National College of Ireland

An Exploration into How the Use of Influencer Marketing Can Help Promote Sustainable Fashion to Generation Z.

Aine O'Dowd

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of MSc Marketing.

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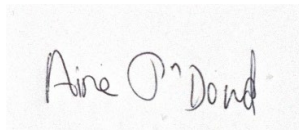Student number: x18322161

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ABSTRACT

Social Media Influencers are known for their impressionable status among Generation Z (Gen Z), and their successful promotional motivations (Zac and Hasprova, 2019), particularly through the promotion of fast fashion outlets. This is influencing Gen Z to purchase fast fashion from cheap online retailer outlets, which is contributing to global warming (Lang and Armstrong, 2018).

Gen Z are now the last generation to help reverse damage caused by global warming. There is a huge demand for wanting to take part in sustainability, but lack of knowledge on how among 54% of Gen Z (First Insights, 2020).

This report examines the potential relationship of influencer marketing promotion of sustainable fashion to Gen Z. The report will examine the willingness of Gen Z to engage in sustainable fashion purchasing, followed by discovering sustainable fashion marketing tactics promoted by influencers, impressionable to the Generation in question.

This report may in hopes include vital insights for fashion brands and influencers who are associated with sustainable fashion. The researcher would like to see a permanent changing, growing sustainable fashion from a trend to a lifestyle choice.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form
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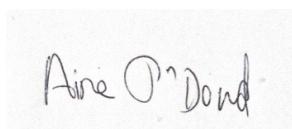**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** Master of Science in Marketing

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this thesis has been one of my proudest accomplishments to date. This would not have been possible without the support of those who stood by me throughout my journey, I would like to make a special mention to the following people.

A special thanks to my family, especially my parents who have done so much to encourage me, motivate me and support me throughout the years of my education and in my times of need.

A big thank you to my partner for his constant supporting and for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself, and to my friends and NCI classmates who have encouraged me throughout my journey.

Many thanks to my supervisor Gerard Loughnane for his insight and support throughout this research project. I would also like to thank Amanda Kracken for her insights and encouragement throughout the process. Thanks to Dave Hurley and my fantastic lecturers for their outstanding support throughout my 4-year journey at National College of Ireland.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to my eight interview participants, who were so giving of their time for me.

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1.1 BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Influencer marketing has become a trending phenomenon, particularly among Gen Z. Gen Z have grown into adolescence with internet access and social media readily available (Fromm and Read, 2018). They rely on what they see on social media and share experiences online among fellow peers. Influencers are opinion leaders who are known for sharing their life experiences on social media, gaining large followings online. Typically, influencers are seen as role models with trusted opinions, which makes them extremely effective at impressing young consumers (Letko, 2019).

While influencer marketing can be a beneficial target marketing tactic for Gen Z, it also poses risk of spreading misleading information and motivating bad ethical beliefs, values and activities to Gen Z. This is apparent in the fashion industry and the rising activity of fast fashion. Gen Z are the generation most concerned about global warming and most willing to take part in sustainable practices (First insights 2020), however over half of Gen Z surveyed suggest that they are unsure of how to be sustainable (ibid).

1.2 GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

1.2.1 Little knowledge about Generation Z's lack of willingness to purchase sustainable fashion

Studies show that there is a successful influential relationship between influencer marketing, fast fashion outlets, and Gen Z from research conducted by Letko (2019). However, studies have not been conducted on the influential relationship between influencer promotion of sustainable fashion to Gen Z.

Rising issues surrounding fast fashion consumption have led to an increased interest in purchasing sustainable clothing. However, despite the obvious interest, consumers are not exactly putting this interest into practice, especially Gen Z (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014). A research gap remains between sustainable fashion intentions versus consumption. This gap is poorly examined (ibid) and it is believed the topic requires more awareness (Gupta and Ogden, 2009)

Duggan (2021) and Murphy (2021) examined the relationship between Influencer marketing and fast fashion/sustainable fashion on millennials, suggesting that new studies need to be conducted on other Generations, particularly Gen Z. There has only been a small number of studies conducted on Gen Z purchasing intentions, due to their recent entrance to young adulthood and only beginning to have the ability to make their own purchasing choices (Reisenwitz, 2021).

There has been a large volume of research conducted on influencer marketing and the Gen z peer influence purchase intention effects, with research conducted in literature by (Johnstone and Lindh 2022). A personal relationship has already been established between influencers and Gen Z. This us suggested from Cassidy (2017) literature, reporting that consumers prefer opinion leader user generated content (UGC) because it gives a glimpse into real data from actual users, allowing Gen Z to opinion seek online for honest product information (Feick et al., 1986). Furthermore, Gen Z has the highest percentage of individuals taking part in sustainable practices (First Insights, 2020) with 64% admitting to having an interest in sustainability. Gen Z also are more likely to make their purchasing decisions based on environmental values (ibid). Liu and Hei (2021) literature has previously discussed Gen Z's attitude to fast fashion versus sustainable fashion. However, the relationship between all 3 topics including Generation Z, Influencer Marketing, and sustainability has not been researched together.

1.2.2 No studies on successful influencer sustainable fashion marketing tactics, which could be impressionable to Generation Z

According to Zahid et al., (2017) previous literature examining green purchasing found that it can be difficult to grasp the customer's attention among many brand's messages widespread across social media platforms. However, there is potential for influencers using their platforms to grab the attention of Gen Z, using their large audience and impressionable lifestyle experiences to promote sustainability among impressionable Gen Z's. Interaction within the topic of sustainable fashion could encourage a major increase in Gen Z sustainable fashion practice behaviour. According to UGC Campus (2020) studies showed that 27% of Gen Z said they did not practice sustainability, still a huge percentage missing from the generation. A further 52% stated they did not know how to participate in sustainability (ibid).

Furthermore, Lei and Hei (2021) research had identified that sustainability is not a solo driver in Gen Z's purchasing intentions, but only when there is combinations of personal and effective external marketing stimuli. Gen Z are known to be impressed by online shared experience and evaluations

(Feick et al., 1986). Therefore, research may be conducted to examine techniques which may be impressionable in making sustainability a future permanent practice among Gen Z.

1.3 RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE

The literature suggests that sustainability is become a new trending practice (First Insights, 2020). There is already a huge interest and demand for taking part in sustainable practices among Gen Z, however an astonishing 52% of the generation do not know how to take part in sustainability (UGC Campus, 2020). Gen Z will be the last generation to reverse the damage created by global warming (Petro, 2020), so it is most important that Gen Z are the most encouraged to participate.

Influencers have the power to motivate Gen Z opinion on social media (Dimock, 2019), as Gen Z are more trusting of opinion leaders than brands (Cassidy, 2017). Influencers have a large platform of opportunity to motivate Gen Z, and this is evident as one third of consumers have already purchased new brands or products discussed by various influencers on social media (Warc, 2021). Therefore, Influencers educating Gen Z by using sustainable fashion marketing tactics may create motivation of participation in sustainable fashion purchases and practices.

1.4 OVERALL AIM OF THE STUDY

The overall aim of this study is to establish a potential connection between Gen Z's willingness to purchase sustainable fashion upon promotion using Influencer marketing. This study aims to examine the willingness of Gen Z to move away from fast fashion practice to successfully practice sustainable fashion. The study will also assess what kind of influencer marketing tactics can be used to promote sustainable fashion among Gen Z. These findings will be established by conducting primary qualitative research from a random sample of Gen Z individuals.

The findings in this report will in hopes educate fashion brands, influencers, and Gen Z to increase practice in sustainable fashion, allowing sustainable fashion to become a common practice instead of a trend.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the emotional relationship between Generation Z and Influencer marketing
2. Explore Influencer Marketing Promotion tactics already impressionable / not impressionable to Generation Z
3. Investigate Generation Z's Willingness to choose sustainable fashion
4. Assess trends in Generation Z sustainable fashion and advertising preferences, in which could be used in promotion

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

There are two types of research methods to choose from quantitative research and qualitative research (Saunders et al, 2009). A number of studies based on Gen Z purchasing intentions and behaviours acquired from influencer marketing promotion, have been conducted using quantitative research. These include descriptive surveys and questionaries (Handayamni and Praygo, 2017) that examined similar topics to the study, but instead focusing on the millennial generation.

While many research reports have used a quantitative approach, the researcher has opted for a qualitative approach. This method of primary research has been chosen based on Lei and Hei (2021) research report conducted on Gen Z purchasing intentions. (ibid) recommended that qualitative research is critical for understanding new phenomena, behaviours and intentions. Since the topic studied by this researcher is new phenonium in its nascent stage (Edmonson and MacManus, 2007), it is key to understand Gen Z's intentions and emotions on fashion sustainability and relationship with social influencers.

There are different types of qualitative research methods used in research. These include interviews, observations and focus groups, producing full data sets (Saunders, 2009). The researcher will use the qualitative interview approach, using semi-structed interviews to probe relevant topics based on participants responses. The Researcher will interview eight Gen Z individuals, both male and female living in socio-economic backgrounds, for a better understanding of the modern Gen Z in Ireland. Participants must also have an interest in fashion for the purpose of the topic.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter will outline the background of the study, the gaps in literature between influencer marketing, fashion sustainability, and Gen Z. This section will also identify the supporting justification for the study along with the overall study aim.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter examines previous research of the topics in question. This chapter identifies and addresses the various subjects important to the study including Generation Z, Social Media, Influencer marketing and Sustainable fashion.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter outlines the study's research objectives and identifies the chosen methodology adopted by the researcher. The researcher will use the Saunders research onion framework as a guide for their methodology approach. The researcher will examine the research philosophy, approach, design and strategy, while also identifying the data sample and method used to analyse and interpret the data collected, along with the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 – Findings

This chapter presents the findings of interviews carried out on eight Gen Z individuals using research questions as a guide. The results found within in the primary data collection have been thematic coded into themes and interpreted by the researcher in order to gain a better understanding of the topic.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This chapter combines, analyses and compromises all findings from data collection and literature found within this study to develop a more theoretical understanding and captivating discussion of the study.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter reflects on the conclusions and judgements made by the interpreted primary data. The conclusion assesses if the research objectives stated in chapter 1 have been discovered. The chapter will also present recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Eco-consumerism, by means of expressing one's environmental consciousness and engaging in sustainable consumption practice have become a new core value for many amid ongoing largescale damage to the earth by toxic waste (Zahid et al., 2017) (Solomon, et al, 2019). Many consumers are now merging their focus on global health along with their personal health, known as conscientious consumerism. These customers who practice combined health and sustainable lifestyles look for products produced sustainably, known as green products. Green-products are popular among 73% of Generation Z consumers' (First Insights, 2020), the generation most concerned about Sustainability (Petro, 2020).

Generation Z (Gen Z) are the last generation that can reverse the damage caused by global warming (ibid). 73% of Gen Z are willing to pay 10% extra for a sustainable product (First Insights, 2020). However, there appears to be a lack of willingness to buy and engage in sustainable fashion, as the majority of Gen Z consumers are not putting their proclaimed interest into practice (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014). The reason for this is unknown, the topic has been understudied by researchers and is lacking in research. This report will examine how the use of influencer marketing could potentially change the willingness of Gen Z sustainable fashion purchasing, due to the nature of the relationship created online between Gen Z peers and social influencers.

The topics discussed in this literature review include Topic 1, An in-depth introduction to the Gen Z cohort, in terms of their characteristics, purchase patterns and decision influences. Topic 2, An introduction to social media and Gen Z social media habits. Topic 3, An introduction to the new phenomena of influencer marketing and it's influential authority over the Gen z cohort. Finally, topic 4, An introduction into fashion sustainability, new sustainably fashion trends and understanding the newfound topic of greenwashing.

TOPIC 1: GENERATION Z

Generational cohorts are population groups of similar aged individuals, who subconsciously share similar life experiences and values (Petroulas et al, 2016). Generational groups may influence other peer's attitudes, believes and behaviours (Bilgihn, 2016) (Ordun, 2015). A generational cohort can usually be identified from events which would have impacted their early adolescent years (Schewe et al., 2000).

1.1 Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z (Gen Z) are the most recent generation to make the transition into adulthood, with individuals born in the late 90's to mid-2000's fitting into this criterion (Dimock, 2019). Many Gen Z individuals are now in their early 20s, finishing their degree and beginning a career path, while beginning to earn their own income from new job roles (Reisenwitz, 2021). Gen Z share similar characteristics, these are as follows:

1.1.1   PRAGMATIC:

Gen Z now begin to receive disposable income from jobs. However, there are consumer related differences between Gen Z and previous generational cohort millennials. Gen Z grew up during times of an economic recession (Reisenwitz, 2021). As a result, this may have affected their ideas about buying choices and may be reason Gen Z are described to be more rational with their money compared to millennials (ibid). Gen Z individuals tend to hold a pragmatic attitude about contemporary world issues and the work that needs to be done to solve these issues (Witte, 2022).

1.1.2   SELF-DRIVERS:

Gen Z appear to be self-drivers of motivation as they remain the most educated generation with many individuals pursuing education, showing a decrease in school and college dropout rates, along with the highest rise in enrolments in college, more than any other generational cohort. (Fry and Parker, 2018).

1.1.3 INDIVIDUALISTIC, STRIVERS FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES:

Gen Z like to express individualism in their daily routines and purchases (Groves, 2021). They value authenticity (Wite, 2022), and appear to be the generation most understanding of racial and ethnic diversity. Arguably, there is a contrast here, as Witte (2022) outlines that Gen Z are known to care deeply about peer's feelings and opinions, but Gen Z also value and express their own individualistic opinions and feelings (Groves, 2021).

1.1.4 DIGTIAL NATIVES:

Gen Z are often labelled as the technological generation. The eldest of the cohort were born around the same time of the introduction to internet explorer in 1995. They became the first ever generation to be exposed to a digital world from birth (Ngangom, 2020), never experiencing life before smartphones or social media (Fromm and Read, 2018). Their tech-savvy characteristic appear as a result of quick technological changes and adaptions over the last 20 years. Growing up with these new digital technologies meant that individuals were always connected to the internet through Wi-Fi and on the go cellular data, with access to constant entertainment (Dimock, 2019). Whereas other generations had to adapt to this new technology as adults. Gen Z were learning about new technology through education and play, so now they now know no different (ibid). Studies conducted in Germany and United States on the Gen Z cohort discovered that individuals of the generation branded the technological changes as 'normal' (Welt, 2022).

1.2 Gen Z Purchase patterns and trends

It is important to understand preferred consumer patterns of a Gen Z individuals, as this is the only way to gain their trust (Groves, 2021). Gen Z claim to be more ethically conscious and often appreciate if a product is sustainably sourced or produced naturally. This aligns with Gen Z having characterises of pragmatic attitudes to issues like climate change (Witte, 2022). Gen Z also prefer to consume promotional content which shows real people, including ethnic diverse models and models with different body types, particularly within fashion promotion. Gen Z also prefer to purchase personalised products and services for expressing their individualism (Groves, 2021).

Gen Z are described as the quickest cohort at seeking product information online when needed, and are the quickest at making purchases online, compared to other generations (Lauring and Steenburg, 2019). It has also been discovered that Gen Z will consume and create more content throughout their live time than any other generation alive (Madden, 2019).

Additionally, Gen Z prefer to create emotional and informal relationships with brands, where they can communicate personally with brands, and make connections by publishing their own user generated content online to communicate with brands (Goldgehn, 2014).

1.2.1 Purchase Intention

In order to make a purchasing decision, an individual needs to focus on one particular brand within their evoked set of recognised brands. Belch and Belch (2012) believe that a customer may develop an intention or predisposition to buy a brand if their purchase motivations matches with characterises of the brand in question. Purchase intention may be supported by brand loyal customers, resulting in their repeated purchase. Customers are reminded of brand loyalty by use of branded advertising, making sure the brand name still relevant in the market (Belch and Belch, 2012). Marketers must also ensure that brands have top line awareness, so their name are quickly recognised and considered for future purchase intentions. These top line awareness models include promotional offers or authentic packaging, in order to influence the decision of new customers (ibid).

1.3 Gen z purchase decision influences

Factors which influence consumption among Gen Z include peer relationships, social pressures, and social acceptation. A trustworthy source can be a persuasive component to a decision when the consumer has not formed an opinion of a product (Solomon, et al., 2019). Studies have shown that 92% of all product/service recommendations originate from other consumers, along with 21% of Gen Z US shoppers, who will buy a product after hearing a peer's experience (Petro, 2020).

Dann and Dann (2011) demonstrate the peer cycle, whereby an individual buys a product for the first time, and after their own consumption shares their experience with fellow peers. The cycle of influencing to purchase will only continue depending on the experience of the first individual. If the experience is successful, the more likely the positive word of mouth and influence around the purchase.

Consumer experience is a powerful tool of promotion, as consumers may unintentionally influence peer groups to purchase or avoid a product based on their sharing of experiences. This is described as the band waggon effect (Eickhoff, 2018). Peer groups, consisting of one influential body, usually drive the motivation among others in the group (ibid). This is particularly common among Gen Z, who are solely impressionable by opinion leader decisions (Watts and Dodds, 2007).

Celebrity endorsements is a popular form of peer opinionated influence, with 14% of US shoppers purchasing a product based on a celebrity recommendation (Petro, 2020). Influencer marketing and celebrity endorsement will be discussed in greater detail in Topic 3.

Many Gen Z's will seek online for peers' experiences prior to purchasing a product. Opinion seeking is described as searching the web for product information and product experiences, based on feedback from interpersonal sources. These resources help the individual determine the quality of the product or service (Feick et al., 1986). Customer experiences are found on review websites, online forums where peers will share their valuable experiences, or received from advice of opinion leaders with large social media followings (ibid).

1.4 Generation Z Peer Social Acceptance

A commonality among Gen Z includes the need to feel accepted and validated by likeminded peers. This is particularly noticeable on social media. An individual will feel validated when a fellow peer 'likes' or reacts to their own creations of content on social media or will appear satisfied when they realise they are the first peer to give product experiences on social media (Fromm and Garton, 2013).

Gen Z will usually build a positive social self-image by impressing likeminded individuals though online interactions and peer influenced purchases. Their self-esteem is understood to be built through self-expression and intense comparison of other peers (Tognela, 2021). However, Gen Z individuals can often take self-comparison too literal, as they feel pressure to be accepted by their fellow peers or fear feelings of unwantedness if they don't buy or react to the latest purchase that other peers have made. This idea derives from the theory of attitude-behaviour, altered from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Otherwise known as TPB, the theory proposes that actual behaviour can be influenced by intentions, then affecting an individual's feelings toward the behaviour.
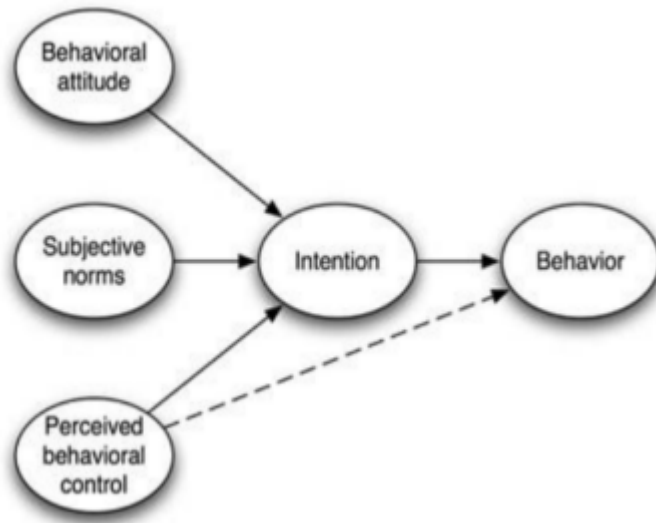
Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory measures an individual's behaviour intentions, while accepting that there can be uncontrollable hidden factors within intentions, which might affect behaviour predictions. One factor is social pressure. Sometimes Gen Z believe that a choice made by a peer is more relevant than their own choice and will then follow their peer's decision. This is due to the individual believing that this is what will help them fit in with their peers (ibid).

TOPIC 2: SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1 Introduction to social media

Social media consists of a social network, and within that, a set of socially relevant nodes, which are members of a network (Solomon, et al, 2019). Social media webpages operate as outlets for connection and communication between nodes, offering opportunities for finding similar acquaintances, exchanging shared experiences and seeking other opinions. This flow that occurs between nodes, creates an online community. However, in order to establish an online community, there needs to be user participation (ibid). The power of online communities allow participants to experience feelings of membership and identify with one another over commonalities (ibid).

2.2 Gen Z User Generated content actions on social media

User generated Content (UGC) is based on customer co-creation of online content, this is content created straight from the consumer and directed towards brands (Killeen, 2018). This may be created through participation of PR branded events, through social trends or by personal feedback of an experience (Dan and Dann, 2011) (Lieb,2011). However, co-creation of value depends on a customer's values and willingness to participate, particularly to take social risks online (ibid).

Sharing UGC can help other social media users develop ideas, collaborate with likeminded individuals and disperse information to other online communities (Warc, 2021). Kileen (2018) states that consumers trust UGC in the form of image and video testimonials, which is powerful and compelling for the customer to see before making their purchase decision. According to Lieb (2011) there has been a 50% increase in consumers trusting their online peer's recommendations and a 21% increase for microblog and opinion leader recommendations.
Studies show that Gen Z want to create consumer / brand informal relationship and collaborations, where they can publish UGC online for brands. This also allows individuals to make connections through their content (Goldgehn, 2014)

2.3 Viral marketing via social media

The term 'viral' is described as online content which is shared across widespread internet, gaining popularity and attraction quite quickly by peers (Meriam Webster, 2022). Creating viral trends also encourages engagement with brands and opinion leaders, creating an awareness and a buzz across social media (Lieb, 2011).

A fundamental part of viral marketing is using hashtags. The purpose of creating a unique hashtag to promote products or brands is there for users to find the content quickly, in a more accessible capacity and enabling them to post their own content, viewed by other peers (Lieb, 2011).

 The introduction of the social media page TikTok, has introduced the concept of viral hashtag video trends. The idea is to create short self-expressive videos along with hashtags developed by fellow peers (ibid). Of the 1 billion users aged 19-29 (Geyser, 2021), 55% create content on the app (Woodbury, 2021). These hashtag challenges are intended to go viral, which can be an advantage for publicity of brands and influencers. TikTok is now branded the most popular social media for Gen Z, with individuals spending 87 minutes a day on the app, and according to Woodbury (2021) will be the first generation to watch more content on TikTok than on TV.

Viral content is easily impressionable on Gen Z's purchasing intentions towards products, as identified from many clothing and homeware brands, whose sales have skyrocketed after gaining viral content on TikTok (Herrman, 2021).

2.2 The Gen z need for Online social media presence

Gen Z began their early years of adolescence with access to social media platforms Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. They were also introduced to YouTube video creators and social media self-proclaimed celebrities (Ibid). Gen Z 's self-esteem appears to develop though use of social media, particularly through visualisation of other peers. (Ngangom, 2020).

Gen Z have had to endure implications of growing up 'always connected' (Dimock, 2019). Studies have indicated changes in Gen Z behaviours and attitudes, compared to those of other generations. Being given the option to always be connected, along with many peer influential bodies having a presence online, Gen Z now believe this is a status they need to fulfil.

95% of Gen Z currently have access to mobile phones, with 45% always connected online and viewing social media on an hourly basis (Anderson and jiang, 2018). Gen Z are the first generation that prefer to use visual social media content, with 76% using Instagram, 75% using snapchat and 55% using TikTok. These media channels have created the potential for users to create visual UGC on the web (ibid). Gen Z are the largest generation of creators using UGC to connect, engage, and influence the behaviours of others (Madden, 2019).

While there are positive attributes, the main issue with 'always connected' to the web, has curated the term 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) among Gen Z. FOMO is a persuasive understanding in that not viewing social media for long periods of time, could result in being absent from viral content or

breaking news (Przybylski et al, 2013). Studies have suggested that there is a relationship between FOMO and social media among Gen Z, as the idea of FOMO has led to common social media addictions and fuelling fear of needing to be always connected (Franchina et al, 2018; Gezgin, 2018) (Yin et al., 2019). Dempsey et al (2019) found that Facebook addictions and FOMO has produced social anxiety among Gen Z and a decrease in life satisfaction, while self-esteem has also been associated with FOMO (Buglass et al., 2017). Additionally, Gen Z individuals often cannot relate to an individual who does not have a presence on social media, as for many it appears as a necessity (ibid).

TOPIC 3: INFLUENCER MARKETING

3.1) What is Influencer marketing?

An influencer is an upcoming or small-scale celebrity or an opinion leader who openly share personal content online to large audiences (Knoll and Matthes, 2017). Influencer marketing is a process whereby opinion leaders publish informal personal statements, actions or attitudes, known as E-word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication on social media to influence their audience (Schiffman, 2012).

Influencers have become of major interest to consumers, as they take their audience on a journey by building their own brand online, host charming personalities and share insightful experiences as the centre focus of their brand (Skizszai, 2020). As a result of the extremely persuasive personalities that influencers display online, they have the power to *''take action to influence the purchasing behaviour of others'' (Zac and Hasprova, 2019).*

Influencers appear across widespread social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter have been curated with a dual function, creating space to share positive e-WOM created by brands, and negative e-WOM created by consumers to discuss their experiences (Schiffman, 2012).

3.1 Influencer characteristics

In order for influencers to persuade the purchasing behaviour of others, influencers must have a set of characteristics that make them more appealing and subconsciously persuasive to others (Breakenridge, 2012) (Zac and Hasprova, 2019). Characteristics shown by the persuasive influencer include 1. Trust: Peers rely and act upon the influencer's direction and insights, based on the important connection between audience and influencer (Breakenridge, 2012). 2. Industry Expertise and Passion: The influencer is viewed as the subject matter expert and giving out false information or lack of subject knowledge may upset their audience (ibid). Furthermore, influencers who are passionate about their subject knowledge carry compelling feeling and emotion, which in return makes their brand seem more authentic and real. 3. Motivation: motivation is a personal rating of how much you can accomplish throughout a given time period, through energy and drive to reach a greater level of success (ibid). Influencers who show motivation appear more positive and attractive to online users (ibid).

3.2 E-word of mouth influence

E-WOM is a major influence which can affect consumer's trust and purchasing behaviours, both positively or negatively. This is understood by the difference between shopping online versus in store. When shopping online, there is lack of direct physical touch with a product's tangible cues. Therefore, a consumer may decide to seek more product information before making their purchase. E-WOM has now given customers this opportunity, by gaining information about products from likeminded peers before they make their purchase. Therefore, the use of eWOM when deciding on a product can be helpful for the consumer and even the brand of the product in question to examine consumer opinions of the brand online (smith et al., 2007).

Goldsmith and Clark (2008) examined how interpersonal opinions and experiences by eWOM has had a stronger impact on Gen Z consumer purchase intention, and impacts on consumer's purchasing habits (Smith, et al., 2007). Cassidy (2017) stated that 70% of Gen Z consumers can actually identify the difference between consumer created content and brand created content. Furthermore, research suggests that e-WOM has a stronger impact on individual attitudes about specific fashion brands. Therefore e-WOM has a direct effect on an individual's buying intentions (Pradhan, Duraipandian and Sethi, 2016).

Many Gen Z individuals search for peer experiences and reviews, or discussion topics before deciding on purchasing a product (Feick et al., 1986). Opinion seeking is defined as searching for information about a particular product, service by the form of review, or feedback from interpersonal peer sources. This evaluates the potential quality of a product or service. Opinion seeking is now admired among Gen Z, as they seek real purchasing information based on experience and evaluations (ibid).

3.3 why are influencers Impressionable to Gen z

Previous literature suggests that opinion leadership existed within multiple product categories. However, a new examination in contrast to the traditional perspective is now seeing topics overlap across similar categories (Solomon et al, 2019). The framework for this understanding is called the Two-Step Model of Influence. The idea is that a small group of similarly categorised influencers publish their own opinionated information usually stimulated from mass media, in order to intentionally modify the opinions of their large audiences online. Through this framework, it was found that influence was driven less by the influencers themselves but more by the interactions among those who are easily influenced, along with the communication of information while communication in a two-way dialogue with the influencer as part of a network (ibid).
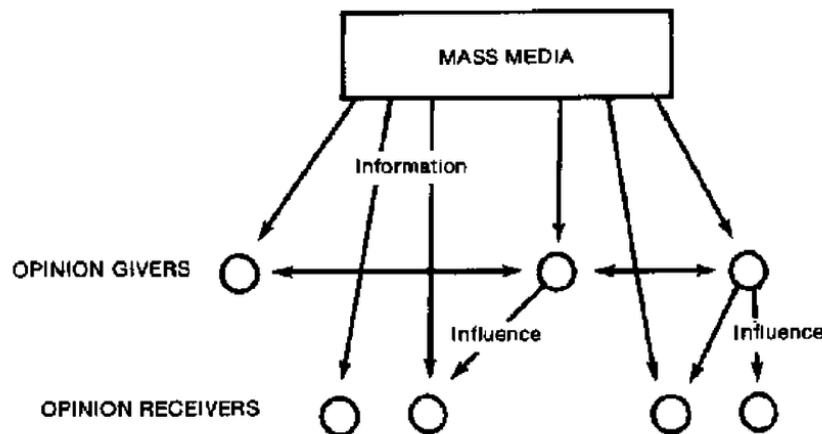
Figure 2: Robinson, (1997) Two-Step flow model of Influence

It is apparent that influencers are beginning to have a direction over Gen Z purchase intentions and topics of conversation, by their popularity and reputation, brand and influencer associations, and personal marketing tactics sold by the influencer (Nagy et al., 2018). Influencers will use multimedia, blogging, or vlogging to create an impressionable story. This involves creating video media to share an experience with their audience (ibid). These techniques allow Gen Z consumers to gain insight into influencer's experiences, which can help them decide on purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, Gen Z now prefer opinion leader content rather than original branded content (Cassidy, 2017), with social influencers generating engagement rates over twice as high as brands (Gallagher, 2018). This is because the influencer provides a real and authentic visual experience for their audience on social media, which can be discussed with peers (Nagy et al., 2018). A survey conducted by Global Web Index, stated that one third of consumers admitted having discovered new brands online via content creators and social media influencers (Warc, 2021).

3.4 Influencers role in the fast fashion trend.

Erkan and Evans (2018) has stated that e-WOM from online influencer fashion promotions has had a stronger impact on purchase intentions. Additionally, with the fashion industry becoming extremely fast pace and the regular introduction of new fashion trends in the market, consumers have become hypersensitive to fashion, engaging in the cycle of buying, throwing out, and buying again (ibid). Consumers are now regularly replacing their fashion at a more rapid rate. As a result, Gen Z's purchase intentions are being affected by tempting influencer promotions and trying to keep up with fast-paced fashion trends to impress their peers (Lang and Armstrong, 2018; Park and Kim, 2016).

Negative implications of fast fashion has introduced the need for an increased interest in the sustainable market. Sustainable fashion solutions are becoming trendy among some generations, with growing interest from 64% of Gen Z (Petro, 2021). However, Gen Z consumers are not exactly practising what they expressed interest in (Carrington at al., 2014) (Belk et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is a poorly examined gap between sustainable intentions versus actual sustainable consumption (Carrington et al., 2014). The gap has now been identified as the 'ethical purchase gap' (Nicholls and Lee, 2006), with researchers suggesting that the topic requires more awareness and understanding in order to help at government level but also for consumer understanding (Gupta and Ogden, 2009). Fast fashion is the second largest polluter in the world, causing overconsumption, toxic waste, plastic microfibers, and forcing unethical working conditions on workers (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014).

TOPIC 4: SUSTAINABILITY

4.1 Overview – eco consumerism and green products

Uusitalo and Okasanen (2004) from Zahid et al., (2017) describes eco-consumerism as expressing a person's environmental friendliness, based on their moral principles, contributing attitudes and behaviours regarding environmental hazards and living a greener lifestyle. Grant (2008) believes that the main potential of sustainable marketing is to make consumers willing to go green. The 'Green Revolution' refers to changes in a person's buying behaviour and the consumer thought process when being made aware of environmental concerns (Ottman, 1992). There are a several ways to make people willing to engage in sustainable practices. These ideas include:

- Education about sustainability (Grant, 2008), which is important particularly among Gen Z, the last generation to reverse damage caused by global warming (Petro, 2021)
- Extend green culture beyond middle class living, and introduce sustainable living to all classes, reaching the majority of the population (Grant, 2008).
- Acculturation, by making sustainable practices attractive and making current practices which are damaging to the earth unattractive and ostracised (Grant, 2008). These acculturation tactics may be promoted by social influencers who have emotional trusting relationship with their large online audiences.

Green products, introduced by the American Marketing Association in 1992 are products safe for consumer use but friendlier to the environment (Ottman, 1992). Green-products are popular among 73% of Generation Z consumers' (First Insights, 2020), manufactured with toxic-free ingredients (Carrigan et al., 2005), using environmental-friendly procedures (Branley, 2013). The idea behind green products was created after a number of small business owners noticed similar consumer concerns about waste within their own products. However, consumer have been relatively slower to accept and adopt to green products in the market (Zahid et al., 2017). According to Kronthal-Sacco and Whelan (2021) the Center for Sustainable Business recorded a 54% sale growth of sustainable goods between 2015-2019 but remains only as 16% of sales in the overall marketplace.

4.2 New sustainable fast fashion trends

Sustainable fashion first emerged in the 1960s, when change for clothing manufacturing had become more prominent after emergence of negative environmental practise in the industry (Jung and Jin, 2014). Today sustainable fashion is beginning to emerge as a "*megatrend"* (Mittelstaedt et al.,

2014). Sustainable fashion is considered as ethically sourced, associated with fair working conditions when manufacturing the clothing (Joergens, 2006), and using organic materials for garments (Johnston, 2012) with environmental traceability (Henninger, 2015).

4.2.1 Sustainable branded clothing lines

A new trend emerging among fashion brands includes recyclable clothing lines and sustainable re-branding. Fashion brands in the recent decade have adapted to emerging sustainable trends and have been taking environmentally conscious actions, using different materials to make their garments, avoiding plastic, avoiding materials that are harmful for the environments, while emphasising the key words ethical, sustainable and eco on their garment tags (Schrotenboer, 2013). Fashion brands have also introduced recycled garments, using recycled materials to make their branded garments (Pandit, et al, 2020). Multinational Brands that claim to have invested in these sustainable actions include the main fashion retailers like H&M, Zara, and Primark (ibid). However, section 4.4 below will examine the reality of these sustainable fashion campaigns, which are usually deemed as marketing activities rather than genuine supports for the environment (ibid).

Trends emerging from sustainable fashion do not always include creation of new garments, with many new ideas arising by means of re-using clothes for a new purpose. These are as follows:

4.4.1 upcycling

Upcycling is defined as buying re-created products made from old materials but transformed into a higher quality product. 56% of Gen Z buy upcycled products (Petro, 2020). However, despite the heightened conversations and willingness around upcycling fashion, only few individuals actually show their commitment (Mintel, 2006).

4.4.3 peer-to-peer marketplace

What started out as charity shopping, marketers have now developed peer-to-peer fashion ecommerce marketplaces, where users can resell their products or may even swap fashion items. These marketplaces are used by 29% of Gen Z (Petro,2020). Depop, launched in 2011, is a social ecommerce platform solely facilitating peer-to-peer fashion, where users can resell their pre-loved fashion or swap as they choose (Depop, 2022).

4.4 Greenwashing

Greenwashing is defined as inconsistency between a brand's promise to become sustainable versus their actual efforts and actions to transition into a sustainable brand (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015). Literature suggests that brands engage in sustainable promotional tactics, which positively enhance their brands reputation, increasing e-WOM. This in return, gains consumer purchase intention, soon followed by brand loyalty (Murphy, 2021).

Within the past decade, businesses are now feeling pressure from consumers and governments to disclose information about their environmental performance (Kim and Lyon, 2015). Brands feel pressure to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility, defined as integrating social and environmental concerns within a brand's values, which has now become a normal practice for business, especially for publicity (De Jong, Huluba and Beldad, 2019).

Marketers may believe that sustainability is a positive look for brands, but the sad reality is that many brands would rather invest money into looking sustainable, than attempting to improve their sustainable activities (Green Queen Team, 2020). Terrachoice (2010) stated that 95% of claimed green products in the USA and Canada contained false labelling, going against the green product ethics. Misleading sustainable information on labels appears to be a rising issue, with this behaviour regularly seen in the sustainable fashion industry (ibid).

Other misleading practices include fashion brands releasing campaigns over-using the key words, ethical, sustainable, and eco, but not necessarily explaining the meaning behind using these words, or why their product labels contain these words. Many of the brands that partake in these campaigns include the main European fashion retailers like H&M, Zara, and Primark (Schrotenboer, 2013). This revelation means that many brands are engaging in false advertisement and practices for their own gain of publicity and not the environment, which is extremely misleading for the customer, causing a trust problem with customers having difficulty identifying true green products (Nyilasy, 2014).

4.5 Sustainable influencers and promotion

A debate lies within the industry about promoting sustainable practices and lifestyles, and the role that influencers can play in this process (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). While sustainability is already a growing trend and has quite a large positive attitude (Langley and Van den Broek, 2010), influencer marketing may encourage more user engagement with sustainable content online. However, this can only be approved upon finding out the motivations of users to engage with sustainable content

(Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). There are already many sustainable and environmental activists publishing on social media, one popular name including Greta Thunberg. The Swedish teenager has many platforms across social media where she publicly speaks about her opinions, which engages many users online (Kramer, 2021).

4.6 Gen z and sustainability

According to USC (2020) a survey conducted on students suggested that there was a massive interest in sustainability among young people, with 64% admitting having an interest, while 33% said they practiced sustainability. However, 27% said they did not practice sustainability, which is still a huge percentage missing among Gen Z. A further 52% stated they did not know how to participate in sustainability (ibid). This is quite concerning as Gen Z are the last generation reverse global warming damage (Petro, 2020).

(Petro, 2021) states that Gen Z are increasingly taking part in sustainable practices, which impacts their purchase decisions. Gen Z are currently the highest percentage of individuals taking part in sustainable practices, with 73% of Generation Z willing to pay 10% extra for sustainable products (First Insights, 2020). This compares to just 23% of the baby boomer generation (60–80-year-olds). However, there appears to be a lack of willingness to buy sustainable clothes from Gen Z, as majority of these consumers are not exactly putting their interest into practice (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014), and this reason is unknown as it appears to lack in the research.

4.6.1 Potential factors affecting Gen Z engaging in sustainability

While there is little evidence to identify the Gen Z lack of willingness to purchase sustainable clothes, there are potential implications which may give an overall perspective as to why Gen Z are interested in sustainability, but not actioning their interest. This researcher believes that an implication may include the cost of sustainable clothes. Sustainable materials are usually more expensive than mainstream fashion and this may be seen as a hinderance to engage in sustainable consumption. As a result, while customers may be willing to purchase sustainable fashion, they may not be able to purchase, particularly due to Gen Z's student budget, which could suggest the lack of engagement in fashion sustainability among the generation (McNeill and Moore, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

First insights (2020) suggest that 73% of Gen Z's cohort choose to purchase green products, the same 73% also admitting that they would be willing to spend 10% extra for sustainable products. However, when it comes to sustainable fashion, there appears to be a lack of willingness from Gen Z. While sustainable fashion is becoming trendy with 64% of Generation Z admitting to having an interest (Petro, 2021), majority of Gen Z consumers are not expressing their claimed interest within actual practice (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014). There is a poorly examined gap between sustainable intentions versus actual sustainable consumption (Carrington et al., 2014), with researchers suggesting that the topic requires more awareness and understanding (Gupta and Ogden, 2009).

A debate about promotion within the industry suggests that there is a need for education of sustainable practice and environmentally friendly lifestyles. There is potential for influencers to play a major role in this process (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). Sustainability is a growing trend and usually has a general positive attitude (Langley and Van den Broek, 2010), which is why influencer marketing could encourage user engagement with sustainable content. However, this may only be approved by finding out the motivations of Gen Z social media users and their willingness to engage with sustainable content (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020).

Gen Z consumers prefer opinion leader content rather than original branded content (Cassidy, 2017), with social influencers generating engagement rates twice as high as brands (Gallagher, 2018). This may be because social influencer's provide real and authentic visual experiences for their audience on social media, preferred by the Gen Z Cohort (Nagy et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is evident from literature that Gen Z feel the need to be accepted by peers, taking self-comparison too literal (Fromm and Garton, 2013). A result of this, peers tend to Influence each other. Gen Z search for peer experiences and reviews, before deciding on purchasing a product (Feick et al., 1986), and thus, they turn to influencers for these experiences, as the mass following of influencers suggests that their opinions are trustworthy (ibid). Many peers will receive purchasing motivation from influencers, which is then passed onto likeminded peers.

In summary, the literature gaps identified include a limited understanding of why the willingness of purchasing sustainable fashion is so low among Gen Z. Furthermore, Lack of research also demonstrates very little Influencer promotional tactical ideas suitable for promoting sustainable fashion among Gen Z. With knowledge that Gen Z have a trustworthy connection with influencers, it

is possible that educational promotion from influencers could encourage user engagement with sustainable content, and in return more willingness to engage in sustainable fashion.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the study's research objectives, research methods chosen for the study, the purpose of research strategy, and preparation for data collection. This research methodology chapter is supported by the framework of Saunders, et al (2007) Research Onion, outlining the idea of conducting primary qualitative research, by breaking down the strategy among various layers. These layers include the philosophical reasoning, the research approach, research strategy, the interview sample group, the researcher's data analysis, along with ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With knowledge that Gen Z are most interested in sustainability and that influencers have a trustworthy connection with Gen Z impacting on their purchasing behaviour, the research objectives have been developed as follows.

Research objective 1	To examine the emotional relationship between Generation Z and Influencer marketing
Research objective 2	Explore Influencer Marketing Promotion tactics already impressionable/ not impressionable to Generation Z?
Research objective 3	Investigate Generation Z's Willingness to choose sustainable fashion?
Research objective 4	Assess trends in Generation Z sustainable fashion preferences, in which could be used in promotion?

See Appendix 1 below for research questions asked to achieve the four research objectives.

3.3 SAUNDERS RESEARCH ONION FRAMEWORK MAP
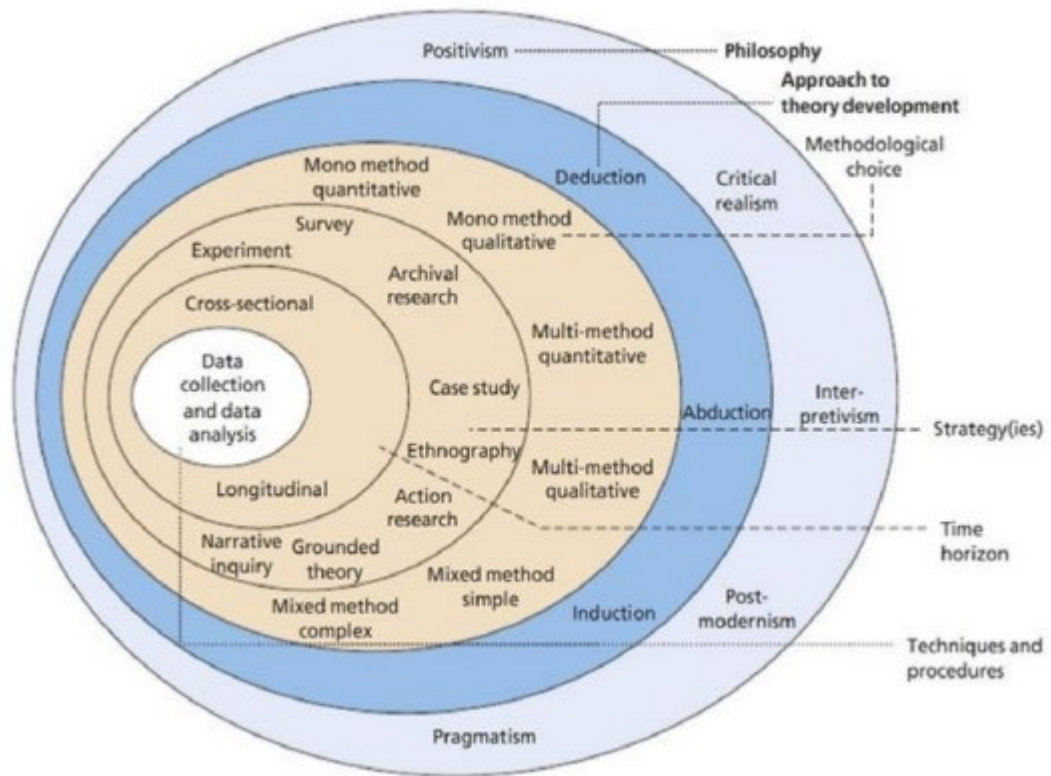
Figure 3: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill Research Onion (2007)

3.4 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler (2011) demonstrate that a clear methodological framework is important in order for successful research. This framework should provide the necessary tools, models and ideas for the study to gather knowledge, which will help in answer the research study.

According to Creswell (2007) philosophy of qualitative research is interpretive, humanistic and naturalist, matching the nature of this study. Therefore, the researcher has decided to use the Saunders research onion of qualitative research. Outlining the outer layer of the research onion, the qualitative research design process begins with research philosophical assumption (ibid). According to Quinlan (2011) all research must be underpinned by a philosophical framework, which will shape the research based on ideas including reality and the nature of knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Philosophical frameworks also equate to research paradigms, which acts as a guide behind carrying out scientific research (ibid). Research paradigms are sets of beliefs for understanding and addressing problems shared between scientists (Kuhn, 1970). According to Collis and Hussey (2014) two main research paradigms are Positivism and Interpretivism, these represent two different worldviews. Positivism is the idea that *"reality is independent of all of us",* meaning the researcher can observe reality without being influenced by opinion. Whereas interpretivism "*is seen as highly subjective",* where ideas are shaped by individuals' opinions and perceptions (ibid).

3.4.1 Interpretivist Approach

This researcher believes that the philosophy of interpretivist research aligns with the researcher's study objectives and views. The understanding of Interpretivism is that reality is a social construct, created by value of social experience, usually neither examinable or measurable through quantity or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Interpretivism explores new social phenomena through gaining an empathic understanding of the data subjects' worldviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The idea is to gain insight about the conditions of the social phenomena, in order to understand an individual's behaviours. This then allows the researcher to achieve an empathetic understanding of the data subjects. Then the researcher must interpret these data findings to generate theories around the nature of the problem and possible solutions (Collins and Hussey, 2014).

This researcher has integrated the idea of the interpretivist approach with their study, by first identifying the research objectives of the study. Then the researcher designed questions to achieve these objectives. The researcher then carried out the interviews with data subjects using these questions. From this, the researcher conducted analysis of the data collected. The final step was interpreting the findings of the data, in order to reach a conclusion and answer to the overall research problem. This researcher used the interpretivism approach because the study explores a new phenomenon: the idea that influencer marketing may promote the sustainable fashion purchasing intentions of Gen Z. In order to complete the study and draw a conclusion, the researcher required rich qualitative research on the opinions and behaviours of data subjects (Lei and Hei, 2021).

3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

The next layer of the research onion identifies inductive and deductive research theory approaches. A deductive approach emphasised in post-positivist paradigm, are used to evaluate hypothesis related to existing data. Whereas inductive approaches are emphasised by creation of new theory

from primary data; collection of primary data and exploration of themes or patterns throughout data to reach a conclusion (Saunders, et al., 2019).

Inductive approaches are more commonly correlated with qualitative research (Lin, 1998) by focusing on individual meaning (Creswell, 2007). Inductive research lets the researcher analyse findings from primary data thematically, to discover a conclusion. The researcher has chosen inductive research, as this theory is suitable when exploring new phenomena or exploring are gaps in literature, as it can help build new understanding (Bryman, 2011; Creswell, 2014). The current gap in the literature of the study includes the lack of willingness to purchase sustainable clothing among Gen Z, and new phenomena suggesting using influencer marketing to promote sustainable fashion among Gen Z.

3.6 METHOLOGICAL STRATEGY

The researcher has chosen to use qualitative research throughout this study, as qualitative research is the meaning of exploring and understanding a social or human problem in more detail, than that of quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research involves the collection and study of data through observation and analysis of behaviours, values and opinions (Creswell, 2009).

The difference between quantitative data and qualitative data is that while quantitative data can refer to specific quantities contributing to a defined hypothesis, qualitative data focuses more on the entire environment of the topic, establishing descriptive patterns through the narrative of data subjects to gain a context and understanding of a research problem (Duggan, 2021). Furthermore, previous research suggests that qualitative data is best suited to research topics that are new phenomena or within their nascent stage of study (Edmonson and MacManus, 2007). Sustainable marketing via influencer promotion is a new phenomenon in its nascent stage (ibid). As the study is in the initial stage the data required needs to be rich and meaningful in order to understand the new behaviours associated with the trend (ibid). Interviews and open-ended questions help to gauge an open mind of the consumer, enabling the researcher to identify key variables throughout the study (ibid). It is also recommended by Lei and Hei (2021) that qualitative research can be critical for understanding and comprehending new phenomena and primary causes of intentions or behaviours. It is important to be able to understand Gen Z's intentions based on fashion sustainability and understanding their emotion and trust for peer social influencers.

3.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher has used qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews, in order to collect data for the study. Qualitative in-depth interviews help the researcher to understand the lived experiences, opinions and beliefs of the interviewees (Seidman, 2016), while following a semi-structure with pre-decided topics can direct and dictate the nature of the interview for a better understanding of thought and opinions within the topic (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The advantage of a semi-structured interview is having the ability to change the flow while omitting or adding questions to the interview depending on the answers the subject gives to the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

While the option of a focus group could provide rich insight into a study within in a shorter period of time, the drawback of a focus group may include receiving a lot less information and insight. Additionally, the data may also be one sided due to loud personalities powering over other personalities in the focus group room and swaying potential answers which may affect the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). If the researcher was to adopt this data method, the research may be bias as Gen Z tend to follow the opinions of peers, as discussed in chapter 2.

Furthermore, the idea of carrying out an observation or ethnography study on this cohort may not be visible, due to limitations of invading privacy, while also potentially not finding enough subjects who actively take part in sustainable fashion purchase and practices, as suggested in the previous research already conduced stated in chapter 2. Which is why it is important to carry out an interview to understand this information.

3.7.1 HOW INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WERE FORMULATED

As the researcher is conducting exploratory research, it is of high importance that information obtained from the study participants is reflected on and constructed accordingly for the most accurate results. The Interview questions for this study were formulated from previous research sources, including gaps identified within the literature, while also adopting similar questions from the research study based on Liu and Hei (2021) *"Exploring Generation Z Consumers' Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion and Marketing Activities"*, a similar study to the researcher, with Interview questions regarding similar topics on sustainable fashion purchases from the Gen Z cohort. These questions were formulated to suit the researcher's topic of study with influence from Liu and Hei (2021). The interview guide was followed by questions based on the responses of the study participants. The interview guide can be found in the appendix.

3.7.2 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted in practice for the proposed semi-structed interviews, in the form of a semi-structured interview with an individual of the Gen Z Cohort, piloting the interview guide. It was necessary to conduct a pilot study particularly when conducting qualitative interviews with such a wide variety of an age group. This also gave the researcher an understanding and confirmation about the purpose of the interview guide, confirming that the subject participants will understand and lead the study within the right tone for an accurate outcome.

3.8 POPULATION SAMPLING

Participants of the study were recruited through snowball sampling. When selecting a sampling method, the technique should be decided depending on the nature of the research question and type of data the researcher is conducting for the study (Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher has adopted a non-probability sampling technique, called snowball sampling. Snowball sampling when a random sample of data subjects are drawn from a finite number of the population (Goodman, 1961). This is known as the first stage. Each individual selected is asked to share the study with likeminded peers in which they communicate with, to find correct subjects for the study (ibid). Any interested individuals then sit within the second stage, and are asked to complete the same process above, finding likeminded peers for the third stage. This pattern may be continued until the researcher is satisfied with their sampling selection. The data obtained by snowball sampling may be utilized to make statistical references about relationships within the study (ibid). The information about data subjects can be described in a matrix, with rows and columns corresponding to the different individuals taking part in the study (ibid). While they must remain anonymous due to privacy and ethical issue, letter and numerical abbreviations can be used for data subjects' identification.

The study was shared on various social media platforms to an audience of male and female members within the Gen Z cohort. Participants who express interest in the study were asked to privately reply to the social media post with their email in order to be contacted. Users were also asked to share the social media post with likeminded peers of their own generation who may be interested in the study. Eight participants expressed interest in the study and were emailed about the description of the study, participation consent forms, and to arrange online interviews, which took place on Microsoft teams. Eligibility for participation in the study meant that, participants had to (a) be a Gen Z aged between 10 and 27. (b) Use social media on a regular basis and (c) Have an interest in shopping and fashion.

Due to ethical considerations, the participants agreed to take part anonymously, which meant that each data subject was labelled an anonymous name. To protect the anonymity of participants, the table below suggests anonymous coding of each data subject, this includes their anonymous name, age and gender. In this study, F is used to identify a female and M is used to identify a male, followed by a numerical category of the order in which the interviews took place with each data subject.

Code	Age	Gender
M1	23	Male
M2	23	Male
F1	24	Female
F2	27	Female
F3	21	Female
F4	21	Female
F5	20	Female
F6	24	Female
F7	25	Female

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. This is the identification of themes which are visible throughout interviews with data subjects. This data analysis does not require a theoretical or disciplinary framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). However thematic analysis does require more involvement and interpretation from the researcher (Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012).

Thematic analysis technique involves the researcher analysing the datasets, identifying common themes within the data, which are usually generated by participant's opinions or behaviours throughout the interview (ibid). The researcher is looking for coherent and meaningful patterns of data from datasets which will then be combined into themes. When each theme has been identified, the researcher will then interpret each theme, examining and interpreting the story and experiences from each participant. Interpreting personal stories and experiences of data subject gives the researcher a better understanding of themes, helping to conclude and answer the research objectives (ibid).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics play an important role in a research study as social research usually involves intrusion into people's personal lives and opinions (Miller and Brewer, 2003). By avoiding forceful behaviour and acting in a respectful manner, the researcher can achieve a mutual relationship between researcher and participant, receiving valid results for the conducted study (ibid).

As this study involves conducting research with human subjects, ethical consideration includes respect for people involved throughout the conducted study. (Mandal, Acharya and Parija, 2011). This applies to the informed consent of participant's rights and opinions, throughout collection of data for the study. Prior to participation all candidates involved will be given adequate information about the study and their rights. The researcher will also seek verbal and written permission in the form of a contract from all participating candidates before recording each interview for ethical and legal reasons. See Appendix 2.

3.11 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

Limitations of the study include the size and nature of the study's population. The Gen Z population is an extremely large population category. Given that the research is being conducted on a small sample of this population, data analysed cannot be generalised. The researcher assumes that not all opinions from the selection of data subjects will represent Gen Z as a whole, as Gen Z are known to express individualism, as stated in literature. Therefore, research findings may be bias in favour to a small group of individual personalities.

3.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology chapter provides justification for the chosen research method that the researcher will conduct for their research (Saunders et al. 2015). Four research objectives have been outlined, The researcher has explained the philosophical approach of the study and its rationale. The philosophy is an interpretivist qualitative research approach, which due to the nature of the study is deemed inductive. Data of interviews was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the primary data collected, in order to find common themes among Gen Z opinion. The sample for the study was identified through snowball sampling. This framework helped the researcher find likeminded data subjects suitable for the study.

A pilot study was conducted with a member of the data subject sampling prior to interviews to ensure the interview guide was suitable for the study. Ethical considerations were also outlined for the study, along with identifying possible limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4:

PRIMARY DATA FINDINGS

4.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The data analysis of the study follows the methodology explained in chapter 3, which states that the researcher uses thematic analysis to produce findings from the data subjects. The findings are based on eight in-depth semi structured interviews carried out in July 2022. The findings showed various themes which are relevant to the research objectives discussed in chapter 3. These are shown in the table below. This chapter explores these themes which have been relevant to each research objective and have been discussed using quotes from the data subjects in the interviews.

4.2: EMERGING THEMES BASED ON EACH RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Research Objectives	Major Themes	Additional Themes
1. To examine the emotional relationship between Generation Z and Influencer marketing	Personal Informal Connection Preference for Honesty	Relatable and Inspiring
2. Explore Influencer Marketing Promotion tactics already impressionable/ not impressionable to Generation Z?	Authenticity and Realness Scripted Promotions	Influenced by Repetitive Promotions
3. Investigate Generation Z's Willingness to choose sustainable fashion?	Cost of Sustainable Fashion Expressed Interest in Reusing Clothing	Focus is on Sustainable Lifestyle Products Scepticism About Sustainable Fashion Campaigns
4. Assess trends in Generation Z sustainable fashion and advertising preferences, in which could be used in promotion?	Genuineness and Passion Visual reality and representation	Education on The Topic TikTok

4.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

To examine the emotional relationship between Generation Z and Influencer marketing

Interview themes

Personal Informal Connection	Preference for Honesty	Relatable and Inspiring

The themes relevant in the first research objective were based on questions encouraging participants to discuss their emotional connection with influencers, their opinions about influencer culture, and to describe any connections with influencers online.

4.3.1 Personal Informal Connection

The first major recurring theme included the idea that individuals feel like they have a personal connection with their favourite influencer. Many participants discussed how they feel like they know the influencer personally, by following their everyday lives in which they post online.

➢ *"I feel like I know him personally"* - M1

➢ *"I like when they show their everyday lives, I feel closer to them"* - F2

➢ *"I talk about them like I know them. You think of them like they are someone in your life"* - F3

➢ *"Because I follow their everyday life it feels more personal and like they are closer to you"* -F4

In the opinion of this researcher, the benefit of having a personal connection is that individuals are more likely to be motivated to purchase a product promoted by an influencer.

4.3.2 Preference for Honesty

The second major recurring theme includes various participants expressing a preference for honesty within the influencer and follower relationship. Gen Z care about honest opinions from influencers. Gen Z individuals only show trust when influencers are honest and act genuinely, particularly about the product they are promoting.

➤ *"I like influencers who are very genuine, honest, and not afraid to discuss more personal topics". - M1*

➤ *"Customers are looking for authenticity and people that are telling you the truth"* – F2

➤ *"I follow her, and I know her day to day life. I know she was honest, I liked her honesty."* -F2

➤ *"I respect influencers showing and promoting things that they actually like, its honest"* - F3

Another participant expressed disgust when influencers are not honest when promoting. This was something they admitted would place a rift between their relationship with an influencer.

➤ *"it is a bit of a sham because you see influencers who are promoting things that you know they don't really like, and it goes to show they are not honest then"* – F5

4.3.3 Relatable and Inspiring

Upon delving further into the interviews, many participants felt they related to the influencers they followed, and that this was the reason why they followed them. Furthermore, many participants expressed feelings of inspiration from influencers, and how those influencers inspired them within aspects of their own life.

➤ *"I like following her and kind of getting inspired through other ways of living"* – F1

➤ *"I like following Influencers that I can relate to"* – F1

➤ *"She shows a lot of different products and even her lifestyle and mainly I like her for inspiration"* – F2

➤ *"it was just nice to listen to her because it was like I relate to her, I feel like I am motivated by her, like we're both young Irish women".* – F5

4.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

Explore Influencer Marketing Promotion tactics already impressionable/ Not impressionable to Generation Z?

Interview themes

Authenticity and Realness	Scripted Promotions	Influenced by Repetitive Promotions

The themes relevant in the second research objective were explored through questioning data subjects to outline their experiences buying products that influencers had promoted, what encourages them to buy promotions from influencers, and what promotions are not impressionable to individuals. In other words, anything they would disagree with when following an influencer.

4.4.1 Authenticity and Realness

The first major recurring theme included the idea that participants in the study like authenticity and real-life experience when they are looking at influencer promotions. Participants suggested that these attributes would encourage them to buy a product that an influencer was promoting, while many participants also expressed their reasons for not buying products promoted by influencers. Many suggested that it was due to the lack of the above attributes.

➢ *"Customers are looking for authenticity, and influencers that are telling you the truth, either good or bad about the product"* – F1

➢ *"It puts me off if influencers lie or just do promotions, and you know when they do promote it just looks fake. We want more realness than just promotions".* - F2

➢ *"I wouldn't be buying something if I saw that If it's not related, real or authentic to their brand. Then you know that they're actually not using it"* – F6

➢ *"When a product has hashtag gifted, it's not authentic. I feel like they are just getting paid to promote it. I don't like if they are promoting something not related, real, or authentic to their own brand".* – F6

Some participants described what makes influencers 'real' and how this would encourage them to buy promotions in which influencers were advertising.

> *"I love her sponsorships with Urban Outfitters because she did an Instagram post with her partner and the two of them were both wearing clothes from there. It looked real, and you could tell it was real and true to her own values"* – F5

> *"when they actually talk more about their lives, or show their daily routines, or how they look, I think that makes them real"* – F2

> *"if an influencer said how they were feeling after using a product, and incorporate the product into their life, it would make it look far more real"* – F2

4.4.2 Scripted Promotions

The second major recurring theme included the idea that participants are extremely unimpressed with obvious promotional content, particularly content which does not match the values of the influencer's brand. Many participants expressed the view that it makes the influencer look hungry for money. Other participants suggested that they can clearly see when an influencer is reading from a pre-written advertising script, and this is extremely non impressionable to participants.

> *"The key thing for me is when someone that wouldn't normally associate with a specific topic like this or a brand, is promoting something from a topic they aren't interested in. And then I don't believe them because it's not related to them"* – M1.

> *"I find a lot of advertisements and sponsorships from influencers are just done for cash and not because they actually like it themselves. And it's obvious they don't use the product they are promoting, you can hear it in their tone, how unnatural it would be compared to how they would normally speak, Then I'm like, you're just purely reading this off script"* – M1.

> *"They all seem to promote the same products or brands, they all get the same sponsorships and sometimes you can hear that they have a script. They obviously have a script like they're obviously given a script from the advertisers. Sometimes you hear the exact same lines from all of them"* – F3.

> *"It would kind of take a lot for me to buy something that's an ad, because I know that it's not real, like they've been told to say this, they've been given a script"* – F6.

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4.4.3 Influenced by Repetitive Promotions

Upon delving deeper into the interview, some participants subconsciously felt influenced to purchase a product based on repetitive influencers promotions of similar products they were seeing online.

> ➢ "I *bought a product one time. It was this shampoo range that everyone promoted, so many influencers, and they all said the same thing, so I assumed that It was amazing. But it was a waste of time, but I had felt pressured to buy it because so many influencers were speaking about it"* – F5.

> ➢ *"Loads of influencers are sponsored by BetterHelp. They are a mental health online course. But it's like 50 Euro a week or whatever. But when like the more influencers within the same category that I follow stared being sponsored by them and like talking about them, it interested me, and I was like, OK, I'll look these guys up"* – F3*.*

> ➢ *"They were using like Instagram stories, but I think mostly it would be Tiktok would be where they get me because I keep scrolling and the ads just keep coming back up, so repetitive. I And then when went on Instagram, then the same ads started popping up with the. It's like as if they knew I wanted them".* – F6

This finding contrasts to the previous finding of negative feelings towards scripted promotions. Participants who expressed their apathy towards scripted promotions, claimed that many influencers appear to promote the same products around the same period, which is extremely unappealing to these participants. However, these findings are conflicting as the same participants expressed the peer pressure they feel to purchase products when they are continuously presented with the same influencer affiliated promotions.

4.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

Investigate Generation Z's Willingness to choose sustainable fashion?

Interview themes

Cost of Sustainable Fashion	Focus is on Sustainable lifestyle products
Expressed Interest in Re-using Clothing	Scepticism About Sustainable Fashion Campaigns

The themes relevant in the third research objective were explored based on questioning data subjects to extract their opinions on sustainable fashion, to recall memories of seeing sustainable fashion campaigns, and to discuss any sustainable fashion practices they already take part in.

4.5.1 Cost of Sustainable Fashion

The first major recurring theme explored was the relatively high cost of sustainable fashion. Almost every participant mentioned the cost of sustainable fashion during interviews. Some stated the fact that they were living on student budgets, and that this makes it difficult for them to buy sustainable fashion pieces while others reflected on buying sustainable fashion saying they would purchase if they had a larger budget available.

➢ *"I am a student I can't exactly afford high end or same fashion all the time"* – M1

➢ *"when you are a student you will go for the cheapest because you are in survival mode"* – F1

➢ *"It's good to take part in if you have the money"* – F2

➢ *"At the moment I can't afford it that's what series me away from it"* – F3

➢ *"Depends on how cheap it is, if I had more money I would buy my favourite brand if it turned sustainable"* – F3

One participant expressed a view that sustainable fashion is for the wealthy population, while other participants stated that money is always on Gen Z's minds. The majority of Gen Z individual's decision when purchasing a product, comes down to price.

➢ *"Sustainability is a privilege and exclusive to the upper class"* -F5

➢ *"People will look at the price at the end of the day"* -M1

➢ *"Our generation like cheap things we can't take forward expensive things"* - F3

4.5.2 Expressed Interest in Reusing Clothing

The second major recurring theme is the interest in sustainable practices among Gen Z. Many participants when asked what they think of sustainable fashion recognised repurposing clothing and second-hand charity shopping in stores and on ecommerce platforms like Depop, as a form of sustainable fashion practice. It was noticeable that the first thing which came to the minds of the participants, when asked about their opinion on the topic, included the idea of repurposing, reusing, swapping, upcycling and donating clothes, with a small number of participants claiming that sustainable fashion is not all about purchasing sustainable pieces of clothing.

➢ *"First of all, I think of Depop it's not all about buying sustainable, it's about reusing clothes even swapping and sharing"* -F3

➢ *"I think the sustainable fashion is trying to reduce reuse purpose clothes."* -F5

➢ *"I have really noticed buying second hand lately as a trend."* -M2

➢ *"I think of second-hand fashion and rebuying."* -F6

➢ *"It's not all about new products, it's about donating too."* -F2

Some participants also argued that they did not see a necessary need to buy sustainable fashion pieces, as they believe that buying less, or keeping and repurposing clothes has very much a similar outcome.

> *"I don't really see the effect if I just buy less it's basically the same thing?"* – F3

> *"I think I will be more inclined to buy less clothes than by sustainable fashion again it's because of money."* -F3

> *"I feel like buying less of everything rather than actively seeking sustainable stuff I think it has the same effect"* -M2

> *"The first thing I think of is reselling used clothes I donate to charity shops, and I keep clothes until they fit again"* – F4

4.5.3 Focus is on Sustainable Lifestyle Products

Upon delving deeper into the interview, some participants already purchase sustainable home and lifestyle products, and a small number of participants have suggested a preference for sustainable lifestyle products, rather than sustainable fashion. It is clear then by reference to the statements below, some participants might be closed off to purchasing sustainable fashion because they already buy sustainable lifestyle goods.

> *"I would reach for lifestyle sustainable products more than I would sustainable pieces of clothing."* – F3

> *"The majority of sustainable stuff I have bought is bamboo toothbrushes and recycled products, but with fashion not as much."* – F4

> *"I buy eco-friendly life products when I have a job"* – F5

> *"I don't really buy sustainable fashion, it would only really be like wooden straws and kind of stuff like that."* – F6

4.5.4 Scepticism about Sustainable Fashion Campaigns

Another theme identified included the intense scepticism that the participants expressed, when asked about sustainable fashion campaigns and opinions on sustainable brands. Each participant's feelings appeared rather similar, showing disbelief and even negative criticism towards brands that choose to operate a sustainable campaign or product.

➢ *"Branded videos can kind of lie. Brands say that their sustainable, how can you prove?"* -F3

➢ *"It's hard to tell what I am buying, where it is made and how it is made. It's misleading."* -M1

➢ *"It's unclear about what sustainability can be. Brands lie."* -M1

➢ *"I think some campaigns are very forgettable. Very kind of like save the planet blah blah. They needs to be eye-catching".* – F5

➢ *"If a company is telling you their green, they are lying, I don't believe it."* – F1

4.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4

Assess trends in Generation Z sustainable fashion and advertising preferences, in which could be used in promotion?

Interview themes

Genuineness and Passion	Visual reality and representation
Education on The Topic	TikTok

The themes relevant in the fourth research objective after questioning the Data subjects centred around what sustainable fashion preferences they have and what would encourage them to buy sustainable products promoted by an influencer. They were asked to give examples or tactics of influencer promoting on social media, which helps the said influencers promote to their own generation.

4.6.1 Genuineness and Passion

The first recurring theme outlines the idea that participants expressed a major interest in influencers who show passion for a topic when promoting a product, and express genuineness when promoting. Participants suggested that this is what appeals to them and would most likely influence them to buy into an influencer promotion.

➢ *"If it came across as genuine and not just a cash grab it could appeal to a wider audience" – M1*

➢ *"They need to be genuinely serious about what they're advertising. because if you are genuine you won't need to remind people to buy a product every five minutes" – M1*

➢ *"Maybe to prove it's genuine an influencer could show the inside of a Factory of sustainable fashion" – F1*

There was also a view from participants, that having a passion for a topic makes an influencer look much more genuine within their promotions and has an advantage of appealing to the correct audience.

> *"You definitely need to have a passion behind it, You want to know that they actually care about the planet"* – F5

> *"I would definitely want to see them following true with the product themselves"* – F4

> *"I am hooked in by the personal experience and story"* – F1

> *"I wouldn't trust if their values did not match up with showing why they use"* - F3

4.6.2 Visual Reality and Representation

The second recurring theme identifies how participants like to receive visual representations of a product when they are viewing promotions, especially in regard to fashion. Participants also stated that they like seeing the value in promoted products, which helps them consider if the purchase is worth their time and money.

> *"It would help if you showed me that you're wearing the clothes you promoted"* – F6

> *"Just showing the value and putting it into practice like showing more visual, I actually want to see you!"* – F2
> *"It would help if they showed the value of the products and if they put it into practice and showed more visual of the products, a lot of us prefer visual. – F2

> *"One thing I'm looking for is if they're wearing it day to day"* – M1

4.6.3 Education on The Topic

Upon delving deeper into the interview, the researcher noticed some participants mentioned education around sustainability. Participants suggested that there is a lack of awareness about sustainable fashion among their generation, while other participants suggested that educating Gen Z about sustainable fashion is a vitally important part of the promotion process.

➢ *"I might be interested if there was more awareness around it"* – M1

➢ *"I think maybe educate people, that they don't need to be re buying clothes all the time"* – F2

➢ *"I think it's important to educate people about the topic"* – F3

Some participants also mentioned that it is just as important for the influencers to be educated about sustainability. Some participants stated that values such as passion and honesty are very important to display when promoting, as this is what engages trust in consumers.

➢ *"Influencers need to be passionate about the product and educated about the topic too"* – F4

➢ *"For our generation to buy sustainable fashion, these influencers need to be fully educated. I wouldn't want someone who I know is not going to be sustainable trying to promote me something"* – F5

➢ *"Being educated, passionate and knowledgeable on a topic is important when promoting"* – F5

4.6.4 TikTok

The last theme identified discusses the heavy presence of the app 'TikTok' throughout the interviews. Many participants claimed that this is their most used social media platform, and that this is where they are swayed the most by promotion because of influencer engagement on the app.

➢ *"I have made purchases from influences on TikTok influencer promotions"* – F1

➢ *"TikTok is probably my most used platform"* -F5

- *"If you engage on TikTok, the more interest you will get" – F4*

- *"I would mostly be on TikTok, this is where the influencers get me because it's constantly repetitive promotional content". -F6*

- *"A girl I follow on TikTok owns her own sustainable fashion page and that has really influenced me" – F1*

4.7 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Based on the primary research conducted by the researcher, the findings suggested that Gen Z like to have a personal relationship with the social influencers. They prefer informal connections, seeing influencers as individuals they know on a personal level and feel comfortable talking about them as if they were a friend. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of real and honest opinions from influencers when they are advertising a product, only trusting honesty, and recognising actions that are not genuine. In addition, participants expressed connections with influencers who they can relate to and feel inspired by. Arguably, it was noted that participants who feel inspired by an influencer are more likely to buy a product they are promoting.

When exploring influencer marketing promotions which have already made an impression among Gen Z, the findings suggested that participants like authenticity and real-life experience when looking at influencer promotions. Participants suggested that this would encourage them to buy a product when seeing its tangible attributes. Furthermore, lack of authenticity puts participants off buying influencer promoted products. Participants also believe that identifying scripted promotions makes them highly suspicious that the promotion is misleading. On a positive note, participants can be influenced by repetitive mass promotion of one product across social media in a short period. They argued that this made them feel peer pressure into buying the product.

When investigating Gen Z willingness to purchase sustainable fashion, it was found that cost is a major factor. Most participants stated that they are still students with little spending budget. There was an interest expressed in second hand shopping and repurposing clothes rather than buying sustainable fashion pieces, as this saves money for the participants. It was also noticeable that participants expressed interest in purchasing sustainable lifestyle products rather than sustainable fashion and the participants agreed that it makes more of an impact. In addition, there was a commonality of scepticism among participants who questioned brands' sustainable campaigns. Some showed feelings of disbelief and negative criticism towards brands who portray sustainable attributes because they find it hard to believe brand genuineness.

When assessing sustainable fashion and advertising preferences among Gen Z, genuineness and passion were very important themes for participants. This appeals to them and would most likely be the biggest influence in buying a product. Visual reality and representation of a product is also important as tangible cues help participants consider if a product is worth purchasing or not. Education and more awareness about the topic is something that participants feel should be adopted more, as influencers come across more trusting when their deep knowledge and positive values are shown, making participants feel much more comfortable purchasing products. Finally,

TikTok had been deemed by participants as the most important social media platform to promote and have a presence on, with many agreeing that this is where they have been influenced the most to buy products.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION OF DATA FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter will discuss the key themes identified in chapter 4 and comparing these topics with literature from chapter 2. Conducting a logical discussion, this chapter will be centred around the themes identified from the primary data analysis and presented with the objectives, shown in 4.2.

5.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

To examine the emotional relationship between Generation Z and Influencer marketing

5.2.1 PREFERENCE FOR HONESTY AND TRUST FROM SOCIAL INFLUENCERS

Preference for honesty is a major theme throughout this interview. Many participants stated that they are more inclined to trust honest opinions from influencers and are more likely to buy a promoted product if the influencer is honest and appears genuinely interested during a promotion. Many participants stated that they would not trust an influencer that appeared to be promoting false or misleading opinions. The assumption is that this would be for the benefit of money, which does not sit right with participants.

"I respect influencers showing and promoting things that they actually like, its honest" - F3

This is also apparent in previous studies which were conducted, as stated in the literature, where Breakenridge (2012) suggests that one of the most important influencer characteristics is trust. Peers rely and act upon the influencer's direction and insights, based on the important bond that their audience have on the influencer's implications (ibid).

5.2.2 IMPRESSIONABLE NATURE OF RELATABLE AND INSPIRING INFLUENCERS

Many participants in the study stated that they felt a connection with influencers that appeared to be like them, and that they like to feel a sense of relatability when looking at influencers online. This allows them to build a more personal connection with the influencer. Participants responses suggested that relatable influencers inspire and motivate them in their own lives. As a result, the

researcher assumes that participants may be more inclined to purchase products promoted by influencers that they trust or find motivation in.

"it was just nice to listen to her because it was like I relate to her, I feel like I am motivated by her, like we're both young Irish women". – F5

Again, this is also apparent in previous studies demonstrated in the literature, where Breakenridge (2012) expresses motivation as one of the most attractive characteristics that influencers need for an online presence. Influencers who show motivation and inspiration appear more positive and attractive to online users (ibid). Based on these findings, the opinion of the researcher suggests that the act of inspiration may be a tactic of promotion to encourage purchasing intentions among Gen Z.

5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

Explore Influencer Marketing Promotion tactics already impressionable/ not impressionable to Generation Z?

5.3.1 THE NON-IMPRESSIONABLE LINK BETWEEN GEN Z AND SCRIPTED PROMOTIONS

Another major theme throughout the interview is the hatred towards scripted promotions among the Gen Z. Participants expressed how they are extremely unimpressed with obvious promotional content, particularly content which may not match the values of an influencer's brand. Some participants even stated that they can tell if an influencer is not using the product they are promoting and recognise when an influencer is reading from a pre-written script by a brand. Many participants expressed that promoting content which does not match with a person's values or personality, can make the influencer seem like they are hungry for sponsorship money.

"I find a lot of advertisements and sponsorships from influencers are just done for cash and not because they actually like it themselves. And it's obvious they don't use the product they are promoting, you can hear it in their tone, how unnatural it would be compared to how they would normally speak, Then I'm like, you're just purely reading this off script"

"I don't like if if they don't seem like they have used the product themselves. I wouldn't trust the influencer if he's talking about, something that you know their values did not match up with. it's a money grab for some people" – F5.

Some participants argued that they would never purchase a product from an obvious influencer promotion, especially a scripted brand promotion, as it does not appear genuine, and the product may appear misleading.

5.3.1.1 Authenticity and Real Online Content

It is noticeable from this small group of data subjects that each participant has the same negative opinion on branded scripted content and prefer real, authentic content from the influencer. This has been previously discussed in chapter 2, where a study discovered Gen Z consumers prefer opinion leader content rather than original branded content (Cassidy, 2017). Additionally, social influencers generate engagement rates over twice as high as brands (Gallagher, 2018). Comparably,

throughout the primary data collection, participants expressed the importance of authenticity, arguing that content will look real and honest, and that consumers are looking for the truth about a product from an honest source.

"When a product has hashtag gifted, it's not authentic. I feel like they are just getting paid to promote it. I don't like if they are promoting something not related, real, or authentic to their own brand". – F6

The researcher's opinion is that Gen Z relate to authentic and real content, as it appears more present in real-life than artificial or fantasy product promotions, in which Gen Z can distinguish between. Therefore, because Gen Z relate to the influencer, the more motivated they are to purchase from authentic promotions.

5.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

Investigate Generation Z's Willingness to choose sustainable fashion?

5.4.1 THE COST OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

A key topic that was displayed throughout the entire interview was the negative cost of sustainable fashion. Many participants stated that they are still students, living on a tight cost of living budget. This was discussed in the literature, when it was discovered that Gen Z have the highest enrolment rates for college, more than any other generational cohort. (Fry and Parker, 2018). It has also been identified that 60% of Gen Z in Ireland alone are attending third level education, which remains the highest percentage in Europe (O'Brien, 2018). Other participants reflected on buying sustainable fashion, claiming that if they had of been in a better financial situation, it would be a good thing to do for the environment. Some participants expressed feelings of privilege associated with sustainability. A similar view in the literature was mentioned by Grant (2008) stating that green culture is currently seen as a middle-class living standard.

"Sustainability is a privilege and exclusive to the upper class" -F5

"When you are a student, you will go for the cheapest because you are in survival mode" – F1

"It's good to take part in if you have the money" – F2

Based on the primary research findings, this may be a reason why, according to the literature review, that there appears to be interest, but a lack of willingness to buy sustainable fashion from the generation (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014).

5.4.2 SCEPTICISM ABOUT SUSTAINABLE BRAND PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Another key topic throughout the interview was scepticism over sustainable brand's promotional campaigns. Many participants displayed feelings of disbelief and showed negative criticism towards well-known brands who display sustainable campaigns. Their reasons suggested that they believe brands lie and that there is misleading information about sustainability. It was also mentioned that often more than not, all campaigns come across the same, issuing the message to 'save the planet', but not educating the customers in question.

"I think some campaigns are very forgettable. Very kind of like saves the planet blah blah. They needs to be eye-catching"- F5

"Branded videos can kind of lie. Brands say that their sustainable, how can you prove?" -F3

"It's hard to tell what I am buying, where it is made and how it is made. It's misleading." -M1

This may be another answer to demonstrate why the rate of sustainable fashion practice among Gen Z is quite low (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2014), as is appears that some of the generation are not impressed by global fashion brands' sustainable promotions.

5.4.3 ATTITUDE TO PURCHASING SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Another theme identified within the interviews was the acknowledgement of widespread sustainable practices among Gen Z. Many participants described sustainable fashion as second hand, and the idea or repurposing and donating clothes, but little mention of purchasing sustainable fashion labels. A small number of participants even claimed that sustainable fashion is not all about purchasing sustainable pieces of clothes. The general attitude from the participants is that there are more widespread ways to take part in sustainable fashion. Some of the topics discussed in chapter 2 included upcycling fashion and peer-to-peer marketplaces, Like the e-commerce app Depop, where consumers sell their fashion to other consumers, by means of repurposing their fashion. It was also discovered that these peer-to-peer marketplaces are used by 29% of Gen Z (Petro, 2020).

In fact, in contrast to purchasing sustainable fashion, some participants argued that they don't see a need to buy sustainable fashion pieces, and that buying less, or repurposing clothes has a much similar outcome.

"First of all, I think of Depop it's not all about buying sustainable, it's about reusing clothes even swapping and sharing" -F3

"I feel like buying less of everything rather than actively seeking sustainable stuff I think it has the same effect" -M2

In addition, a discovery was made from interview participants claiming their preference in purchasing sustainable lifestyle, rather than sustainable fashion.

"I would reach for lifestyle sustainable products more than I would sustainable pieces of clothing." – F3

The general assumption from participants suggested that this generation may be closed off to purchasing sustainable fashion, as they already partake in repurposing fashion and sustainable lifestyle changes.

5.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4

Assess trends in Generation Z sustainable fashion and advertising preferences, in which could be used in promotion?

5.5.1 PREFERENCE FOR GENUINE AND PASSIONATE INFLUENCER PROMOTIONS

As established during the interviews, many participants favour when an influencer is passionate about a topic and act genuine towards a brand promotion. Being passionate and educated about sustainable fashion may help with the promotion of sustainable products, as the influencer will be factually correct and may also appear more genuine. Participants were asked for promotional tactics for influencers to promote sustainable fashion. Many suggested that passion and genuine interest in a particular topic is what appeals to them and, would most likely influence them to buy into an influencer promotion. Already identified in chapter 2, Breakenridge (2012) describes passion and industry knowledge as one of the most important characteristics for influencers to have when promoting. The influencer is viewed as the subject matter expert and giving out false information or having lack of knowledge of the subject on question could upset their audience. Additionally, influencers who are passionate about a topic carry compelling feeling and emotion, which in return makes their brand appear more authentic and real to the viewer.

"You definitely need to have a passion behind it, you want to know that they actually care about the planet" – F5

As discussed above, Gen Z can distinguish between scripted brand content and real influencer content, while also acknowledging that Gen Z are more sceptical about sustainable promotion. It is important that influencers promoting any sustainable promotions are fully educated in sustainability, give a genuine review of the product in question, and show their real passion for the promotion, with no promotional script involved. It must be authentic and real in order to appeal to them.

5.5.2 PREFERENCE FOR VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS DURING PROMOTION

All participants agreed that showing visual representations of sustainable fashion products during promotion is vital for sales. This helps the participant consider if the purchase is right for them or not. This appears to appeal to this generation. As already identified in chapter 2, Gen Z search for experiences and reviews before deciding on purchasing a product (Feick et al., 1986). Furthermore, the appeal for visual representation was also discovered in previous research, stating that social

influencers provide a real and authentic visual experience for their audience on social media, which appeals to the generation because this can then be discussed with peers (Nagy et al., 2018).

5.5.2.2 Use of TikTok

Another key point from the participants included their regular use on TikTok, claiming that it is their most used social media platform, and very easy for influencers to engage with their audience on the platform.

"If you engage on TikTok, the more interest you will get" – F4

Some participants even admitted that Influencers sharing TikTok videos have persuaded them to buy promoted products. Discovered in the literature, TikTok has 1 billion users aged 19-29 (Geyser, 2021), with the generation spending on average 87 minutes a day on the app (Woodbury, 2021), being very easily impressed by viral content on the app (Herrman, 2021).

There has already been huge success for influencers on TikTok according to participants, so brands hoping to promote sustainable fashion should choose to collaborate with influencers on the TikTok app, as this is the most used platform for Gen Z.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Based on the key themes identified in the primary research compared with the literature, various key themes have been presented throughout this chapter, in conjunction with the 4 research objectives of the study. The themes discussed included:

The previous success of impressionable influencer promotions on Gen Z. Gen Z enjoy personal relationship with influencers and prefer honest and inspiring influencers who produce real and authentic content with no scripted content, as Gen Z can distinguish the difference between scripted brand promotions and real influencer online content.

When examining the willingness to purchase sustainable fashion, the general opinion from Gen Z was more negative than positive, with a major factor including cost. Many participants stated that they were living on student budgets and could not afford sustainable fashion, while other classed sustainable fashion as a privilege. Another negative factor included disbelief among fashion brand's sustainable campaigns, which may mean that Gen Z have a pre-decided negative opinion of purchasing sustainable fashion.

However, some participants did display interest in sustainable fashion practices, including second-hand fashion and repurposing clothing. Participants also expressed interest in sustainable lifestyle products, rather than sustainable fashion. The understanding is that participants are more inclined to buy lifestyle sustainable products already accustomed to their own traditions and may not be committed to try sustainable fashion.

The final discussion included assessing preferences in advertising, which may help influencer promotion of sustainable fashion, targeting Gen Z. From the primary research, along with literature, it was established that Gen Z prefer visual content with real life visual representations of products. Visual content helps Gen Z decide on their purchase, while many individuals will also opinion seek for product information on the internet before making purchases. Participants also agreed that influencers having passion for the topic they are promoting is widely appealing to Gen Z and may encourage them to make purchase based on the education and genuineness of the influencer.

In summary, the primary data demonstrates that while there is a negative opinion on purchasing sustainable clothes among Gen Z due to high cost, they remain willing to partake in sustainable fashion practices when influenced by peers and opinion leaders and are particularly impressionable by visual and authentic promotional online content created by trusting and reputable influencers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSIONS TO THE STUDY

The overall objective of this research was to explore how the use of influencer marketing can help promote sustainable fashion to Generation Z. In response to the research objectives outlined in chapter 3, presented alongside primary data collection in chapter 4, with analysis and decision in chapter 5; it is believed that a more robust understand of the research question has been outlined. The research has given insight and possible answers to the objectives which represent the overall research question. Through qualitative primary data collected and thematically analysed, the researcher has gained a better understanding of the positive relationship between Influencer Marketing and Gen Z, while also examining Gen Z and their willingness to purchase sustainable fashion.

It was found from primary research, the main factor which poses a negative impact for sustainable fashion is cost. Many Gen Z individuals cannot afford to purchase sustainable fashion, as they are on student budgets and see sustainable fashion as a luxury. Furthermore, Gen Z are pragmatic individuals, they are believed to be more reserved with their money. Additionally, Gen Z can distinguish between promotional brand online content and genuine influencer online content. Gen Z prefer genuine influencer content over branded content and as a result, hold a negative bias over brand content. Many Gen Z individuals feel disbelief as they don't trust branded sustainable fashion campaigns and argue that the campaigns lack information, which is misleading for the cohort. While the general outlook did appear negative, some Gen Z admitted to having an interest in repurposing clothes, second-hand fashion, and purchasing sustainable lifestyle products. The opinion is that sustainable fashion is not all about buying sustainable labelled clothes, rather that re-using provides the same outcome.

With these implications in mind, it is possible that Gen Z may have already made pre-decided decisions and may not be willing to purchase sustainable fashion. However, with knowledge that there is interest in repurposing and re-purchasing second hand clothes, there is potential for willingness in sustainable fashion practices. In addition, with the very personal and inspirational relationship that Gen Z have with influencers, it may be possible to motivate the purchasing decisions of the generation.

On the topic of influencer promotion, Gen Z described the content most impressionable is what appears natural and genuine. Gen Z prefer genuine promotional content from influencers, who share a passion for the product in their promotion. The second impressionable tactic includes using visual aids to promote content. The literature demonstrates that Gen Z opinion seek on the internet before purchasing a product. Therefore, it is vital that influencers show a visual representation of the product, as Gen Z prefer to consume digital content and may be the sole influence of purchase. The social media platform TikTok, was also presented in primary data, as Gen Z admit that they can be persuaded by visual content on TikTok created and shared by influencers.

6.2 PROFESSIONAL RECCOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various discussions presented within chapter 5, the researcher suggests the following recommendations for marketers, sustainable fashion brands and social influencers, who are interested in promoting sustainable fashion successfully to Gen z.

6.2.1 Sustainable fashion willingness

Due to the pre-decided opinion on sustainable fashion including cost and scepticism toward promotional branded content, Gen Z are more likely to participate in sustainable fashion practices, rather than sustainable clothing purchases. Interest has already been established in sustainable fashion practices among Gen Z. This could be important insights to brands who offer sustainable fashion services.

6.2.2 Sustainably educated Influencers

As discovered in the primary data, Gen Z only trust influencers who are passionate about the topic they are promoting, show genuine feedback and results throughout their promotions, and are highly educated on the topic. For brands to collaborate with influencers to promote sustainable fashion, they need to be highly educated in the topic of sustainably and have a genuine interest in the topic. They also need to create their own ideas while promoting which they know appeal to their audience. Otherwise, the promotion will come across scripted, which according to the primary data, is avoided and unimpressionable to Gen Z.

6.3 RECCOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This report discussed the use of influencer marketing in promoting sustainable fashion to Generation Z, using a qualitative, inductive approach. The research questions have been answered from the findings of the primary data; however, the findings have allowed the researcher to find other research questions which may need to be answered in the future.

A follow up to this study, might include the study of ethnography on Generation Z individuals to see if influencer advertising preferences discovered during the primary data, are successful in influencing Gen Z to purchase sustainable clothing.

Additionally, further future research would be recommended on the same study but examining Generation Z individuals that are college graduates and earning an annual salary, with extra disposable income. It is also recommended that future research may examine the willingness of purchasing sustainable fashion, in conjunction with the cost of living as a young adult.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION – FASHION

Can you tell me a bit about the fashion brands you buy and why?

Do you ever look at the labels of your clothes before purchasing them? if so, what are you looking for on the tags?

TOPIC 1 – INFLUENCER RELATIONSHIP

Do you follow social influencers? What kind?

How do you feel about social influencers?

Tell me about a relationship or connection you have with a social influencer? How do they make you feel?

TOPIC 2 – INFLUENCER MARKETING PROMOTIONS

Tell me about a time you were influenced by an online social influencer to purchase a product
Can you remember how they were promoting the product and at what stage did you decide to buy it?

How often do you make purchases recommended by influencers?

What would an influencer have to do to make you buy a promoted product?

What concerns would make you not buy a product that an influencer was advertising, is there anything that would put you off?

TOPIC 3 – SUSTAINABLE WILLINGNESS

What comes to mind when you think of sustainable fashion?

In recent years, there are many campaigns about sustainable fashion marketing, have you ever paid attention to them? What is your attitude towards this? (Don't care; question; cause concern, disgust.)

Do you engage in any Sustainable fashion practices?

What is the most important factor of a sustainable fashion product to you?

If a Brand you buy began to label their fashion a sustainable, but costed now, would you still buy?

TOPIC 4 – PROMOTIONAL PREFERABLE TRENDS

Have you ever purchased a sustainable fashion item? what influenced you to buy it?

What would a social influencer have to do to make you consider a sustainable fashion product or practice?

APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

National College *of* Ireland

INFORMED CONSENT CONTRACT

I hereby consent for my responses from an Interview to be used and quoted anonymously in a Dissertation Research Study at National College of Ireland.

Interviewer Name	Aine O'Dowd
Year	2022
Programme	Master of Science In Marketing

Interviewee Print Name	_____
Signature	_____
Date	_____

MSc Marketing July 2022