National College of Ireland

The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Fast Fashion Purchase Intentions from an Irish Female Millennial's Perspective.

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Marketing

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Abstract

The Millennial generation are focused on wanting new goods and services more frequently and as fast as possible. Brands are now using social media influencers to promote fast fashion to female millennials online although research in this area is not fully developed. There is an evident gap in the literature regarding the impact that social media influencers have on an Irish female Millennial's purchase intention of fast fashion. There have been many studies (Shen, 2021; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010) regarding influencer marketing, buyer behaviour to fast fashion and millennial consumer behavior but research on fast fashion purchase intentions is limited, especially in the Irish context which provides a gap for research.

The main objective is to assess the impact of influencers on fast fashion purchase intentions, through the eyes of an Irish female millennial consumer. This research will assess engagement between Irish social media influencers and Irish female Millennials, the effectiveness of promoted content and the impact it has on their purchase intentions.

Several in-depth interviews (5) will be conducted among Irish millennial female consumers (25-40 years old), who have the same interests in fast fashion brands and influencers online. An inductive qualitative approach will be used in this research to gather natural and true perceptions of the topic. The gathered data will then undergo thematic analysis and presented as findings, for example, the research participants admitted that they would still purchase fast fashion based on an influencer's collaboration or review even after learning about the damaging and unethical consequences of fast fashion.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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"What feels like the end, is often the beginning"

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Chapter 1: Introduction to The Subject Area and Thesis

1.1 Background to the Study

In today's world, consumers have become even more conscious of their appearance and fashion choices. There is an inherent demand for the newest fashion trends and styles which fuels the destructive cycle of fast fashion i.e., the process of the production of clothing right through to the disposal stage (Payne, 2011) which is detrimental to our environment and the lives of many workers in developing countries.

Consumer demands are putting immense pressure on fast fashion brands and retailers to keep up to date and to have the picture-perfect pieces on their shelves as soon as possible. As a result of this phenomenon, brands are putting their suppliers and garment factories under more stress to deliver cheap goods with the fastest possible turn around (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Currently, many Irish social media influencers have collaborated with fast-fashion brands like Primark, Boohoo and Pretty Little Thing on platforms like Instagram to sway their audience to make a purchase based on their recommendation.

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

There is currently a gap in the literature regarding the impact that social media influencers have on Millennial's purchase intentions of fast fashion in an Irish context. Millennials are now heavily exposed to these promotions such as affiliate links and sponsored posts and the effects of influencers on fast fashion goods have not been academically researched thoroughly. Therefore, this study aims to understand the attitude between Irish Millennials and social media influencers in terms of their engagement and perception online. Additionally, another gap that will be investigated is the impact of social media influencers on Millennial's purchase intentions overall.

1.3 Research Justification and Rationale

Due to the growth of the fast fashion industry alongside Millennial's increased engagement with social media influencers (Hughes *et al*., 2019), in tandem with the overconsumption of clothing in Ireland (Moore, 2020), this study will focus on drivers to this phenomenon of fast fashion purchase intentions being encouraged by social media influencers. There is little research carried out in this area which does not provide insights into the mind of consumers and their overconsumption which is damaging to the global environment.

1.4 Overall Aim of the Study

As previously outlined, there are literature gaps regarding fast fashion purchase intentions in the context of Irish female Millennial's, the aim of this study is to bridge these gaps and gather insights to uncover a more comprehensive understanding of Millennials consumption habits, which has a huge impact on the environment and lives of garment workers in undeveloped countries. These issues have not yet been researched in previous literature therefore the research aim will be attained by answering the research questions listed below.

1.5 Research Questions

The objective of this study is to answer the overall question of this paper: What is the impact of social media influencer marketing on fast fashion purchase intentions from an Irish female millennial's perspective? This question has been formed based on the gaps identified within the literature, in the section above.

1. What is the attitude between Irish social media influencers and Irish female Millennials?

2. What are the norms that influence consumers to purchase fast fashion when using Instagram?
3. What is the behavior of millennials online when using social media platforms?
4. How much of an impact do Influencers have on Irish female Millennials' purchase intentions of fast fashion?

The research questions helped form the basis of the research objectives which are outlined further in Chapter 3 (Table 3.2.1: Research Objectives). The chosen objectives were aligned with the Attitude-Behavior Gap Framework (Ajzen, 1991).

1.6 Research Methods for the Present Study

To successfully carry out this dissertation, this study will take a qualitative approach that consists of in-depth interviews. The participants will be female Millennials who consume fast-fashion goods and who are interested in social media influencers. The Research Onion (Saunders, 2015) was implemented throughout the research process, each layer of the Research Onion is addressed in Chapter 3. This research will apply an epistemological philosophy which refers to beliefs and assumptions that are deemed to be acceptable and legitimate (Burrell et al., 2016). Interpretivism epistemology was selected as most appropriate for this research as it investigates meanings that are initiated by individuals in a human context. As this topic is based around human assumptions, more specifically Irish female Millennial assumptions, the researcher aims to experience society from the participants point of view.

The research approach that was selected was inductive for this study since previous research on this topic will help form the basis of this study. Induction formulates a theory post data collection meaning the researcher can utilize a thematic analysis because this topic has gaps in the literature. Small qualitative sample sizes were adopted for the in-depth interviews instead of a big quantitative sample as according to Saunders et al., (2016) this approach is better. The researcher opted for a mono-method approach as time constraints were a limitation for this study. Mixed-methods or multi-methods were

not an option for this study as this topic required the researcher to delve deep into the thoughts and perceptions of Irish female Millennial's to uncover insights and opinions.

The sample consisted of female Irish Millennials (24-40 years old) as there was a gap in the literature in an Irish context and the researcher wanted to refine the sample and focus on one demographic. Only females were selected as they spend 226% more on fashion annually compared to men (Oakes, 2021). The chosen participants should have an interest in Fast Fashion and Influencers to accurately represent Millennials as a whole.

The analysis of the data implemented a thematic approach meaning common themes and ideas were pinpointed and discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to discuss the findings based on common patterns or themes that emerged throughout the interview stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The questions used during the interviews were constructed on the basis of the research objectives and provided the researcher as a guide to identify recurring themes.

1.7 Overview and Structure of the Research Project

Chapter 1 – Introduction
This chapter begins with a brief overview into the area of fast fashion and social media influencers with gaps in the literature identified as supporting justification for the research. The aims and justification of the study are also introduced.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review
The Literature Review section consists of in-depth exploration of the topic and related literature. As this research seeks to examine the attitudes and purchase intentions of Irish female millennial's, previous literature on influencer marketing and the attitude-intention gap will be explored.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodology chapter outlines the overall research objectives, philosophy, approach, strategy, collection methods and the sample chosen using Saunders (2015) Research Onion.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the insights collected during the in-depth interview stage using thematic analysis, using recurring themes and points of interest that emerged. The interviews were conducted based on questions surrounding the research objectives outlined in chapter 3. This chapter also offers a critical discussion by the researcher based on reflections after the interviews.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Recommendations

The concluding chapter offers reflections and conclusions based on the previous chapters along with recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review aims to construct a better understanding of the current literature associated with the area of the research question. The research examined online social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, Blogs, YouTube and TikTok. Additionally, the study focuses on the behavior and content of social media influencers in the fashion industry. Millennials, also known as Generation Y, will be investigated throughout this section.

This section focuses on building an understanding of the themes of the research which are millennials, social media and influencer marketing. The section after this will look at other related subject matter such as social media, the role of influencers attitude-behavior framework (Ajzen, 1991). Since the rise of influencers is relatively new to the area of marketing, the academic literature is limited in volume. Throughout this discussion, the most recent literature will be examined to gain a greater understanding of the area.

The concept of influence will be analyzed to add to the insight of social media influencers, this review will look at attitude, norms, behavior and an influencer's effect on purchase intentions. The objective is to outline existing knowledge, recognize recurring themes and spot possible gaps in the research. This will set up a basis for the research question and provide useful information for this study.

2.2. Millennial generation/ Generation Y

The Millennial generation or generation Y can be described as the digital natives who have lived their entire life on earth in a digital-orientated world. Their environment has been dramatically affected by the technology around them including how they work and live (Bennett, Maton and Kervin, 2008; Wesner and Miller, 2008; Prensky, 2001). A defining characteristic for this generation is their persistent exposure to online platforms

which has a substantial effect on cognitive, emotional and social development (Immordino-Yang, Christodoulou and Singh, 2012) and they are referred to as the generation who are online (Mangold and Smith, 2012). The millennial generation are known to be more tech savvy compared to earlier generations like generation X (1965-1980) and baby boomers (1946-1964). Defining this age group with a title allows researchers to examine the variance between millennials and other generations and their social media use (Dimock, 2019).

According to the 2016 Census carried out by the Central Statistics Office (2016), 21.3% of Ireland's population in 2016 were millennials. Millennials are individuals who were born in between the years 1981-1996. These individuals are more connected than ever before, and they have a very firm social conscience as consumers. They are known to be more tech-savvy compared to earlier generations like generation X or baby boomers (Brosdahl and Carpenter, 2011; Nowak, Thach and Olsen, 2006). Millennials are influenced majorly by experiences with technology and tend to utilize technology for shopping, social activity and hobbies (Lissitsa and Kol, 2016). This dependence on technology has fostered a much stronger facilitation of e-commerce and online advertising, compared to other generations mentioned above.

Millennials have a huge reliance on technology for entertainment, social interaction and education (Park and Gursoy, 2012). Their consumption is based on personalized and customized products, services and experiences which has become increasingly popular and available (Berry *et al*., 2010; Ansari and Mela, 2003; Bitner, Brown and Meuter, 2000; Peterson, Balasubramanian and Bronnenberg, 1997) which is relevant for this research topic of fast fashion. Their behavior is focused on 'wanting it all and now' which has a particular effect on their consumption and consumer behavior (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010; Twenge, 2010). This has a direct link to the consumption of fast fashion and the association to online shopping.

2.3. Social Media

Two major occurrences at the start of the 21st century constructed the idea of social media and influencer marketing. Many companies were affected by the worldwide recession meaning marketing budgets were cut back due to consumers spending less during the economic crisis. Simultaneously, the rise of the internet and WIFI emerged which became a cheaper marketing alternative to reach customers compared to other mediums like TV, radio or print. Social media rapidly became the new way to market goods and services. Both phenomena emerged at the same time and at a rapid pace (Hughes, Swaminathan and Brooks, 2019; Stubb and Colliander, 2019; Van Dam and Van Reijmersdal, 2019; Piskorski and Brooks, 2017; Hwang and Jeong, 2016; Khamis, Ang and Welling, 2016; Carr and Hayes 2014; Friestad and Wright, 1994).

In 1991, the world wide web emerged and became the starting point of what is now known as social media. One of the first social media platforms to exist was called Six Degrees which allowed users to create a profile and communicate with others (Samur, 2018). It wasn't until the late 1990's that platforms such as Blogger (1999), Wikipedia (2001), Myspace (2003), Facebook (2005) and Bebo (2005) arrived on the scene (Van Dijck, 2013). Twitter launched in 2006, the same year in which Facebook gained traction and took flight. The hashtag arrived on the social scene in 2007 which invigorated Twitter as a platform and allowed users to create awareness and promote social issues. Instagram was born in the year 2010 which revolutionized the way in which individuals shared images and filtered images (Samur, 2018).

Social media can be defined as anything that is delivered online where users can generate and share content. Social media includes social networking platforms, online review websites, video streaming services and communities online (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). Social media enables the flow of thoughts, communication, ideas and connections between brands and consumers which allows marketers to convey messages and campaigns. It can also be described as user activities in the form of contributing, i.e., posting content on platforms or consuming the content already available, observing others (Shao, 2009; Schlosser, 2005). It has been suggested that

many individuals consume more content compared to contributing content online (Jones, Ravid and Rafaeli, 2004). In the case of millennials and since their generation grew up with a computer, they have grasped the use of social media quicker and use it for many daily tasks such as online shopping, banking, communication and exercise. Millennials mainly use social media for the need to socialize with others (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008).

In 2021, Data Reportal (Kemp, 2021) carried out a study which proved that Ireland had 4.51 million internet users out of a population of 4.96 million. Facebook was the third most popular website regarding traffic, Twitter appeared in tenth place and Instagram was ranked number fourteenth. In 2021, 81.4% of 25–34-year-olds (millennial age) purchased a product online in the past month when the study was carried out. The fashion and beauty industry experienced a spend of €816 million and in comparison, to 2019, there was a 25.3% increase in this industry due to the coronavirus pandemic. The annual spend for consumer goods was €833 per user in Ireland and this increased by 25.5% in comparison to the year previous.

Many millennials were of a young age when the internet and social media arrived and were born into a connected world (Gontijo, 2015). According to Weigand (2009), social media provides value to millennials in terms of their purchase intentions including what, when and where to buy goods and services. Most retailers and more specifically fast fashion brands have social media pages to communicate their promotional cycles and new products to consumers, especially millennials (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Over the last decade brands have included social media as an element to their promotional mix to target consumers and position their offering using social media influencers. Thus, this research aims to understand the role in which social media influencers have on the purchase intention of fast fashion in the Irish context from a millennial's perspective.

2.4. Influencer Marketing

An influencer is an individual who can also be referred to as a social media celebrity as they have become known in the public eye and to their large audiences compared to

traditional celebrities who are well known for their involvement in TV, film and music (Khamis *et al*., 2016). In Ireland, influencers such as Suzanne Jackson, Rosie Connolly, Pippa O'Connor, Keilidh Cashell, Aoibhe Devlin and Terrie McEvoy have a combined following of approximately 2 million followers (Instagram, 2021). Many of these Irish influencers have set up brands and built businesses using their platforms to entice their followers to support their enterprises, for example, Rosie Connolly has set up a unisex clothing brand called 4th Arq which sells loungewear (4TH ARQ, 2021).

> *"Social media influencers are referred to as people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them"*

> (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017, p. 798).

Consumers have a stronger attachment to social media influencers as they can relate to them more and perceive them as more authentic. This stronger connection and engagement to social media influencers has resulted in a higher purchase intention of goods and services, for example, fast fashion. It has become easier for consumers to imitate social media influencers rather than celebrities as they are perceived as real and relatable (Tran and Strutton, 2014; Stefanone, Lackaff and Rosen, 2010). Many influencers create content that is educational, inspiring and entertaining for their audiences while incorporating promotional elements for brands (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Influencers connect with their niche audiences in a more intimate way which is unique, compared to traditional celebrities who appear on broadcasted TV and in movies (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016).

Instagram is a platform used by many social media influencers as it has become a place for aesthetic content, many fashion and beauty brands utilize Instagram for promotional campaigns. Much of the content posted on Instagram is filtered or photoshopped images showing a luxury or desirable lifestyle (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Instagram facilitates the relationship between companies and it's consumers by attracting a large audience or followers. Influencers can share beauty or fashion content to a large audience of people easier than ever on platforms like Instagram. Over the

years, fashion Influencers have built strong followings which have turned into an online community. Having a large community online provides the influencer with a platform to promote messages, goods or brands. The phrase 'Instafamous' has emerged over time meaning individuals online have become famous on Instagram (Dewey, 2014). The main point of difference between celebrities and Instafamous individuals is the fact that the online space or platforms was responsible for the influencer's popularity. Celebrities are usually well known in the public eye for their involvement in TV and movies (Khamis *et al.*, 2016). Social media influencers or bloggers online have gained popularity online since they're relatable figures and their followers can connect with them on a more personal and authentic level.

Social media Influencers tend to share the good, bad and ugly side of their everyday lifestyles which comes across as being more relatable. This type of content earns influence online as audiences tend to trust normal individuals' opinions and recommendations compared to celebrities (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu, 2019). Micro influencers have grown in popularity online as they post content as ordinary people which gains them a large audience for showing their offline life online.

Micro Influencers can be defined as social media accounts that have 1,000-10,000 followers (Bernazzani, 2019). Influencer marketing has witnessed a huge increase in popularity with 75% of brands implementing the phenomenon into their digital strategy (Hughes *et al.*, 2019). Influencer marketing has become an essential element when building brand awareness and engagement (Newbury, 2019). Influencer marketing is becoming a successful marketing tool as many consumers base their decisions off other individuals' opinions (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001).

2.4.1. e-WOM tools of influence

Word of mouth is one of the oldest methods of transferring information (Dellarocas, 2003) and it has been defined as the exchanging of knowledge between individuals which plays a role in consumer behavior and influences their attitude towards specific

goods or services (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1966). With the rolling out of the internet, there has been a new type of word of mouth that occurs online; this electronic form of word of mouth is now considered as a hugely influential method of advertising (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013).

Unlike the previous definition mentioned, e-WOM takes place online and can be defined as informal communications that are related to products or services that are directed to users via social media (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). E-WOM has become hugely prevalent today and utilized by many businesses and organizations (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Millennials are increasingly using platforms online to share their suggestions and recommendations about goods and services that they consume and to explore other brands that interest them (Gupta and Harris, 2010). The millennial generation has been found to be the largest segment that adopts social media (Bucuta, 2015) and a greater percentage of individuals who engage in the phenomenon of e-WOM (Valentine and Powers, 2013).

Internet platforms have matured into a suitable channel for frequent communications between brands and consumers; these relationships online enrich 'a social identity' among millennials. Social media has adapted significantly and has changed everyday life for consumers and brands (Lee *et al*., 2011) and E-WOM has become one of the most influential sources of advice on the internet (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016).

2.5. Fast Fashion

Fast fashion can be defined as the rapid turnaround of garments in the quickest time frame possible using innovation and low-cost producers (Bruce and Daly, 2006). The fast fashion industry has revolutionized the clothing market in recent years, and it has been driven by the changes to consumer lifestyles and the constant desire for new clothing. The fast fashion consumer is a part of the Consumer 2.0 generation who is now more informed about the latest fashion trends and feels the pressures of social acceptance in an affordable manner (Cachon and Swinney, 2011). The industry has had to change the supply chain process to satisfy the customer. Fast fashion brands

now must respond rapidly to the ever-changing fashion demands and forecast the next trends to lead by competitive advantage. Brands like Zara, Primark and H&M have successfully responded to consumer demands by replenishing their inventory more frequently throughout the year (Christopher, Lowson and Peck, 2004; Frings, 2002).

The selection and sourcing decisions made by fashion buyers combined by the speed of the changing of the seasons has created this challenge to the sustainable world of fashion. Consumers have welcomed the idea of new and frequent clothing to the high street and online stores, making the complex process of buying fashion even more demanding and competitive. Getting clothing from paper to stores as soon as possible has resulted in fast fashion companies like Zara, switching to closer suppliers in Europe to achieve a five-day shipping turnaround from Turkey, compared to 22 days from China (Financial Times, 2019).

According to the Netflix documentary "The Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion" (2019), in 1980 the average American bought 12 items of clothing per year and in 2018 this number of clothing rose to 68 items (half of these items are worn three times or less). Consumers are only keeping each garment half as long compared to twenty years ago and the average American throws away 80 pounds of clothing per year. The documentary also pinpointed major culprits like Zara, who were first to pioneer and perfect the fast-fashion model. The group produced 1.59 billion items in 2018 according to their annual report (Inditex, 2018). The company utilizes quick response manufacturing and dynamic assortment to operate in the fast-fashion market which is the company's way of pumping out new products and observing what sells best.

Overconsumption is evident in Ireland; we send 63,000 tons of clothing to landfill sites every year (Moore, 2020). Many Irish consumers send bags of clothing to charity shops or clothing banks every year after a wardrobe is cleared out but almost half of these donations end up in the global textile trade which is usually a harmful consequence for the countries who receive this donated clothing.

2.5.1. The Fashion Product Life Cycle

The life cycle of a garment is a cradle to grave process that begins at the production of fibers, to the production of the textile, to the design stage, the manufacturing process, distribution, selling, and the utilizing of the product to the disposal step (Payne, 2011). The fashion product life cycle is used to demonstrate the scale of the problem of fast fashion and encourages all parties involved (designers, producers, consumers) to reconsider their choices and processes. The fast fashion industry is currently under much scrutiny due to its devastating effects on the global environment and its pollution damage. Even with this environmental issue present, the demand for these cheaply manufactured garments continues to experience growth year on year and fashion brands are producing twice as much clothing in comparison to the 2000s (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020).

Fashion season cycles have become shorter and more regular, shipping has become faster, and stock arrives with swing tags attached ready for the sales floor. The lifecycle of fashion has become less sustainable and more exploitative in developing countries. In 2004, 75% of exports in developing countries were clothing, making the buying power of European fashion companies much larger and easier to take advantage of these low-cost suppliers. It is known that fast fashion has dramatically changed the life cycle of clothing in today's world. Across the last few decades, the rate of consumption for clothing and shoes has taken a sharp increase, for example, Swedish consumers have increased their consumption by 53% over a 10-year period from 1999-2009 (Gwozdz et al., 2017).

Across the globe every year, 80 billion items of clothing are consumed which is an increase of 400% compared to 20 years ago (The True Cost of Fashion, 2015). According to a TedTalk by Lucy Siegle (2014), fashion in today's world holds a specific impact on consumers' lives and in doing so, they consume without considering the effects it has on our ecology systems, economy and their pocket. Fashion has become less and less about art and more about the profit fashion houses can make from it due to globalization. The issue of overconsumption is having a lasting effect in our world and

over the last decades, consumers have been impulse buying excessively without understanding the effects this has long-term. When consumers investigate their wardrobes, they will find the same items of clothing appearing and they will continue to purchase the same garments due to the price being so low.

Consumers then get rid of these cheaper pieces of clothing faster than the more expensive items, making our wardrobes more disposable than ever before but unfortunately for our world, many consumers do not think about the lasting effects this has. With almost 2 million tons of clothing heading to landfill each year, it shows that consumers are extremely wasteful towards resources and not living as sustainably as we should be for future generations. Siegle (2014) explains that consumers should not buy clothing unless they can guarantee at least 30 uses for that item.
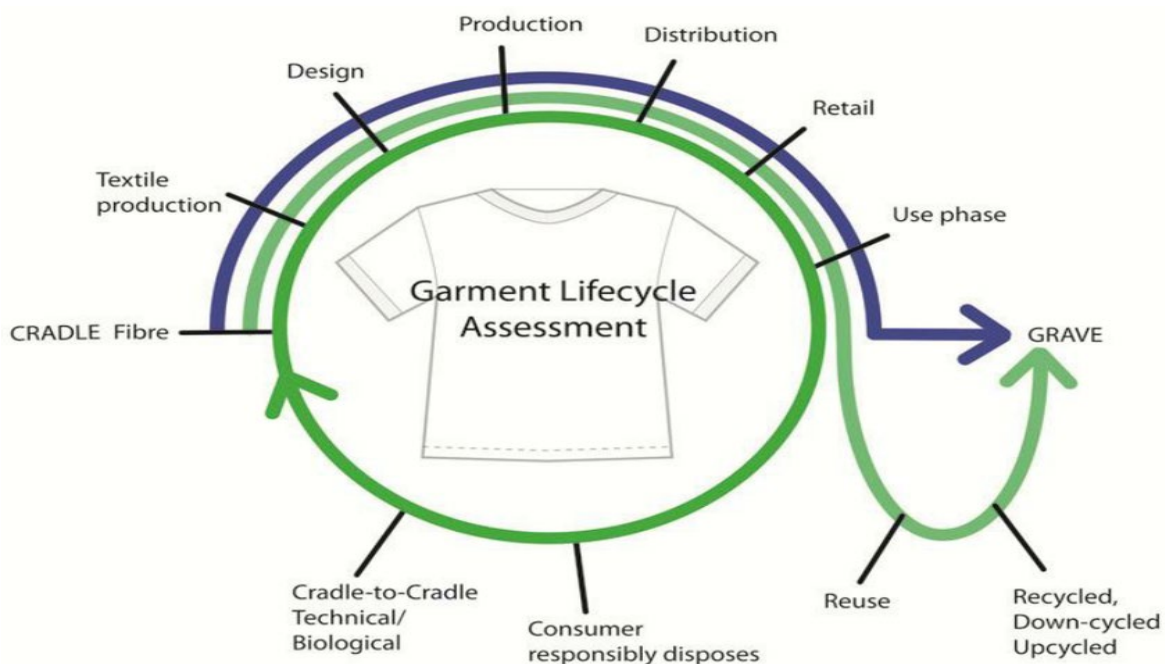

Figure 1: Garment Life-cycle Assessment (Payne, 2011).

2.5.2 Greenwashing and ethics

Greenwashing is defined as the discrepancy between the brand's claims and the actual effort they make to be more sustainable (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). Research has shown that when companies engage with initiatives that positively help the world that it enhances the company reputation and in turn, the customers' purchase intention and loyalty. Corporate social responsibility has grown in importance and become a normal element to the organisation (De Jong, Huluba and Beldad, 2019). With the growth in importance for CSR, many brands are culprits for the act of greenwashing.

Alongside Primark's eco-friendly campaign comes backlash from critics who say this is an enormous greenwashing attempt. Many customers on Twitter have asked the brand "how can a €13 pair of jeans be sustainable?". Greenwashing can also be described as a tactic that brands use to 'appear' ethical and eco-friendly compared to what they are. Many brands invest more money into looking green than making any attempt to improve their processes and activities (Green Queen Team, 2020).

There are many indicators that consumers can look out for when they suspect a company is greenwashing, they include releasing 'conscious campaigns' where they throw around keywords like 'ethical, sustainable, eco, consciouses. For example, fast fashion brand H&M released the "Conscious Collection" and Zara launched "Join Life" (Schrotenboer, 2013). Another indicator is when brands launch a small range of clothes that claim to be more sustainable than their other collection; this is greenwashing as the company is still profiting off their unsustainable goods. Companies often launch initiatives to help workers overseas but rarely mention figures that backup their claims. Another misleading attempt is when they launch 'recycled polyester' but still fail to pay their garment workers a living wage (Zhang, Zhang and Zhou, 2021).

Another greenwashing attempt comes from the brand's 'instore recycling bins' where they claim to recycle any donated clothing, but critics claim that these bins are completely for show and that any brand who places these bins in their stores is to show

customers a means of doing a good deed to remove the guilt of overconsumption so that customers will shop more. According to the Netflix documentary The Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion (2020), H&M has been found to bin 90% of the clothing that they receive through his scheme. The company even offers the customer a discount code after donating previously loved clothing which has been criticized as a poor attempt to look sustainable.

2.6. Purchase Intentions

Purchase intention can be defined as the merging of consumer products and the likelihood of a consumer to make a purchase based on their beliefs and attitudes about a particular product or service (Engel, Kollat and Roger, 1973). Another interpretation is the probability that an individual will plan to buy or purchase a certain product in the future (Huang *et al*., 2011). This effective concept is used to measure a consumer's buying behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980). Out of all elements that influence purchase intention, perceived value has been shown to be the most effective factor involved and has been proven many times (Ho *et al*., 2020; Khan and Mohsin, 2017; Awuni and Du, 2016; Park and Lee, 2015).

Regarding influencers online, there has been prior research to suggest that an individual's attitude about a specific clothing brand will have a direct effect on their buying intentions (Pradhan, Duraipandian and Sethi, 2016). Other studies have suggested that e-WOM has a stronger impact on purchase intentions when an influencer online promotes a product (Erkan and Evans, 2018) while Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) have emphasized that the quality of e-WOM is a determining factor in purchase intentions. Brand attitude, brand image, quality, knowledge and loyalty have been mentioned in prior literature to be a measurement of purchase intentions and have been shown to be a powerful influence (Tariq et al., 2013).

When considering all the above, marketers regard purchase intention as the key determinant of buying decisions (Raza *et al*., 2014). Purchase intentions are used by

marketing managers to forecast future sales and to predict how consumers will react to the actions that they take. In many cases, purchase intentions are often used by marketers to calculate demand for goods and services (Morwitz, 2014).

With the fast fashion industry being under enormous pressure to produce the latest fashion pieces, consumers have become hypersensitive to fashion and purchase intentions are wholly affected by influencers and fashion trends (Lang and Armstrong, 2018; Park and Kim, 2016). Fashion influencers with large followings hold the power to convince their followers to purchase fast fashion. Though, so far, there is a gap in the literature that addresses the correlation between influencers online and fashion purchase intentions (Lang and Armstrong, 2018). Research relating to social media influencers and purchase intentions in the fast fashion world is limited.

2.7. The Attitude-Behavior Gap

The most well-known theory of attitude-behavior is adapted from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), also known as TPB, it suggests that actual behavior is influenced by intentions which then affects the feelings toward this behavior.
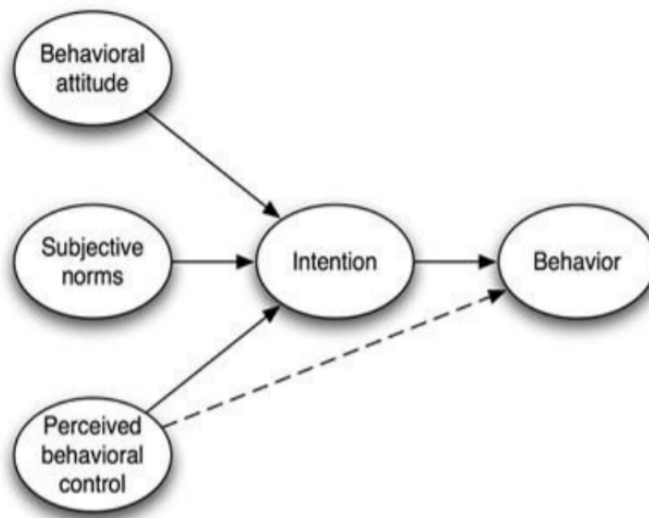

Figure 2.7.1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The attitude-intention behavior gap is the ideology that examines an individual's attitude to specific goods or services and their actual behavior to that same object (Redondo and Puelles, 2017). The model is related to environmental behavior of consumers and how their consumption is not aligned with their expressed opinions regarding sustainable products (Claudy, Peterson and O'Driscoll, 2013). The attitude-intention gap is used for investigation purposes regarding environmental topics or sustainable behavior (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Other studies have been conducted to explain this gap from a psychological point of view (Moser, 2015; Claudy *et al*., 2013).

According to Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000), corporate responsibility is a key component to a successful business as consumers are concerned about the behavior of companies which influences their purchase intentions. Nowadays, consumers are becoming more aware of their spending habits and the types of products that they are purchasing. This interest in sustainable living does not convert into actual behavior especially with fast fashion garments (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

The issues surrounding fast fashion consumption have led to a wider conversation about solutions to the issues such as the increased interest in sustainable clothing. Despite embracing the solutions to the issue, consumers are not practicing what they are preaching (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014; Belk, Devinney and Eckhardt, 2005). The gap that exists between sustainable intentions and actual sustainable consumption remains poorly examined (Carrington *et al*., 2014) and the topic requires more awareness (Gupta and Ogden, 2009). This gap has now been renamed by researchers as the 'ethical purchase gap' (Nicholls and Lee, 2006). Understanding this gap further would provide insights which would be helpful at both government and consumer level, however, this area has not been thoroughly researched in respect to the fashion industry.

A starting point to closing this gap that exists would be to encourage a positive attitude towards the ideology of sustainable garments as a favorable attitude toward a specific

thing is a key determinant in encouraging a specific action. However, from a critical point of view, even in the world of sustainable consumption, research has confirmed that sustainable intentions do not equate to purchase intentions (Morwitz, Steckel and Gupta, 2007). Despite the conversations around upcycling fashion, heightened environmental attitudes and consumers' willingness to appear more sustainable, few individuals show their commitment to greener products (Davis, 2012; Morwitz *et al*., 2007; Mintel, 2006).

The purchase intentions of sustainable fashion are not widely understood as the consumer's attitude is complicated and dynamic depending on the individual's circumstances. Sustainable fashion purchase intentions are often influenced by a host of motivations. A focus group carried out by Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2011), pointed out that price, information, quality and experience were factors that affected intentions.

2.5 Conclusion

With the rise in social media influencers and their influence relating to consumers' purchase intentions, there is a rationale to research this area further. Millennials are asking more from brands to provide the latest fashions and at a more frequent rate. Throughout this review of literature, there has been evidence of some gaps in the knowledge available regarding the impact of social media influencer marketing on fast fashion purchase intentions. This will provide a path for further study in this field and help to answer the research question. The aim is to provide more information on influencers' impact and fast fashion issues which will be useful to provide solutions to the area of sustainability and activism.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The gaps identified in the literature in the previous chapters will provide a basis for the research objectives in this chapter. This chapter will explore the research questions further along with philosophical rationales for each research method and a justification for the selected method. As there are many methods available to carry out this research, the methods chosen based on their suitability, possible limitations and best-fit approach. This section will conclude with ethical considerations, limitations to the research and data analysis techniques.

This research aims to explore the impact an influencer has on the purchase intentions of female millennials when purchasing fast fashion products. The following objectives will help to answer the research question; What is the impact of social media influencer marketing on fast fashion purchase intentions from an Irish female millennial's perspective?

3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The objectives of this study will include gaining a better understanding of their behavior, opinions and attitudes towards influencers online and their effect on their fast fashion shopping habits. The central focus of this study is to construct a stronger insight into the impact influencers have on the consumer behavior of female millennials.

The four objectives constructed in line with gaps within the literature and aligned with the Attitude-Behavior Gap Framework (Ajzen, 1991):

Theory of planned behaviour

- Attitude
- Subjective Norm
- Intention
- Behavior
- Perceived Behavioral Control
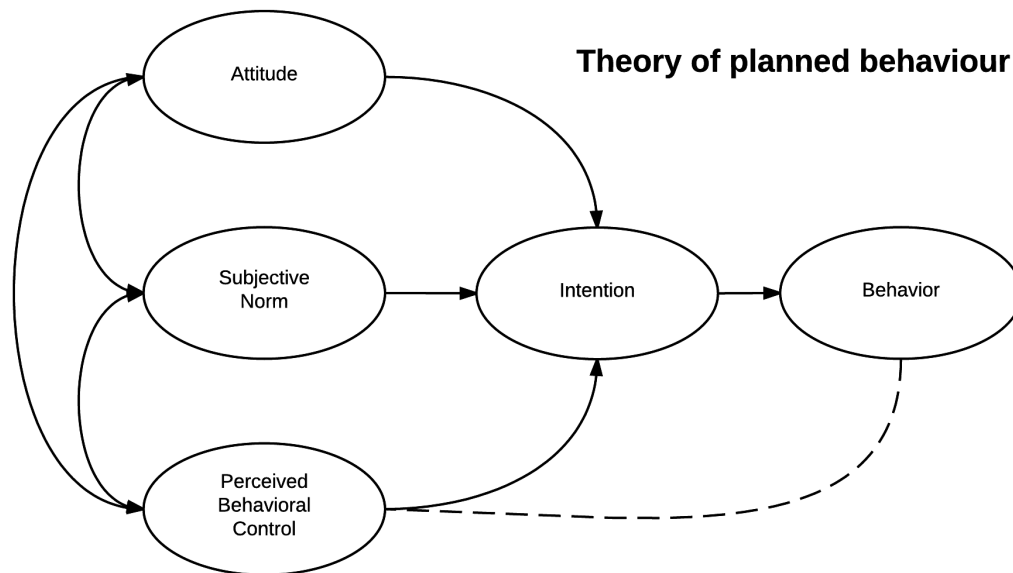
Table 3.2.1: Research Objectives

Research Objective 1	To examine the **attitude** between Irish social media influencers and Irish female Millennials'.
Research Objective 2	To identify **norms** that influence consumers to purchase fast fashion when using Instagram.
Research Objective 3	To evaluate the **behavior** of millennials online when using social media platforms.
Research Objective 4	To assess the impact of fast fashion content on Irish female Millennials' purchase **intentions**.

3.3 Research Philosophy and Design

Fig 3.3.1: The Research 'Onion'.
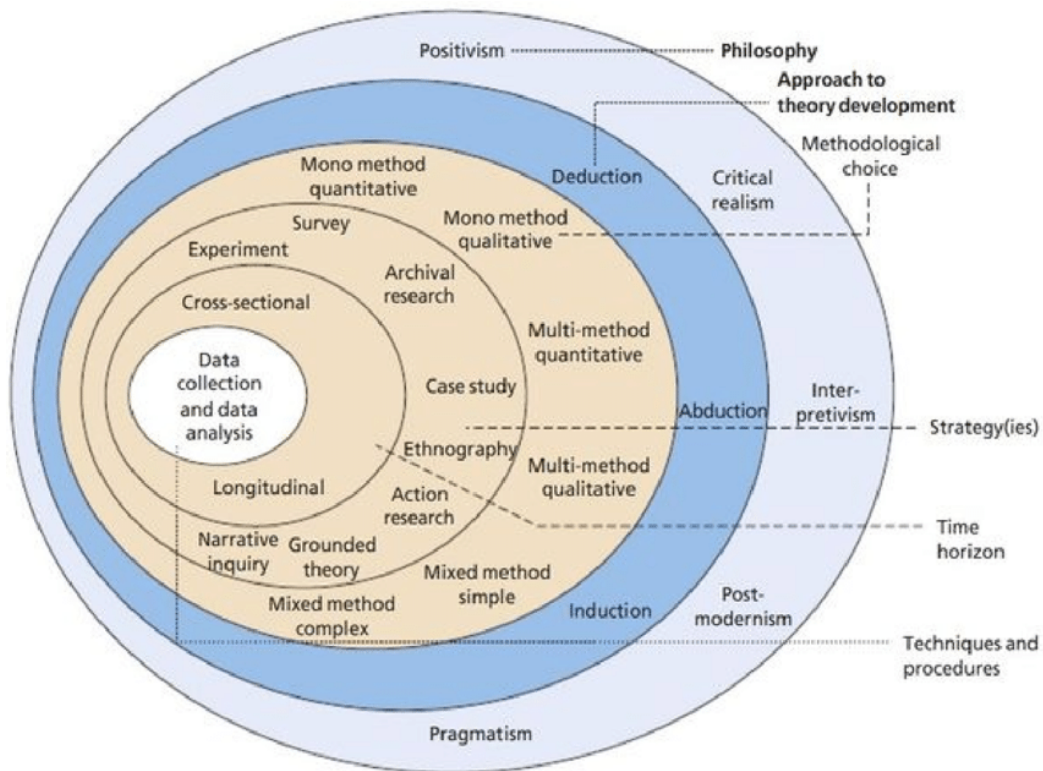
Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015

The selected methodology aligns with the Research Onion (seen in the figure above) framework and aims to address the research questions presented earlier in chapter 1 (Saunders et al., 2015). This methodology consists of an outer, inner and center layer which interprets the research process. From a critical point of view, the layers must be approached from the outside inwards according to Saunders et al. (2009). The sequence of layers provides decisions which must be decided before proceeding to the data collection stage.

3.4 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders et al. (2016), research philosophy is related to the system of assumptions and opinions regarding the evolution of information. This forms a basis for the research and develops knowledge in a specific area such as influencer marketing and fast fashion. The topic may not be wholly dramatic or a new phenomenon, but it can be as little as developing knowledge in an already known area. During every step of carrying out research you create assumptions about the topic (Burrell and Morgan, 2016). These assumptions include ontological assumptions (one truth reality), human assumptions you make unconsciously which are known as epistemological assumptions and axiological assumptions which is how your own human values affect your research. Using these assumptions allows us to shape our research questions and the methods that we utilize to analyse the data (Crotty, 1998). Strategic and credible assumptions allow us to justify our decisions regarding the research process and guide us to a reliable philosophy (Johnson and Clark, 2006).

Ontology refers to the study of what there is or a first estimation of the information available. It's a preliminary understanding of something and looking at what already exists (Hofweber, 2004). It is also described as the nature of reality, and it is known to shape the way you view your intended research objectives. Whereas epistemology refers to beliefs around knowledge and assumptions based on acceptable and legitimate information. Epistemology also refers to how we can communicate information to others (Burrell et al., 2016).

This research will adopt an epistemological philosophy meaning this study will seek to comprehend influencer marketing's impact on fast fashion, by building an adequate amount of knowledge through the process of qualitative in-depth interviews. With epistemology there are two main approaches, Positivist and Interpretivist. Positivism can be defined as 'observing a social reality' to construct law-like assumptions. It focuses on scientific facts and collecting accurate information to draw pure conclusions (Crotty, 1998). Using positivism allows researchers to develop hypotheses on existing theories but this is not necessarily a requirement. The other approach, Interpretivism, studies the meanings that are created by humans in a social context. Interpretivism has a purpose of constructing a new and further understanding of society by looking at different topics from different perspectives. Interpretivist epistemology is when the researcher steps into the social world of research participants and tries to comprehend their view of the world. As millennials encounter a different experience when following social media influencers, Interpretivism epistemology was chosen as most suitable for this research. Building acceptable information and comprehending millennials' point of view is perfect for this approach.

3.5. Research Approach

3.5.1 Deductive Approach

When it comes to research approaches, there are two options that a researcher can take: deductive and inductive. The deductive approach involves the further development of a known theory which then undergoes rigorous testing (Blaikie, 2010). The deductive process explains the relationship between a proven concept and a variable. This would not be a suitable approach for this research as deductive research seeks to anticipate, predict the occurrence and control the element i.e., in this case; consumer purchase intentions (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.5.2 Inductive Approach

On the other hand, Induction, is the alternative approach which begins with developing a new theory based on no prior analysis. The inductive approach explores an area and seeks to identify themes and trends which can then be used to construct a conceptual framework. Analysing a specific situation allows us to construct a loose theory which can then be tested (Saunders et al., 2016). With induction, the theory follows the data compared to deduction which is the opposite. This research will adopt an inductive approach as it attempts to formulate a theory around the conceptual framework of social media influencers. The Inductive approach is the most suitable as this study looks to compare previous work to identify common themes and since this area has not yet been explored in detail. When we look at the approaches listed critically, we can say that deduction tends to form a rigid methodology that does not allow alternative options. Another note, inductive facilitates a subjective conversation between interviewees and allows different opinions of phenomena. The inductive nature is most likely enlightened by interpretivist philosophy (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.6. Research Strategy

According to Saunders et al., (2016), using an interpretivist philosophy integrated with an inductive approach using qualitative research methods alongside small samples facilitates better data collection compared to bigger quantitative samples. For this

reason, in-depth interviews in small samples will be used for this research. In-depth interviews are one of the main methods of qualitative data collection when conducting research. Many researchers, including Malinowski, expressed the importance of communicating with participants to fully grasp their opinions and beliefs (Burgees, 1982).

In-depth interviews can be explained as having a conversation with a pre-established purpose (Webb et al., 1932). As data collection goes, in-depth interviews offer a comprehensive insight into a particular topic and have a high response rate meaning the researcher can collect responses in a timely manner as they are scheduled ahead of time compared to surveys which the researcher needs to wait for participants to respond (Bailey, 2008; Bell, 2005; Denscombe, 2003). In-depth interviews also allow the interviewer to explore new ideas that might emerge, ask for further explanation or remove any misunderstanding during the discussion (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

There are alternative options for research strategy such as using case studies or ethnography to gain insights into how millennials are impulse to buy fast fashion because of influencers online. In-depth interviews proved to be the most suitable option since they could provide their point of view and insights around a specific topic of fast fashion purchase intentions which may not be able to be collected via Netnography or case studies. A focus group could have been a suitable alternative to carry out this research, but the researcher must be conscious of the phenomenon of "groupthink" which is a psychological driver for a general group consensus i.e., suppression of alternative ideas or opinions within a group (Janis, 1972). This would prove a risk that members of the group would not express their alternative views or critical thinking regarding ideas or topics.

In-depth interviews provide less of a risk to missing valuable insights as the interviewer can lead the interview and recover the conversation. The researcher wants to ensure that the genuine thoughts, feelings and attitudes of interviewee's are captured and represented in this study, hence why in-depth interviews were chosen. Inductive

research is about uncovering themes or common trends that are associated with millennials and their purchase intentions with fast fashion making interviews the best tool to investigate thoughts and construct the most accurate qualitative information (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Bryman (2008), in-depth interviews are conducted between 45 minutes to 2 hours each and they aim to investigate topics or individuals.

There is an alternative research strategy which is mixed methods meaning both quantitative and qualitative research methods could be used together (Saunders et al., 2016). Some researchers have suggested that using mixed methods can provide richer findings and insights, but others have warned that they have different philosophical approaches along with different assumptions (i.e., epistemology, ontology or axiology) meaning they cannot be analyzed parallel (Quinlan et al., 2019). In the next section, it will cover the advantages and disadvantages of in-depth interviews.

3.6.1 Advantages of In-depth Interviews

The main advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide rich insights compared to other research methods like surveys. In-depth interviews can be seen as a more laid back and relaxed environment when collecting information as it's mainly a comfortable conversation. Other methods like filling out a survey can be seen as more unpleasant and monotonous. Another advantage to this method is the aspect of dual exploration, according to Breener et al., (1985) the participant and interviewer can explore the topic together even though it is guided mainly by the interviewer. By providing probes, the interviewer can keep the conversation on topic and guide it to collect invaluable insights. When compared to focus groups, they can be more difficult to control if the topic veers off course, hence why in-depth interviews are the better option. In-depth interviewers are also quick to conduct meaning information can be collected in an efficient manner compared to Netnography.

3.6.2 Disadvantages of In-depth Interviews

However, from a critical point of view, there are some limitations and disadvantages to in-depth interviews that need to be addressed. Even though the duration of an interview

can have its advantages (as mentioned above), in-depth interviews can prove to be extremely time consuming for the individual collecting the data. This method requires a huge amount of preparation regarding the questions being asked and after-interview activities such as transcribing the conversations between the participant and interviewer (Bailey, 2008; Morris, 2015).

Another disadvantage is that this method of data collection can be prone to bias meaning there is a risk involved where the interviewer could sway the participants opinions or feelings towards the topic of fast fashion purchase intentions. It is believed that the personal opinions of the researcher could influence the interview and therefore, impact the results and findings. The researcher could base the interview questions on subjects to prove that their idea is 'valid', or the participants could provide biased answers based on their involvement with the topic.

When conducting in-depth interviews, every effort should be taken to prevent this from happening. The interviewer should conduct the research interviewers with minimal bias (Guion et al., 2011; Healey and Rawlinson, 1994).

According to Saunders et al (2016), the interviewer may allow their own point of views or conclusions to interpret the responses that were accurately registered but to ensure the researcher doesn't interpret the information completely wrong or biased, some structure was implemented. This research will utilize a thematic question guide to provide some guidance and structure but to ensure that the interviewees were allowed to express their own thoughts and feelings under no constraints, the interviewer recorded non-biased notes after each interview along with a recording to ensure correct data was interpreted.

With the disadvantage of time constraints mentioned above, the option of telephone or virtual interviews were considered. Although phone interviews may solve the problems surrounding time and organizing constraints, the ability to view facial expressions and participants' reactions prove difficult over the phone (Quinlan et al., 2019). This option provides many advantages such as time and organizing in comparison to scheduling an in-person interview alongside the constraints of social distancing due to the Covid-19

pandemic. However, with all elements considered, Zoom will be the chosen channel to conduct interviews due to the safety of both participants and interviewer in mind during this pandemic.

3.6.3 Interview Structure

Semi-structured interviews will be used to allow both the participant and interviewer to engage in the conversation and freely explore the topics. Semi-structured interviews provide the option of discussing unexpected topics but more importantly, all the main topics should be covered. It's important that the researcher takes back control of the conversation once the topic has been explored sufficiently. For example, the interviewer can let the participant know that they are going to change the topic (Morris, 2015). Using semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to delve deeper into topics that emerge during the interview. This structure suits this research due to the need to explore different points of view and opinions about social media influencers and fast fashion purchase intentions. By letting the conversation flow in a flexible and natural way, it allows the interviewer to see the topic from the eyes of the participant (Bryman, 2008).

The alternative option is structured interviews which are closely related to the survey method. This method has set questions prepared and the researcher must stick with these questions, they are mainly closed questions meaning the answer is either yes or no. This option does not allow the interviewer to probe or explore topics that arise which are not suitable for this study mainly since millennials' opinions are subjective and don't fit under 'yes or no' answers.

3.6.4 Interview Techniques

This research will utilize some interview techniques to capture the best information and to help the interview flow in the right direction. For example, displaying images of social media influencers wearing fast fashion on the screen can help the participants with

answering questions. The interviewees were then asked to imagine if they were scrolling on Instagram on a normal day, would the influencer encourage them to purchase the fast fashion in the picture. The objective of this imagination exercise is to provoke opinions, feelings or memories (Quinlan, 2011). Another technique is to ask the participant to describe a time they were active on a social media platform, and they bought fast fashion based on seeing it on a social media influencer.

The most important thing during interviews is to let the conversation flow naturally and not to interrupt participants mid-flow as this can affect the quality of the information. Another element to remember is to ask questions that will ultimately answer the research question. Asking an interviewee to describe their experiences also allows for them to answer the topic along with many other themes (Morris, 2015).

3.6.5 Research Method

The research method is concerned with the fourth layer of the research onion framework, and it refers to the three methods available to the researcher: the mono-method, mixed-method and multi-method. Mono method means the use of one type of research design and data collection method for example, this research will follow a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews only (Saunders et al., 2016). This research will follow a mono-method approach as it is better suited due to the time constraints occurring. The other alternatives for example mixed methods were not viable for use in this study as it requires the use of philosophical approaches and multi-method require the use of two or more quantitative or qualitative methods but due to time constraints this was not possible (Quinlan, 2019).

3.7 Qualitative Data Primary Collection

Quantitative research is the other research collection method, and it investigates topics through the collection of numeric data. When using quantitative research, the researcher would apply scientific models and techniques to analyse the data (Creswell, 2002). Quantitative research methods are used in the form of experiments, surveys and

structured interviews. The main limitation when using quantitative research is the inability to delve further into social topics to uncover further meanings which is unsuitable for this research.

On the other hand, qualitative research is referred to as 'non-numerical data' and it is heavily focused on words rather than numbers. Qualitative adopts a holistic approach and it seeks to understand an in-depth understanding of social aspects by exploring topics, which suits this research perfectly (Williams, 2011). Qualitative research methods include in-depth interviews, case studies and ethnography. The researcher will use Qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews as discussed in the previous chapters (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

3.8 Population

The term 'sample' refers to the investigation of a small group of individuals that represent a bigger group of people or population. According to Saunders (2009), sampling is used when conducting research as it is a massive task to attempt to survey the entire population for example, a census therefore using a sample provides an effective alternative. Sampling is also a cost effective and faster way to collect data as well as being more accurate compared to a census as more time can be given to a smaller sample for collecting richer data (Henry, 1990).

In qualitative research, there is no expectation that the sample of participants need to be random, but it's recommended to select a diverse sample to collect different insights to represent a larger demographic. When we compare this to quantitative research, the sample needs to be random so the information analyzed can be 'generalized to the population' (Marshall, 1996). When using in-depth interviews, it's useful to opt for purposeful sampling meaning the interviewer can select participants who will be more likely to provide valuable insights with an aim to ultimately answer the research question. It is expected that the researcher will select a broad range of participants as a sample, for example, a broad range of Millennials (i.e., different age). A sample with a stronger representation of the target group i.e., Millennials will provide a broad range of insights into the phenomena and provide confidence in the validity of the study (Graziano and Raulin, 2010). This means that the sample must be closely related to the

target group, in this case it's millennials. Millennials ages between twenty-four and forty were selected for interviews (Beresford Research, 2021).

Since millennial females spend 226% more on fast fashion every year compared to men, the researcher decided to focus this study on females only (Oakes, 2021). The number one influencer partnership industry is fashion therefore (Moaz, 2018), the researcher will focus on this area especially due to fast fashion brands engaging with influencers online for example, Boohoo, Little Thing, Fashion Nova, Primark/ Penney's, in The Style.

There are two sampling techniques known as probability sample and non-probability sampling. Using probability sampling gives every person in the population an equal probability of being randomly picked on the other hand non-probability sampling refers to the researcher picking individuals specifically meaning they cannot represent a population accurately, but the selected participants are most suitable for the topic being investigated (Greener, 2008). For this study, the researcher has picked non-probability sampling as it is most suitable when using qualitative research (Saunders, 2016). The researcher approached individuals using a snowball technique which means contacting a couple of people and letting them nominate more participants until the sample size is reached. The chosen participants were picked based on the following criteria:

➢ Age: To ensure the interviewee was within the Millennial generation i.e., 24-40 years old. The interviewer also tried to ensure that there were various Millennial ages included within the study.
➢ Gender: Females were used for this study, to correctly represent the gender focus for this study.
➢ Nationality: the participant must be Irish to represent an Irish Millennial consumer.
➢ Interest in social media influencers and understanding the term fast fashion: the participant should have an interest in both topics mentioned above to accurately represent the target group of Millennials.

3.9 Analysing Qualitative Data

The final layer of the research onion deals with analyzing the data that was collected during the in-depth interviews. The information was collected over Zoom calls with 5 participants which suited them due to the flexibility for scheduling around their spare time and the interview can be done in the comfort of the candidates' homes. All interviews were scheduled in advance that suited each participant over the month of July 2021 and each interview will last 30-45 minutes. As stated in the previous section under interview techniques, the questions will be open ended to allow for full exploration of each question (Quinlan, 2015). The researcher will practice neutral body language without any judgement towards the participant. The researcher will not provide negative or overly positive assumptions or opinions towards topics to prevent a biased response. This will be important to make sure all efforts were taken to ensure there are unprejudiced and unbiased insights. During all interviews, the researcher will record, take notes and transcribe the conversations using Otter to ensure validity and accurate findings. All participants were made aware that the conversations were being recorded and that they would be destroyed after the study.

After the interviews are conducted and transcribed, the data collected needs to be analyzed which can be carried out in several analysis methods. These methods focus on identifying patterns or themes within the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These analysis tools include thematic analysis and content analysis which exposes themes or common patterns within the information collected (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). For this research, the researcher chose a thematic analysis as it is useful for sizable information that is disorganized. Thematic analysis seeks to identify a correlation of information that is collected by subjective participants (Saunders et al., 2016). With this method, the transcribed interviews are read in detail to uncover common words or phrases. According to Saunders et al (2016), the codes that become clear throughout the transcripts in one of three ways; through the interviewee's words, labels that the researcher uses on a collection of data or expressions that are used widely in previous literature.

A thematic question guide was used during interviews which ensured a deep level of discussion for each topic. The topics covered were social media, Social Media Influencers, Fast Fashion, E-Word of Mouth, The Fashion Life Cycle, Greenwashing and Purchase Intentions. Once the questions were formed, they were pre-tested with individuals to ensure that they were easily understood. After the pre-test with questions, minor adjustments were made prior to the interviews (De Vaus, 2002).

3.10 Ethical Issues

The National College of Ireland's 'Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants' were adhered to by the researcher throughout the study. All data obtained by conducting in-depth interviews was only used for the purpose of this dissertation. The researcher showed integrity and sincerity at all research stages and the privacy of all participants involved was respected. Furthermore, the participation in qualitative aspects of this investigation was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any time.

3.11 Limitations to Research

There are limitations to this study which will be outlined below, a limitation is referred to as elements of the research design or methodology that impact the findings or constraints or deficiencies within the research (Price and Murnan, 2004).

Firstly, the area of green consumption and social media influencers is still in its infancy in relation to research available. A longitudinal approach over several years would have given more insights and findings, however, due to the time constraints of this research this was not possible. A longitudinal study would have provided more time to investigate the impact that social media influencers have on fast fashion consumption over time. Not only would a longitudinal approach provide more time, but it would provide more data using additional interviews, focus groups or netnography.

Secondly, with the Covid-19 pandemic occurring throughout this entire research, there are many constraints such as in-person interviews being not advised especially with any vulnerable interview participants. Virtual interviews could possibly have some limitations

or connectivity issues which could put a constraint on collecting the research compared to an in-person interview.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion

The basis of this chapter is to present the research findings and offer a discussion across all the information gained from conducting the in-depth interviews. Since the interviews, recurring opinions and themes featured throughout the data collection process. The Irish female Millennials who participated in this study provided the researcher with insights and point of views. This chapter will explore each objective that was outlined at the beginning of this research; What is the impact of social media influencer marketing on fast fashion purchase intentions from an Irish female millennial's perspective?

This research was conducted with five research participants who were female Irish Millennials. The average age of the participants is 28, which is fitting for this research as it is based on millennials. The table below outlines additional information of the study's participants.

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Interest in social media influencers
A	Female	Irish	28	Fashion, makeup and homewares
B	Female	Irish	29	Fashion, beauty and home decor
C	Female	Irish	30	Fashion, sport and lifestyle
D	Female	Irish	27	Fashion, beauty and yoga
E	Female	Irish	28	Fashion, gym and sports

Figure 4.1: Information on the participants which includes their age, nationality, gender and interests.

4.0 Research Objective 1

Research Objective 1:

To examine the <u>attitude</u> between Irish Social Media Influencers and Irish female Millennials.

Interview themes:

- Social Media Usage
- Ad avoidance

4.0.1 Social Media Usage

The researcher began the data collection process by asking the participants about their social media usage and how often they use it daily. All participants mentioned that they use social media every day.

Participant E "2 hours every day"

Participant D "I want to say six but maybe more."

The responses by the participants are complementary to the phenomenon that millennials are digital natives and live in a digital-orientated world (Prensky, 2001; Mangold and Smith, 2012). As discussed in the previous chapter, Instagram is the best platform to focus on in this study due to the targeted audience i.e., Millennials. All participants said that they use Instagram daily and it is their primary social media platform. According to Sprout Social (2021), 72% of Millennials have said that social media is an essential element of their daily lives which is the highest percentage of all ages.

From a critical point of view, many participants have created limits to their usage to control their interactions online as they expressed a sense of frustration for spending too much time on apps like Instagram. Most participants mentioned how they spend hours on Instagram mainly, mindlessly scrolling. This has led them to enabling screen

time limits that locks them out of these apps to prevent any further usage. According to a report by GWI (2021), 26% of millennials are tracking their screen time usage and the study showed that millennials are the most likely generation to do this. These limits have come from a phenomenon trend that first emerged in 2019 called a "digital detox", where individuals would remove specific or all social media from their devices to take a break from social media.

Participant E "So like Instagram locks me out after two hours "(...) "I was like scrolling for hours and hours on end"

Participant B "I try to limit it to an hour on my Instagram."

Participants mentioned how they are now managing the content that they consume every day since they were engaging with constant ads and not seeing the content of family or friends. Millennials on average spend 2 hours and 34 minutes per day on social media (GWI, 2021).

Participant E "I'm probably getting more Instagram screen time than I am asleep at nighttime."

Participant D "I feel like my body just automatically clicks onto it and scrolls."

4.0.2 Social Media Channels

Instagram was the primary platform used by all participants which said they use the app daily. Interestingly, all participants said that they don't use Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat at all, and they feel these channels are no longer beneficial for their daily lives. TikTok was the second most popular social media platform amongst the participants which they said they use for entertainment and inspiration; Pinterest was mentioned additionally. TikTok has been a recent emerging platform since 2016 and is traditionally associated with Generation Z who are born after 1997 (Dimock, 2019) but it has become a popular platform for Millennials too (GWI, 2021).

The top 5 social platforms of Millennials are Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp based on an international survey of 55,167 millennials (GWI, 2021). LinkedIn, Twitter and Snapchat are the platforms that are used less regularly among Millennials. This study looks at all Millennials across the globe and not necessarily from an Irish perspective therefore the participants in this study say otherwise regarding Facebook being a less popular choice.

Participant C "I don't have Facebook anymore." (...) "What's the point? We don't use it."

4.0.3 Social Media Influencers

As Instagram was their primary channel, many interviewees mentioned how their feeds are clogged with Influencers who post advertisements constantly, one participant mentioned how 90% of the people they follow are influencers. They mentioned how they rarely see content from family and friends due to the volume of sponsored content posted by the influencers that they follow. There was a consistent theme between all participants that they didn't follow macro influencers anymore due to a lack of trust, relatability and the overuse of sponsored advertisements. They discussed how macro influencers such as SoSueMe show an elaborate and lavish lifestyle online which affects their mood directly because the participants cannot live their lives the same way (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

Participant D "I wouldn't follow like big bloggers (...) they make me feel bad about myself"

On the topic of influencers, all the participants said that they prefer to follow the smaller accounts or micro influencers due to their transparency, relatability and availability of the same lifestyle (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu, 2019). They mentioned how smaller influencers have the same access to the same shops to purchase fashion compared to macro influencers who have been sent possibly sold-out pieces of fashion by brands who pay them for sponsored content. They also referred to brands who pay many macro influencers to promote the same campaign which translates on the Instagram feed to appear as the same post over and over.

Participant A - "every single post is an ad."

Sponsored content was mentioned by all respondents as being untrustworthy and they feel like the product or service is being forced upon them. This deters the respondents from following the influencer as they are actively trying to benefit from product reviews which come across as less genuine. Trust plays a huge role between influencers and consumers purchase intentions due to the risks involved when spending money online. Consumers are less likely to make a purchase if they do not trust the seller online (Lu et al., 2016), therefore influencers endorsements are a trustworthy and credible source (Dwidienawati et al., 2020).

4.0.4 Motivation to follow Influencers online

When participants were asked their main drive to follow influencers online, they mentioned fashion, home decor and lifestyle inspiration. Most participants explained that they follow influencers for outfit inspiration because they show how to style pieces together, then the participants will then purchase these outfits. One participant mentioned how they only follow influencers who they can relate to and who promote pieces of fashion that they can afford to buy. If an influencer posts designer items regularly, the interviewees mentioned how this would deter them from following this influencer as their lifestyle did not match up to that of the influencer.

Participant D - "so I'd follow people and then buy their outfits"

4.1 Research Objective 2

Research Objective 2:

To identify the <u>norms</u> of Millennials and fast fashion consumption

Interview themes:

- Online shopping

4.1.1 Fast Fashion Consumption

The participants were asked about their fast fashion consumption and how regularly they would consume it, all participants consume fast fashion in different volumes. There was a common consensus across all interviews that they know it's wrong to buy fast fashion or indeed too much of it, but they continue to buy these items. There is a paradox that exists in the world of sustainable consumption meaning consumers who have ethical intentions rarely make ethical decisions, which was evident during the interview process (Claudy, Peterson and O'Driscoll, 2013). Many studies have shown that while more consumers are becoming more and more aware of ethical morals and values, their change in consumption is less evident (Auger et al., 2007; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Moser, 2015; Claudy et al., 2013).

Participant E - "I'm probably the worst person for fast fashion". (...) "I wear it once and then it just sits in my wardrobe."

When the researcher questioned the participants about their fast fashion consumption it was clear that purchase inspiration came from social media and more specifically social media influencers. Online shopping became a recurring answer from all participants when asked about their shopping habits. The participants all mentioned how they shop online on a weekly basis with multiple packages arriving at the door.

Participant C "I am on a first name basis with the DHL driver. "

4.1.2 Fast Fashion Perception

The participants were then asked about their perception of fast fashion and if they were conscious of the environmental effects when consuming fast fashion. The responses were mixed as some interviewee's said they would be conscious of the damages to their environment and the unethical working conditions for the garment workers. Many mentioned the pandemic and how they have had time to reflect on their consumption choices. They mentioned Netflix documentaries being their only entertainment outlet during lockdowns which provided insights into the fast fashion industry. This heightened awareness has encouraged sustainable actions such as selling clothing on Depop, one participant recalled how they utilize it if they're only wearing the item of clothing once. According to Depop, it has experienced a triple-digit growth year on year in Ireland specifically and the platform now has 26 million users (O'Connor, 2021).

> **Participant A** - "Now there obviously is the apps (Depop) now you can sell things on if you're not going to wear again and that's great as well as cutting down on that (fast fashion)".

In the UK, 55% of consumers have described the issues of fast fashion as 'severe', this figure was 35% in 2017 meaning more consumers are becoming more aware year on year of the issue. This increase in awareness has risen during the global Covid-19 pandemic and attitudes have shifted towards less consumption and getting garments repaired instead. A study carried out by Waste and Resources Action Program, found that 19% of 2000 respondents have kept an item of clothing for a longer period compared to the duration that they normally would since the pandemic began (Seares, 2020).

Other respondents said they are oblivious to the environmental damages when they're purchasing fast fashion. Respondents said they feel more conscious of unethical decisions when shopping on Chinese e-commerce websites such as Shein or AliExpress but don't feel the same way when they are shopping on ASOS for the simple reason that ASOS sells brands that are recognized worldwide. This selective awareness

is part of the issue with fast fashion as consumers are unaware of the damage done by larger European fast fashion brands and their perception of the issue is foggy.

4.1.3 Attitude-Intention Gap

In this part of the interview, participants were asked if their consumption has changed in any way since becoming aware of the issues surrounding fast fashion. Few participants stated that their habits have not been changed since learning about fast fashion, they mentioned how they still buy garments despite their awareness of the issue. Especially during the Covid pandemic lockdown, respondents have said they were unable to access physical stores, so it was much more accessible to shop on e-commerce fast fashion websites such as Zara, Pretty Little Thing and Boohoo.

Participant D - "I probably bought online from pretty little thing more than I ever have" (...) "because you couldn't get to the shops"

Other participants stated how their fashion consumption has slowed down since the discovery of the damaging effects. One respondent has mentioned that they have become more mindful of where their clothes are coming from, they wouldn't purchase trendy pieces anymore, but they would still buy fast fashion staple pieces. Another contributing factor to this change in consumption was the financial pressure when buying new clothing every week which has helped the respondents to change their habits. They mentioned how they felt it was wasteful to wear an item of clothing only once so now they are making a conscious decision to re-wear outfits.

The objective of this study was to understand the attitude-behavior gap within the Irish fast fashion market regarding Irish female millennials. This was achieved through in-depth interviews which uncovered the paradox that exists within this area of interest as Irish female Millennials are often encouraged online to consume fast fashion even though they are aware of the environmental consequences. Irish female millennials enjoy the content from influencers online as it provides a channel for entertainment, inspiration and education. Millennials are also influenced by what they see online

especially Instagram and TikTok as they are purely imagery and video-based channels that are highly engaging. Instagram especially can be used by brands and influencers as a platform to post appealing fashion content which creates a drive from consumers to shop online. It was interesting to confirm that participants were fully aware of the negative effects behind fast fashion, but they are still purchasing frequently, and their habits have not changed since becoming aware of the issues.

4.3 Research Objective 3

Research Objective 3:

To evaluate the <u>behavior</u> of millennials online when using social media platforms

Interview themes:

- Negativity online

4.3.1 Instagram uses

The participants were asked their main uses for using Instagram as a platform, they all had mentioned the activity of looking for inspiration for fashion, homewares and beauty. Another use for Instagram was seeing what other individuals were doing for ideas, recommendations or suggestions. Another participation mentioned the use of Instagram for finding new trends or staying up to date with the latest ideas or individuals. Millennials are notably affected by individuals that they follow online, especially social media influencers. Instagram has a higher influencing purchasing power compared to other platforms like Facebook and 57% of millennials come across new fashion trends on social media. Millennials are the dominant group to use social media and the primary group to make online purchases due to influencers and online advertising (Loeb, 2020).

4.3.2 Online Environment

When the participants were asked their feelings around social media and if they think it's a negative or positive environment, their first initial reaction was that it's a negative space. One participant had mentioned that the negative feelings outweigh the positive as they feel it's easy to get sucked into the false realities online and compare themselves to the other individuals that they follow. A recent study has shown that Instagram did not have a direct increase of social anxieties in individuals in Singapore, but it had a direct impact on their self-esteem and social comparison (Jiang and Ngien, 2020).

Another respondent recalled how their Instagram feed has become a highlight reel showing the highs of their following life yet never the negatives. Another participant stated how they don't want to be a part of the negative world; therefore, they control every element of the social media that they consume, especially sponsored content that feels forced upon the user.

Participant B - "You just don't know what's real and what's fake."

Social media can be a positive place to be online, as respondents have recalled positive accounts that encourage self-care and positive mental health habits. Millennials are known to believe that social media is a positive place for society compared to other generations. The participants' insights complement research which discusses how millennials are aware of the negatives online just as much as the positives (GWI, 2021).

4.4 Research Objective 4

> **Research Objective 4:**
>
> To assess the impact of fast fashion content on Irish female Millennial's <u>Purchase Intentions</u>
>
> Interview themes:
>
> - Affiliate links
> - Overuse of sponsorship

4.4.1 Paid Sponsorship

In this section, the researcher focused on asking questions around how influencers make the participants feel online and if they encourage consumption of fast fashion products. All the participants said that they recognized the efforts that influencers go to promote brands and in turn convert followers into making purchases through product placement. They have all noticed the promotional activity that influencers engage with online meaning it does not go unnoticed. One participant noticed how a specific brand will utilize the platforms of many influencers to promote the same campaign or product.

Participant E - "If like River Island have a sale" (...) "they're all using the same affiliate links and they're all sharing the same stuff.

The participants associate influencers' promotions as an obvious strategy to encourage sales and conversions. Another respondent referred to how they can spot the telltale brands who rely on this marketing activity a lot, making them conscious of the same specific brands such as Pretty Little Thing and Penney's. This is negatively perceived by millennials as it almost feels forced on the consumer and an obvious attempt to sell something to them. Consumers are widely exposed to paid advertisements every day online which has sparked the phenomenon of advertisement resistance which can lead to the avoidance of brands and a negative attitude towards said brands (Gaber et al., 2019). The participants' answers complemented this view as they began to resist fast

fashion brands like River Island who implemented paid partnerships with influencers consistently.

4.4.2 Purchase Intentions

Participants had mixed opinions when it came to the question regarding purchase intentions based on an influencer's fast fashion reviews or sponsored posts. One participant mentioned how they would be more inclined to buy fast fashion after consuming an influencer's review if the outfit or trend was relatable and suitable to their lifestyle, for example, if an influencer posts content around workwear fast fashion, this participant would be much more likely to purchase based on their review. According to a study consisting of 1,300 individuals, 71% of consumers were likely to buy a good or service if it was mentioned by a social media influencer. The same study found that 92% of the survey respondents would trust a review when purchasing an item online (Bokunewicz and Shulman, 2017).

The same concept goes when an influencer is showing outfits in the same clothing size as the viewer, according to the participants. Participants mentioned how they felt influencers have the skills to style, edit and photograph specific outfits which make their content aesthetically pleasing, except when the participant buys the same outfit, it doesn't look the same.

> **Participant A -** "And when you buy it, and it just doesn't look the same on you."

The short video platform TikTok was mentioned in terms of a place to receive style inspiration, especially because the fast fashion content is quick and engaging. Participants mentioned how they are more likely to buy fast fashion from TikTok videos if the content creator has the same body shape as them with the idea that the outfits will appear the same on them.

> **Participant A -** "Oh, that looks really well on them. That'll probably look good on me."

4.4.3 The effects of an Influencers review

In terms of being conscious of sustainable fashion and reducing consumption of fast fashion, one participant mentioned how they would still purchase fast fashion if the clothing was idyllic for their personal style. The participant talked about how there is a strong paradox between right and wrong, but they would consume fast fashion regardless of their feelings towards the negative effects. They mentioned how influencers are constantly sharing affiliate links to sales in Nike, making it easy to shop for cheap items frequently. Shein was again mentioned as being a frequently used brand by influencers for its low prices and on-trend pieces, one participant recalled how they would use affiliate links to fill their online basket and then pay for all the goods at the end of the month.

All participants recalled a memory where they purchased a fast fashion item based on an influencer's review or paid partnership with a brand. Affiliate links were mentioned as a reason for purchasing fashion online, where a discount code was offered by the brand if you shopped based on a specific influencer's recommendation. Affiliate links are the main money maker for 39% of influencers according to a survey and 78% of their income coming from brand sponsorships (influence.co, 2020). Another participant mentioned how they would prefer an influencer if they gave an honest review without taking a sponsorship from any brand as they would be much more likely to engage with the content if it's organic and incentive free.

Following on from what we already know regarding Millennials, social media and fast fashion, this research aimed to discover the true extent to how social media influencers encourage millennials to purchase fast fashion online. As seen in previous chapters, millennials refrain from admitting their fast fashion consumption habits and believe that overconsumption is unethical and fundamentally wrong, yet they still admit that social media influencers can impact their decision making. Participants had mentioned how they are less likely to trust or purchase items through affiliate links if the influencer is a macro-influencer and appears to be overcompensating on paid sponsorship.

5.0 Conclusion

After examination of the current literature based on the impact of Influencers on an Irish female Millennials purchase intention in an Irish context, it was apparent that there are gaps existed in this subject area. The aim of this study was to bridge these gaps and provide scope for further research in this area for future.

5.1 Recommendations

To conclude on the previous chapters, the fast fashion industry is being increasingly damaging to our global environment due to the toxic waste, unethical working conditions for the workers and overconsumption (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014). Fast Fashion is now the second largest polluter in the world which demonstrates the need for the issue to be tackled. The aim of this Interpretivist epistemological study was to gain a better comprehension of the impact that influencers have on the purchase intentions of Irish female Millennial's. This study provided insights into the point of view of millennials and their consumption habits based on engaging with reviews or collaboration content from influencers. The area of attitude, norms, behavior and purchase intentions were explored thoroughly throughout in a bid to understand Irish millennials behavior better.

The findings had revealed that Irish female Millennial's gravitate towards fast fashion even though they're aware of the negative effects on the environment. Many participants had mentioned their consumption habits are influenced by social media and more specifically influencers that they follow, meaning social media influencers have a direct impact on the goods that millennials consume.

5.1.1 Recommendations for future research

The above paper discussed several findings and discussions that answered the proposed research objections and questions. The study utilized an interpretivist philosophy integrated with an induction approach using qualitative methods which was carried over a number of months. Further research in the future would be recommended

in fast fashion consumption in Ireland among different age groups for example Generation Z (born between 1997-2002) who are the generation after Millennials (Dimock, 2019). It would be beneficial to interview individuals born in the Generation Z era to gain further understanding of female consumption in Ireland. There was a lack of time scale during this research, which was mentioned in the research limitations, a longitudinal approach would have provided more insights.

Another recommendation for further research would replicate the above research design, strategy and execution but using the individuals and examining their attitude, norms, behavior and purchase intentions over the course of their lives to examine the effects of age on the phenomenon. Additionally, adding a mixed-method or multi-method approach will gain more insights into the participants point of view.

5.1.1 Recommendations for professionals

As mentioned in chapter 2, greenwashing is an adherent issue within the fashion industry, Greenwashing is the discrepancy between a brand's declaration and the actual activities they make to be more sustainable (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). Transparent and effective sustainability efforts by brand's not only helps the global environment but it increases the brand's reputation and corporate social responsibility status. Corporate Social Responsibility has gained traction over the last number of decades and has become a normal element of every corporation (De Jong, Huluba and Beldad, 2019).

Consumers are hyper-aware of greenwashing and know about the indicators that could potentially point to a greenwashing attempt. Consumers are more aware and concerned about the activities of brands which influences their purchase intentions (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000). From a critical point of view, our research sample and other academic research (McNeill and Moore, 2015) proves that this ideology is not accurate from a female Irish Millennial point of view as they are highly influenced by social media bloggers and influencers.

For fast fashion retailers in Ireland and abroad, these businesses can inform themselves of the current trends in sustainable consumption and implement strategies that can prevent the harmful effects of fast fashion. Retailers can produce garments made from more sustainable working conditions, fabrics and materials which will contribute to a cleaner and more ethical society. Brands can adopt a proactive approach to increased awareness of the issue and contribute to the conservation of the global environment.

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