To evaluate the extent to which South African fast fashion brands that prioritise sustainability and align with conscious consumerism have a competitive advantage in appealing to Generation Z consumers.

While some brands, like Woolworths, were perceived more favourably due to their perceived commitment to sustainability, the prevalent sentiment of scepticism about greenwashing indicates that merely appearing sustainable isn't sufficient. Brands that genuinely align with conscious consumerism principles may have a competitive advantage, but they need to convincingly demonstrate this alignment to gain trust.

Conclusion

This research highlights a generation (Generation Z) in South Africa that is complex in its interactions with the fast fashion industry. They are aware and concerned, but also influenced by the dualities of ethics versus practicality, quality versus price, and genuine sustainability versus greenwashed marketing. For fast fashion brands aiming to appeal to this demographic, the path forward seems clear: a genuine commitment to sustainability, transparency in practices, adherence to affordable prices and an authentic presence in the digital sphere where this generation spends much of its time.

As conscious consumerism continues to gain traction, the fast fashion industry in South Africa will be compelled to evolve in response to these informed, discerning consumers.

Conclusion

Validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the findings

In this study, reliability was pursued through the consistent application of thematic analysis by familiarising and coding through the data multiple times, ensuring the stability of the interpretations of the focus group discussions. The use of recording devices during focus groups and the subsequent transcription of these recordings bolstered the dependability of the data.

The trustworthiness of the findings was reinforced by adherence to some of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles, notably internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity. Credibility was established through long-term engagement with Generation Z participants, allowing for an in-depth understanding of their views on fast fashion. Authenticity was ensured by capturing a range of voices within the focus groups, representing different facets of Generation Z's perspectives. Descriptions in the reporting allowed for transferability, providing readers with a clear sense of the contexts and circumstances under which the findings were generated.

In line with Eisner (1991) and Lather (1991), the research employed structural corroboration by triangulating data from various sources—including focus group discussions, literature reviews, and market trends—to support the interpretations made.

Finally, the concept of validation, as articulated by Creswell & Poth (2013), was addressed by presenting a richly detailed account, aligning closely with the experiences and perceptions of the participants, and allowing for an accurate representation of the results by the researcher. This approach aimed to capture the complexity of Generation Z's interaction with fast fashion, which was characterised by an interplay between ethical concerns and practical considerations such as cost and convenience.

Implications of findings for future practices

The implications of these findings are significant for future practices, suggesting that brands must navigate the delicate balance between affordability and ethical production to retain Gen Z consumers. This demographic's buying behaviour, influenced by aggressive marketing and ethical branding, underscores a shift towards more conscious consumerism, albeit moderated by practical constraints.

The research successfully addresses the initial questions, highlighting the intricate dynamics between Generation Z's environmental awareness and their participation in the fast fashion economy. Looking ahead, there is a clear avenue for future research to further dissect the factors that could persuade Generation Z to align more closely with sustainable practices despite economic barriers. The heuristic value of this study lies in its potential to inform targeted strategies that resonate with this generation's values while considering their financial limitations, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable consumerism.

Ethical Implications

First and foremost, ethics clearance and permissions were obtained from the Independent Institute of Education (IIE), adhering to the guidelines stated in the IIE's postgraduate handbook of 2022. Refer to Annexure D for the IIE's Ethical Clearance.

Upon receiving ethical clearance, the researcher obtained written consent from all participants, as seen in Annexure E, which served as the consent form and Annexure F, which served as a recording consent form. Both clearly explain the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality and privacy. Participants were fully informed and had the right to decide whether or not to take part in the study.

To maintain confidentiality and privacy, participants were informed that their identities and online names would be known to other participants in the focus group. This

transparency allows participants to make an informed decision about their level of comfort in sharing personal experiences and opinions within the group setting.

The researcher did uphold ethical principles throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy. This means that participants' personal information and any data collected were treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality.

Moreover, the researcher complied with the ethical guidelines and regulations set by the institution and any relevant ethical committees. These guidelines provide a framework for ethically conducting research and helping ensure the well-being and rights of the participants.

Given that the study aimed to explore Generation Z's perceptions of and behaviours towards fast fashion, it is crucial to handle the potentially sensitive and personal information that may arise during the research process. By addressing these ethical considerations and adhering to the necessary protocols, the study was conducted in an ethical manner, promoting the trust, well-being, and rights of the participants involved.

Limitations

This research paper acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, the sample size of eight participants is small in comparison to the realistic size of the population, which may have affected the generalisation of the research findings to the entire population. Secondly, convenience sampling may limit the study as most participants will have a high level of education and know about the concept of sustainability. This could have created a biased representation of Generation Z's perceptions and behaviours towards South African fast fashion brands in the era of conscious consumerism. Thirdly, the research was conducted during a time in South Africa when it was increasingly vulnerable to a recession, which might have influenced the participants' responses due to financial constraints (News24, 2023). This could have impacted the participants' ability to engage adequately with the study, possibly only purchasing fast fashion because they have to and not because they want to. This could potentially affect the

quality and reliability of their responses. Financial stress could have influenced participants' perceptions and behaviours related to fast fashion, potentially skewing the study's findings. To address these limitations, the researcher ensured that the sample is diverse and therefore more representative of the population as much as possible so that the results can be as accurate as possible. The findings were interpreted with caution.

Recommendations for further research

This study suggests several recommendations for future research. Scholars could investigate the long-term impacts of ethical marketing on Generation Z's loyalty to fast fashion brands. Additionally, comparative studies across different demographics could yield insights into generational shifts in consumer behaviour. Exploring the efficacy of policy interventions in promoting sustainable consumption within this demographic may also prove valuable. Further research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample size and a broader geographical scope to enhance the transferability of the findings and deepen the understanding of global patterns in conscious consumerism.

Reflection

Regarding the research process, it's important to acknowledge areas that presented learning opportunities and things the researcher would have done differently if they had the chance to do the study again.

Reflecting on the study's methodology, it becomes evident that while the research effectively illuminated Gen Z's perspectives on fast fashion, there was room for a deeper exploration of their views on sustainability. A more focused approach to the focus group discussions could have strengthened the alignment with the research questions. In hindsight, steering the conversations more rigorously towards these questions would have kept the discourse on track. Additionally, the inclusion of labour laws as a prompt, while informative, did not directly serve the research objective. The researcher acknowledges that discoveries of new information can occur through the introduction of different ideas and the sharing of perspectives which can be insightful yet not always relevant to answering the research questions. The researcher recognises

that such findings may be useful as recommendations for future studies. These reflections are valuable for refining future research design and ensuring that all elements are closely tied to the central investigative themes.

Reference List

Abu, F. 2019. *Generation Z & The Fast Fashion Paradox*. Refinery29, 1 October 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/fast-fashion-gen-z> [Accessed 10 October 2022].

Ajzen, I. 1991. *The theory of planned behaviour*. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes. Volume 50, Issue 2. Pages 179-211. Accessed 20 March 2023. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T).

Bamboo. 2022. *Generation Z*. Bamboo HR, 2022. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.bamboohr.com/hr-glossary/generation-z/#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20D
efinition%20of,percent%20of%20the%20country's%20population](https://www.bamboohr.com/hr-glossary/generation-z/#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Definition%20of,percent%20of%20the%20country's%20population). [Accessed 26 October 2022].

Baum, A. & Clarke, A.M. (2012) *APA Handbook of research methods in psychology*, Vol 2: Research designs. DOI: 10.1037/13620-004. [Online] Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2011-23864-004> [Accessed: 20 July 2023].

Bell, A. 2022. *Understanding Gen Z*. WGSN, 23 June 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wgsn.com/en/blogs/understanding-gen-z> [Accessed 10 October 2022].

Bugday, E and Babaogul, M. 2016. Conscious Consumer Scale: The study of validity and reliability. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*. 5(2). [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313726278_CONSCIOUS_CONSUMER_SCA
LE_THE_STUDY_OF_VALIDITY_AND_RELIABILITY_1_i](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313726278_CONSCIOUS_CONSUMER_SCALE_THE_STUDY_OF_VALIDITY_AND_RELIABILITY_1_i) [Accessed 1 September 2022].

Chaturvedi, P., Tripathi, V., Kulshreshtha, K. 2020. Investigating the determinants of behavioral intentions of generation Z for recycled clothing: evidence from a developing

economy. *Young consumers insight and ideas for responsible marketers*. [Online]. DOI:10.1108/YC-03-2020-1110. [Accessed 15 October 2022].

Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Crosley, 2021. *What (Exactly) Is Thematic Analysis?* Grad Coach, April 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://gradcoach.com/what-is-thematic-analysis/> [Accessed 01 May 2023].

du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C. & Bezuidenhout, R.-M. (eds.) 2022. *Research Matters*. Reprint, Claremont: [Juta & Company Ltd]

Eisner, E.W. 1991. *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

J Bras Pneumol. 2018 May-Jun; 44(3): 183. doi: 10.1590/S1806-37562018000000164

Johansson, W., Nikolov, N., Pehrsson, J. 2016. *Identity Brand Avoidance. Understanding the Interdependencies and Main Drivers of Brand Avoidance*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:932803/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

Johns Hopkins University. n.d. *Assessment Tools & Methods: Focus Groups*. [Online] Available at: <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/viceprovost/assessment-analysis/assessment-tools-methods/focus-groups/> [Accessed on: 10 November 2023].

Joy, A., Sherry, J., Ventkatesh, A., Wang, J., Chan, R. 2012. *Fast Fashion, Sustainability, and the Ethical Appeal of Luxury*. *Fashion Theory* 16(3), 273-296. [Online]. DOI: 10.2752/175174112X13340749707123 [Accessed 1 August 2022].

Kapferer, J.N. The new strategic brand management: advanced insights and strategic thinking. 5th ed. *Great Britain*: Kogan Page Limited.

Kale, S. 2021. Out of style: Will Gen Z ever give up it's dangerous love of fast fashion? The Guardian, 6 October 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/oct/06/out-of-style-will-gen-z-ever-give-up-its-dangerous-love-of-fast-fashion> [Accessed 15 October 2022].

Karoui, S and Khemakhem, R. 2018. Veblen, The First Marketing and Consumer Behavior Theorist. Faculty of Economics and Management, SSRN. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3099386>

Kotler, P. and Keller, K. 2008. Marketing Management. 13th ed. *Prentice Hall*: Pearson Education International.

Lather, P. 1991. Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern. New York: Routledge.

Lee, M., Motion, J., Conroy, D. 2009. Anti-consumption and brand avoidance. *Journal of Business Research*, (62): 169-180. [Online]. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.024 [Accessed 20 September 2022].

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985. Naturalistic Inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Liu, Y. and Hei, Y., 2021. Exploring Generation Z Consumers' Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion and Marketing Activities regarding Sustainable Fashion [Dissertation]. Available at: <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hj:diva-52771> [Accessed [Accessed 1 September 2022]].

Ly, M and Vigren, S. 2020. *Changing attitudes towards fast-fashion - A qualitative study of Swedish Generation Z and their increased ecological conscience*. Bachelors of Business Administration. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1439178&dswid=8284> [Accessed 15 October 2022].

Meola, A. 2022. *Generation Z News: Latest characteristics, research, and facts*. Insider Intelligence, 5 January 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/generation-z-facts/#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20US%20population.in%20embracing%20diversity%20and%20inclusion>. [Accessed 26 October 2022].

Mukherjee, J. (2017) 'Philip Kotler, Hermawan Kartajaya, and Iwan Setiawan: Marketing 4.0, ISBN: 978-1-119-34120-8 Published by: Wiley, 2017', *Vilakshan: The XIMB Journal of Management*, 14(2), 111–112. Available at: <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.iielearn.ac.za/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsu&AN=129358422&site=ehost-live&scope=site> [Accessed 3 March 2022].

News24. 2023. The odds of a recession in SA are increasing, News24. 10 February 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/the-odds-of-a-recession-in-sa-are-increasing-20230210> [Accessed 22 March 2023].

News24Wire. 2015. *Best and worst clothing stores in South Africa*. Business Tech, 20 August 2015. [Online]. Available at: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/96307/best-and-worst-clothing-stores-in-south-africa/> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

Nguyen, T. 2021. Gen Z doesn't know a world without fast fashion. Vox, 19 July 2021. [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2021/7/19/22535050/gen-z-relationship-fast-fashion>
[Accessed 15 October 2022].

Owen, S. 2019. *The Gen Z equation*. WGSN, 9 July 2019. [Online]. Available at: https://www.wgsn.com/assets/marketing/toprightbox_assets/images/Gen_Z_Equation.pdf [Accessed 1 September 2020].

Roodhouse, E. 2013. *Buying in: Socially Conscious consumption and the Architecture of Choice*. Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. University of Pennsylvania.

Staff Writer. 2023. How much you need to earn to be middle class in South Africa, BusinessTech. 10 July 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/wealth/701787/how-much-you-need-to-earn-to-be-middle-class-in-south-africa-2/> [Accessed 3 October 2023].

Su, J. and Chang, A. 2018. Factors affecting college students' brand loyalty toward fast fashion: A consumer-based brand equity approach. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 46(1), 90-107. DOI: 10.1108/IJRDM-01-2016-0015. [Accessed 10 October 2022].

TMO Contributor. 2021. *The purchasing power of Generation Z and why businesses should take notice*, The Media Online. 7 October 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://themediainline.co.za/2021/10/the-purchasing-power-of-generation-z-and-why-businesses-should-take-notice/> [Accessed 10 November 2023].

Webster, F. 1975. Determining the Characteristics of the Socially Conscious Consumer. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 2, Issue 3, December 1975, Pages 188–196, <https://doi.org/10.1086/208631>

Western Governors University. 2021. *Who is Gen Z and How Will They Impact the Workplace?* WGU, 17 February 2021. [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.wgu.edu/blog/who-is-gen-z-how-they-impact-workplace1906.html#close>
[Accessed 05 May 2023].

Williams, M. 2021. The impact of consumers' sustainability consciousness on sustainable purchase intention amongst Gen Z in the South African fashion retail market. *School of Management Studies*. [Online]. Available at: <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/36586> [Accessed 10 October 2022].

Wong, K. 2019. *How to Be a More Conscious Consumer, Even If You're on a Budget*. New York Times, 1 October 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/01/smarter-living/sustainable-shopping-conscious-consumer.html#:~:text=Conscious%20consumption%20is%20an%20umbrella,way%20to%20consume%20more%20consciously>. [Accessed 26 October 2022].

World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. [Online]. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf> [Accessed 05 May 2023].

WSGN. 2022. *Future Consumer 2024*. WGSN, 2022. [Online]. Available at: https://lp.wgsn.com/future-consumer-2024-download-en.html?utm_campaign=future-c%E2%80%A6 [Accessed 20 October 2022].

Vajkai, E and Zsóka, A. 2019. Brand avoidance behaviour of Gen Z toward fast fashion brands. University of Budapest. [Online]. Available at: http://unipub.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/5674/1/VT_2020n5p39.pdf [Accessed 10 August 2022].

Yamama, S. 2021. Fast fashion in Africa. Infomineo, 15 February 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://infomineo.com/fast-fashion-in-africa/> [Accessed 15 October 2022].

Annexures

Annexure A: Research Instrument

Annexure B: Focus Group Transcription

Annexure C: Codebook

Annexure D: IIE's Ethical Clearance Letter

Annexure E: Example of Consent Form

Annexure F: Example of Recording Consent Form

Annexure G: Concept Document

(See all annexures attached separately)