

# MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Fast Fashion Haul Videos on Social Media: Exploring the  
Influence on Attitudes towards Overconsumption and its  
Environmental Implications in the USA and Germany using  
Think Aloud Protocol

verfasst von | submitted by  
Sara Leslie Zennedjian

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree  
programme code as it appears on the  
student record sheet:

UA 066 550

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree  
programme as it appears on the student  
record sheet:

Masterstudium Communication Science

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jörg Matthes

## **Abstract**

Fast Fashion ist eine Branche, die aufgrund ihrer niedrigen Preise bei den Verbrauchern rasch an Beliebtheit gewinnt, gleichzeitig jedoch auch wegen ihrer schädlichen Auswirkungen auf die Umwelt zunehmend Aufmerksamkeit erregt. Insbesondere bei jungen Verbrauchern wird Fast Fashion durch sogenannte „Haul“-Videos in sozialen Medien populär. In diesen Videos kaufen Influencer eine große Menge an Kleidungsstücken, präsentieren sie oder probieren sie an, um sie ihren Zuschauern vorzuführen. Diese Masterarbeit zielt darauf ab, den Einfluss dieser Videos zu untersuchen und die Einstellungen junger Konsumenten (18-25 Jahre) in Deutschland und den USA gegenüber dieser Art von Social Media-Inhalten durch halbstrukturierte Einzelinterviews zu vergleichen. Ein „Think Aloud“-Protokoll wird verwendet, um die ersten Reaktionen der Verbraucher auf Haul-Videos zu ermitteln und festzustellen, ob sie kritisch über die Umweltauswirkungen dieser Inhalte nachdenken. Die Ergebnisse der Befragung zeigen, dass es keine signifikanten Unterschiede zwischen jungen Verbrauchern aus den beiden Ländern gibt, und dass es eine Mischung aus positiven und negativen Einstellungen gegenüber Haul-Videos gibt. Junge Verbraucher sind der Meinung, dass Alter und Generationszugehörigkeit wichtige Faktoren für den Einfluss solcher Videos darstellen. Zudem geben sie an, dass soziale Kreise ihr Konsumverhalten beeinflussen und sie dazu verleiten können, ihr Kaufverhalten anzupassen. Diese Ergebnisse bieten wertvolle Einblicke, wie der Einfluss von Haul Videos eingeschränkt werden könnte. Sie liefern praktische Ansätze für gezielte Interventionen, die politischen Entscheidungsträgern, gemeinnützigen Umweltorganisationen und nachhaltigen Unternehmen dabei helfen können, ein verantwortungsvolles Konsumverhalten zu fördern und zum Kampf gegen den Klimawandel beizutragen.

## **Abstract**

Fast fashion is an industry that is rapidly growing among consumers for its low price points while simultaneously gaining attention for its detrimental effects on the environment. Among young consumers, fast fashion is being popularized by “haul” style videos on social media, which display influencers buying and showing off a large amount of clothing, sometimes trying it on to demonstrate it for their viewers. This study aims to explore the influence of these videos and compare the attitudes of young consumers (ages 18-25) in Germany and the USA toward this type of social media content using semi-structured individual interviews. A Think Aloud Protocol is used to determine the first reactions of consumers to haul videos and determine if they are thinking critically about this content regarding its environmental effects. Interview results show that there does not appear to be significant differences between young consumers from these countries, and that there is a mix of positive and negative attitudes. Young consumers believe age and generational affiliation is a significant factor in the influence of these videos, and they are influenced to change their consumption behaviors from social circle influence. These results provide insight into how to combat the influence of haul videos, offering practical applications for targeted intervention which will be useful for policy makers, environmental nonprofits, and sustainable business marketers aiming to promote responsible consumer behavior and contribute to the fight against climate change.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction.....                                              | 4  |
| Theoretical Background.....                                    | 7  |
| Haul Videos and e-WOM.....                                     | 7  |
| Elaboration Likelihood Model & Theory of Planned Behavior..... | 8  |
| Environmental Implications of the Fast Fashion Industry .....  | 10 |
| Consumer Culture Differences.....                              | 12 |
| Method .....                                                   | 14 |
| Sampling.....                                                  | 15 |
| Participants .....                                             | 15 |
| Data Collection.....                                           | 16 |
| Procedure.....                                                 | 16 |
| Data Analysis .....                                            | 18 |
| Results.....                                                   | 18 |
| Discussion .....                                               | 33 |
| Limitations .....                                              | 36 |
| Conclusion .....                                               | 38 |
| References.....                                                | 40 |
| Appendix.....                                                  | 46 |
| Interview Guide.....                                           | 46 |

## Introduction

As the planet continues to warm and climate disasters begin to occur more frequently, the world is turning its attention to potential remedies, such as solar panels and electric vehicles, to reduce our impact on the environment. However, one area of pollution that may be regularly overlooked is fast fashion production and textile waste. In fact, it was found that 50 billion clothing garments are being discarded within a year of being made, and fashion brands are producing twice the amount of clothing they did in 2000, highlighting the rapidly increasing significance of overconsumption (Nature, 2022). One of the largest contributors to this surplus of clothing in production is Shein, a Chinese fashion retailer. It is popular among Gen Z consumers for producing clothes very cheaply, but it has also been garnering media scrutiny. Recently, the company significantly increased its market share in the United States (overtaking competitors such as Zara and H&M) and is valued at \$100 billion (Perri, 2023). To further illustrate the urgency of this recent fast fashion phenomenon, in 2023, members of the European Parliament called on the European Commission to fight excessive production and consumption of textiles, including clothes and footwear (European Parliament, 2023). Additionally, number 12 of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals based on the 2030 Agenda focuses on sustainable consumption, demonstrating the increasing public attention and the relevance of finding solutions to combat this concern (UN, 2015).

In today's globalized economy, the term "fast fashion" has been coined to emphasize the alarming speed at which retail clothing chain stores, such as Shein and H&M, can produce new "trendy" items to turn a profit (Bick et al., 2018). These business models produce an excess of inexpensive clothing products to meet the demands of consumers, leading to environmental degradation in the supply chain as well as significant effects on human health, often referred to

as being an “environmental injustice” (Bick et al, 2018; Niinimäki et al., 2020). The extremely low price point of these garments is often made possible by large corporations outsourcing work and benefiting from poor labor practice laws in low-income countries, which generates concerns about these local communities and ethics of the working conditions (Bick et al, 2018; Peters et al., 2021). The existence of fast fashion alone is not the sole issue, but also the fact that this low price point of these garments makes it possible for consumers to purchase items in excess, while simultaneously wearing items that they already own less frequently, thus further driving the demand (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In recent years, due to the prevalence of consumerism on social network sites such as Instagram and TikTok, there is a new form of video circulating which is further exacerbating this issue. Coined a “haul” video, this type of social media content essentially shows an influencer showing off items that they have recently purchased, often in excess from fast fashion retailers, sometimes trying the items on to demonstrate how they will be worn (Haines et al., 2023). To exemplify the far-reaching influence of this haul video phenomenon in popular culture, as of November 2024, e-commerce giant Amazon has launched their own platform as a competitor to fast fashion sites Shein and Temu, which is named “Amazon Haul” or “Haul”. A key quality of this new platform is that no item will cost more than \$20, promising extremely low price points (McMahon, 2024).

Despite growing evidence that textile waste and fast fashion production is having a significant impact on our planet, there is very little existing research that explores how consumers are affected by e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) in the form of haul videos, that promote the purchasing of fast fashion products in excess. Therefore, the aim of this study is to bridge the existing knowledge of the e-WOM phenomenon and studies on haul videos with qualitative interviews to create a new comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes, how

they are affected at an individual level, and how they respond to this type of communication. Additionally, a unique aspect of this study is the exploration of how consumers in two different countries, namely the United States and Germany, view this type of social media communication and if there are any differences that can be detected based on cultural and societal influences.

This study will begin by examining recent literature regarding e-WOM and fast fashion as well as tying in theoretical frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Next, the methodological design will be presented, using individual semi-structured interviews which were conducted with participants from the United States and Germany, including a Think Aloud Protocol component utilizing a sample fast fashion haul video as stimuli to provoke further discussion. A content analysis of interview transcripts is performed to identify key themes that emerged regarding haul videos and overconsumptive behavior. This multidisciplinary study, which draws theory from communication science, consumer behavior research, environmental science, and psychology, will contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes and engagement with fast fashion content on social media and offer insight into ways to combat haul video influence. These findings can be leveraged by policy makers, as well as those running awareness campaigns, such as nonprofits, sustainable fashion brands, and companies focused on Corporate Social Responsibility, as strategies for effective outreach will be provided that can be used to counteract haul video influence and encourage environmentally responsible choices.

## Theoretical Background

### Haul Videos and e-WOM

Based on the concept of traditional Word of Mouth, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is becoming more prevalent as seen through the rise in popularity of social media platforms such as Tiktok and Instagram. Social media influencers (SMIs) on these platforms earn their income by promoting goods or services in exchange for payment from the company, and the growing industry of influencer marketing has been shown to increase materialism in consumers (Lee et al., 2022). Many social media users value the opinion of SMIs highly, as they are seen as more authentic and trustworthy than advertising from traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Schouten et al., 2020).

One specific way influencers participate in e-WOM is through promoting products or brands with a type of content called a “haul video” (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2022). Haul videos have appeared in online media since 2007 and have been consistently gaining traction (Haines et al., 2023; Jefferies, 2011). Originally appearing mainly on YouTube and now extending onto platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, this type of video showcases an influencer displaying items they have recently purchased, typically clothing or makeup products, and sometimes they give their opinion on the products to stimulate buying intention of the viewers (Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, 2022; Jefferies, 2011). In one form of these videos, a “try-on” haul, the influencer puts the clothes on and shows how they will be worn and styled. As described by Jefferies (2011), the typical audience for these types of videos is usually young women, ranging from teenagers to “twenty-somethings”.

The rise of fast fashion has made haul videos more ubiquitous than ever, fueled by the allure of cheap price points and the constant turnover of trendy items. The low price point



enables influencers to purchase fashion items in excess for haul videos, and excessive amounts of clothing contribute to the virality of these forms of videos. Further, haul videos may serve as templates for consumption behaviors among their audience, who typically seek to emulate their favorite influencers by buying the same products as them (Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, 2022; Garcia, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to gain understanding of how participants evaluate this type of social media content.

Due to the profound popularity and potential impact of haul videos on social media, the following questions are asked:

**RQ1:** What are the attitudes toward haul videos on social media that display overconsumption of fast fashion?

**RQ1.2:** How do participants evaluate such a haul video, using Think Aloud protocol

### **Elaboration Likelihood Model & Theory of Planned Behavior**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that humans follow two different routes of persuasion depending on their motivation and involvement in a decision, which is called dual processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central processing route occurs when the subject is highly involved in a decision, and the peripheral processing route occurs when there appear to be low stakes in the making of a decision. Therefore, heuristics are used as a tool to inform and process (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This theory can be applied to consumer decisions and influence regarding social media e-WOM such as haul videos. As the peripheral processing route occurs when people are less involved in the decision, and since fast fashion is low cost, it could lie within the realm of the peripheral route. The implications of this is that consumers will look at any type of advertising of these products, such as the haul videos, with less scrutiny (Lee & Cho, 2022), and potentially disregard the harmful impacts of fast fashion on the environment.

Additionally, there have been studies conducted that apply the Elaboration Likelihood model to the realm of online content, and evidence that suggests that this content is most often heuristically processed (Metzger et al., 2010; Rohde & Mau, 2021). The internet is an information rich environment, and most people lack the time and cognitive capacity to evaluate the information in detail, resulting in the use of heuristic cues to process factors such as source credibility (Metzger et al., 2010; Rohde & Mau, 2021). Examples of heuristics, or “rules of thumb” used in the evaluation of online content, including social media influencers, include reputation, consistency, and endorsement (Metzger et al., 2010).

Furthermore, when aiming to understand the role of haul video behavior and its influence on social media users, Theory of Planned Behavior, or TPB (Ajzen, 1991) provides a valuable framework. This theory, which posits that individual behavior is primarily determined by behavioral intentions, which are then shaped by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, offers a method to explain the processing and decisions behind the behavior of purchasing fast fashion items because of a haul video’s influence (Ajzen, 1991). Further, haul videos may have an effect on perceived subjective norms, by making the behavior of shopping in access seem normalized or socially acceptable, and therefore increasing favorable attitudes toward fast fashion brands and overconsumption. According to Chun and colleagues (2021), “Consumers share a strong desire to fit in and will conform to the behaviors of those around them”. While this could mean eliciting socially responsible behavior in some contexts, as observed in previous environmental behavior and sustainable consumption research (Brandão & Costa, 2021; Cesarina Mason et al., 2022; Riva et al., 2022), there is also the potential of harmful and unsustainable behaviors being modeled by SMIs. Additionally, we can

explore how haul videos shape the perceived behavioral control of individuals and learn if the messaging used in haul videos has an effect on the perceived ease of imitating this behavior.

In conjunction with the ELM, applying the TPB to this research guides us to dissect the influence of haul videos to learn more about social media users' buying habits. Consequently, the next question is posed:

**RQ2:** How are individuals influenced by haul videos on social media that display overconsumption of fast fashion?

### **Environmental Implications of the Fast Fashion Industry**

The overarching concern regarding the fast fashion industry and the effect of overconsumption is the significant impact that it has on our environment and health of the planet. The planetary boundary concept is a set of precautionary environmental thresholds that, if they were to be crossed, could cause irreversible damage to the planet and human safety. Typically, the recognized limits include climate change, ozone depletion, and ocean acidification, but plastic pollution and textile waste is becoming more feasible as a potential planetary boundary of concern (Niinimäki et al, 2020; Villarrubia-Gómez et al., 2018;). Alarming, the amount of clothing that Americans throw away per year amounts to 14 million tons, which equates to 80 pounds per person (Wicker, 2016). The Environmental Protection Agency also estimates that the majority of textile waste generated in the United States ends up in landfills, rather than recycled (EPA, 2022). The cheapness of fast fashion continues to drive the cycle, as it was found that garment-use time has decreased by a surprising 36% since 2005, showing the individuals are not only buying more clothing, but wearing what they already own much less (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017; Niinimäki et al, 2020). These statistics signify the sheer amount of clothing

that is wasted per year and underpin the further damage that influencers demonstrating excessive consumption and encouraging people to buy from fast fashion can have on our environment.

However, it isn't just the amount of fast fashion that goes to waste, but rather the entire life cycle of these trendy items, from production to retail, that has a harmful effect on the planet. According to Niinimäki et al. (2020), in each step of the supply chain, the fashion sector leaves its mark on the environment, including the consumption of water and chemicals in the production of fibers, yarns, and textiles, as well as the release of CO<sub>2</sub> throughout the manufacturing, distribution, and utilization of clothing. It was found that China, India, and Brazil dominate as greenhouse gas emission contributors within the fast fashion industry (Peters et al., 2021). Further, according to Peters and colleagues (2021), "Fast fashion has liberated or disconnected consumers' buying habits from their physical needs. Eliminating the unnecessary size of the fashion industry will require engagement from industry, governments and the non-government sector to try and influence consumers to buy fewer but better clothes". This statement drives the importance of curbing fast fashion consumption among the population and shows that the fight against fast fashion will not only take the reduction of consumption, but also the implementation of policy to support the supply chain issues.

However, within the context of this study, the aim is to investigate if participants are aware of the impacts of haul video behavior and overconsumption of fast fashion on the health of the environment, in order to better understand how this type of social media content affects consumers. There is existing research that suggests that consumer behavior intention is affected by environmental knowledge and concern (Chun et al., 2021) and, as evidenced by a recent study by Papadopoulou and colleagues (2022), sustainable knowledge enhances willingness to act environmentally consciously. Practically, this means that when consumers are informed about

the effect of fast fashion on the environment, they may be less likely to act on purchasing these products, despite the social influence of haul videos and the modeling of this behavior by SMIs.

Therefore, the following question is explored:

**RQ3:** How do participants perceive the environmental implications of haul videos on social media that display overconsumption of fast fashion?

### **Consumer Culture Differences**

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a family of theoretical perspectives that address dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Waqas & Hamzah, 2021). A significant focus of Consumer Culture Theory is on the experiential & sociocultural dimensions of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). There is also a focus on the individual, and that while the individual's desires and actions relating to consumption are influenced by their own lived experience and personal social circle, this type of influence also stems from larger external factors such as societal structures, economy, and political environment (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Consumer Culture Theory can be applied to learning about how individuals from different countries, cultures, and societal backgrounds experience “haul videos” on social media, from their attitudes toward this type of media to if they are aware of the environmental concerns of fast fashion overconsumption that is being portrayed. Further, a 2011 article by Askegaard and Linnet, which argues for an epistemological positioning of the CCT, critiques typical studies and encourages the growth of CCT by conducting more cross-cultural context research, in order to broaden consumer behavior research beyond the existing heavy bias of the American middle-class.

Additionally, a 2016 study by Bartolini & Sarracino using data from the World Values Survey indicated that there are trends of divergence of materialism in EU countries and the USA, with increasing materialism in the USA over the past 25 years. The factors measured for materialism include how important having a good salary, money and material possession are. Increasing materialism in the USA may demonstrate that these individuals are more motivated to consume fast fashion and be influenced by haul videos than someone from a European country where the values relating to materialism have been shown to decline, and more emphasis is placed on factors such as time with family and friends, rather than money and material goods.

To further narrow down the cross-cultural comparison, we now look to compare the United States to Germany in relation to the environment, as both are large western economies. The United States used to act as a leader in pioneering environmentalism, with large growth in environmental policy in the 1970s as well as the establishment of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (Dryzek et al., 2002). Many other countries used the USA's policy as a model, especially relating to pollution control and natural resource management (Dryzek et al., 2002). Over time, environmental support and enthusiasm waned, due to political shifts and presidential turnover, as well as an increasingly stronger economic focus. Environmental issues were de-emphasized in more recent years, resulting in a failure to integrate stringent environmental policy into the state (Dryzek et al., 2002).

On the contrary, Germany found success in adopting a strong governmental and societal focus on environmental issues, by integrating environmentalism with public policy and economic strategies (Dryzek et al., 2002). Sustainability is now a fundamental aspect of its political and social system, and it has taken on a leadership role in terms of international environmental efforts, by engaging in global agreements and target setting.

A lack of policy support in recent years in the United States could very well contribute to a lack of environmental awareness and education among the population, positioning Germany as a society that is overall more concerned and educated on issues that the environment faces. Similarly, recent survey results show that Germany is more concerned than the US about personal harm from climate change and that a higher percentage of people in Germany are willing to make some changes in their lives to reduce the effects of climate change (Bell, 2021).

Therefore, there appears to be a gap between the United States and Germany in both materialism and environmental awareness. The application of Consumer Culture Theory encourages us to explore how consumption differs between these two contexts. The interest of this study lies in investigating whether different societal or cultural backgrounds can affect how individuals experience fast fashion haul videos on social media. Thus, the following questions are posed:

**RQ4:** Does the participants' cultural or societal background affect their perception and attitudes toward haul videos on social media?

**RQ5:** How do participants from the US and Germany differ in regard to all previous research questions?

## **Method**

Semi-Structured Interviews were chosen as the qualitative method for this study. In addition to the semi-structured interview, a Think Aloud Protocol was conducted, and was chosen as it is devised as a reflective approach that provides a unique understanding of internal narratives and decision-making processes; it is commonly used for testing user experience of computer interface but has also been successfully used with digital media (Davies et al., 2023; Freiling, 2019; Stewart & Ogden, 2021). The aim of using Think Aloud Protocol is to determine

what the first reactions of the participants are toward haul videos, before receiving input from the interview to change their opinions, and to see if they initially can recognize the environmental issues associated with fast fashion haul videos.

## **Sampling**

Participants were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling, mainly using word of mouth. They were selected on the conditions that they identify as female, are from either Germany or the United States, are between the ages of 18-30, regularly use social media platforms (regular meaning least three times a week to multiple times a day), and are already familiar with haul videos on social media. The age group of 18-30 was chosen in particular because these consumers are the main target for fast fashion advertisements and as they have greater purchasing power than teens (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Additionally, it has been found that this age group consumes more fast fashion and is less likely to dispose of unwanted clothes using sustainable methods, and instead simply throw these clothes away (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022). This demonstrates that this age group has adapted to the cyclical nature of fast fashion, and they may be especially influenced by haul videos that promote overconsumption.

## **Participants**

A total of 12 English-speaking female participants (ages 18- 25, median 23.5) took part in the study, giving verbal consent which was recorded via transcription software. Six participants were of German nationality and six were of U.S. American nationality. All participants met the aforementioned criteria of social media usage. The following table shows an overview of participation by age and nationality:



**Table 1.***Participant Age and Nationality*

| <b>Anonym (representing nationality)</b> | <b>Age</b> |
|------------------------------------------|------------|
| USA1                                     | 24         |
| USA2                                     | 24         |
| USA3                                     | 25         |
| USA4                                     | 23         |
| USA5                                     | 24         |
| USA6                                     | 24         |
| GER1                                     | 22         |
| GER2                                     | 22         |
| GER3                                     | 24         |
| GER4                                     | 23         |
| GER5                                     | 23         |
| GER6                                     | 18         |

**Data Collection**

The interviews took place between April-October 2024. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted between 1 and 37 minutes. Otter.ai, a free online transcription tool, was used to record the interview audio and simultaneously transcribe them verbatim. Only audio was recorded then transcribed from Zoom, no video was recorded.

**Procedure**

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) using open-ended questions was developed by the author based on the relevant literature review. The interview guide was

designed to elicit thoughtful and reflective responses about the participants' attitudes toward haul videos, how influential they find them, how aware they are of the environmental impact of fast fashion, and how they believe their cultural background shapes their responses to the questions. One pre-test interview was conducted in order to identify ambiguities and refine word choice. The author served as the interviewer for all participants, using a friendly and conversational discussion approach. All interviews took place in English. To begin, participants were briefed about the study (anonymity and ethics) and after giving their consent to participate, they were asked preliminary questions about their age, social media usage, and familiarity with haul videos. Participants were then shown one haul video (1 minute and 20 seconds in length) posted by an anonymous user on the social media platform TikTok, which demonstrates the overconsumption of fast fashion. In this video, the creator is showing a large box of products (including clothes and some other decorative items) that were purchased from the online retailer Shein and then displaying all of the items, sometimes showing a close-up of the fabric or material. While viewing the video, the participants were asked to share any thoughts or feelings that come to them at that very moment. Following the Think Aloud Protocol video, the interview guide questions were asked to further clarify attitudes toward these videos. Examples of the questions include 'What elements of this video did you find to be attractive?' and 'Reflecting on the video, how do you think it might affect your own purchasing behaviors?'. The interview guide was used flexibly, and not all of the questions were asked of each participant, if it was deemed that they had already given sufficient responses. In total, 12 interviews were conducted, and this was determined to reach saturation of content.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis using deductive category assignment and thematic analysis (Mayring, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed to analyze the data. The author used both a theory-driven and data-driven content analysis approach to identify relevant themes, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the interview data. First, the author began by familiarizing themselves with the transcripts, reading them while listening to the recording, and correcting any discrepancies in the auto-transcribed text. At this time, the transcripts were also pseudonymized. In line with Mayring's (2014) guidelines for content structuring/thematic analysis, the author then coded the transcripts into deductive category themes based on topics determined from the existing literature review. Next, the author extracted and analyzed the material from the deductive categories, creating further inductive subcategories which emerged from the interview content. Finally, quotes from the participants were selected to represent the determined codes and subcategories.

## **Results**

Based on the existing literature review, the following categories were determined for the content analysis (1) attitude, (2) think aloud, (3) influence, (4) environmental impact & awareness, (5) individual cultural & societal influences.

### **Attitude**

Participants recalled being frequently exposed to haul videos when scrolling on social media, often stating they see them every day, or at least a couple times a week. When reflecting on their attitudes toward seeing them, there were mixed responses. While some appreciate haul

videos for their creative content and authenticity, others felt negatively toward these videos. A smaller number of participants appeared to be neutral, expressing boredom when watching them. Overall, to answer RQ1, the attitudes toward this type of social media content vary and the following categories were identified: (1) positive, (2) negative, (3) neutral.

### **Positive**

Some participants praised the authenticity of influencer haul videos as compared to a traditional advertisement, adding that they felt more like a real scenario:

*“I think they are well made, like they really see into me. A haul video advertisement on social media seems realer than, for example, TV advertisements in the past. Something like this could be real situations from people my age”* (GER3)

Moreover, some participants voiced that they are wary of blatant advertisements, but appreciate the authenticity of haul videos for their inspirational value and demonstration of clothing:

*“If I see something at the bottom that says, like, this is an ad, I'll take it more with a grain of salt, because I'm like, they're probably being paid to say that they absolutely love all these clothes...I would say overall, I have a positive outlook on them. I think it's inspirational sometimes.”* (USA4)

*“I like watching them because I like seeing different types of clothing, and maybe it influences me if I see something I like and I think, that's exactly what I want.”* (GER6)

*“Sometimes I like them [haul videos]. Someone that's just like, I did some spring summer shopping, I needed new clothes. Then I think to myself, oh my gosh, I need new clothes for spring and summer...”* (USA1)

Others noted that they had no negative feelings toward haul videos themselves, but rather are of the viewpoint that each individual consumer should think critically about their consumption:

*“I feel like haul videos, in and of itself, aren't bad things. I think it's kind of up to the consumer to not fall into like every trend they see online and just hold themselves accountable.” (USA6)*

### **Negative**

A few participants had very stark negative views of haul videos, making it clear that they see through the promotion of this type of content and are only able to focus on negative aspects of it:

*“When I think of haul videos, I think there's an excess of clothing. We don't need that much, and it's typically very, very trendy, and then a year later, your pieces of clothing are outdated.” (USA5)*

*“I don't have a good feeling watching them [haul videos]. So I'm not really often watching these influencers. Fast fashion is now really a big thing, and all the people are talking about it, and you're not feeling good when you're buying clothes from brands like this.” (GER4)*

*“With advertisements, sometimes it's just people who don't actually like what they're wearing or what the product is, but they're getting paid to say that they do. And if it's a big influencer, then it's likely that someone else is going to buy the product. So I find that unattractive.” (USA4)*

In the same vein, some participants simply found haul videos to be boring, but also recognized the possibility that others might find them interesting:

*“I think they're a bit boring...I'm not so interested in the things which other people are buying. And sometimes the video lasts for, I don't know. 20 minutes.” (GER2)*

*“I'm not especially attracted to these videos, but it is all over [the internet]. So some people must be, yeah.” (USA2)*

### **Neutral**

Some participants noted that when they see videos, they have no strong or negative feelings toward them, but are rather uninterested in them and have no desire to watch, sometimes scrolling past them:

*“It's not something I would necessarily want to watch again, but I also didn't dislike it.” (in regards to the shown haul video) (USA2)*

*“If I'm looking for a dress to wear to a wedding, I might be more interested in looking for reviews about things or just examples. But in my day to day, I'm not really looking to watch them all the time, and I normally don't watch them all the way through.” (USA3)*

## **Think-Aloud**

As previously stated, the purpose of conducting the thinking-aloud exercise was to determine the first reactions of the participants and understand if they are aware or thoughtfully considering the overconsumption and waste associated with haul videos and its impact on the environment. Surprisingly, only 4 of the 12 total participants (USA2, USA5, USA6, and GER4) noted direct concerns about the plastic packaging waste, associated with pollution, in the haul video during the Think Aloud Protocol, demonstrating that environmental impact may not be the first thought of many consumers. However, certain topics and criticisms of the video were commonly brought to light, further providing insight to RQ 1.2. The following categories demonstrate the commonly discussed topics and are illustrated by quotes from the thinking-aloud segment: (1) the speed of the video, (2) excessiveness, (3) the style of the video, and (4) the material and quality of the displayed items.

## **Video Speed**

Many of the participants felt that the speed of the video was notable, and that the creator was using a tactic of quickly displaying the items in succession to show as much product as possible, creating a stimulating effect:

*“I mean, as much as I hate it, there is a little bit of dopamine...it's a lot of stimulation. Which, in a way is, I think, what draws a lot of people to these haul videos.” (USA1)*

They commented on this type of fast-paced, short-form content which has been popularized by TikTok, where videos are typically less than a minute in length and also noted it to be distracting in nature:

*“It is really fast. I feel like, with the time limits on TikTok, sometimes people try to put as much content as possible into something... I feel like she's showing this sheer amount of product that she got and, with it being so fast, it's almost like you can't look too closely at the actual quality of things.” (USA4)*

*“She's opening it and showing how to use it...She's going quickly...there's no pause between or talking... It's good editing.” (GER6)*

### **Excessiveness**

Interestingly, participants commonly expressed shock and surprise at the amount of clothing that was being displayed in the haul video, but did not directly mention concerns about the environment or pollution. It is unclear if they made this connection between an overconsumption of clothing and the environmental impact, however it is still significant that they expressed concern and looked at consumption from a critical context. They also compared the amount to their own shopping habits:

*“I don't know why you would need that much stuff...like, how do you have room for that much stuff in your closet?” (USA5)*

*“It's interesting because you don't know what's going to come next. it's not just clothes, it's like a lot of stuff... if I did this, this would be my shopping for a year.” (USA2)*

*“I'm sure these [items] aren't necessary. Um, it just kind of seems like consumption for the sake of consumption.” (USA1)*

*“It's a lot of packages there... Wow, I don't know how many things she got, but she will never use them all.” (GER4)*

## **Video Style**

Participants, especially U.S. participants, often expressed that they prefer a “try-on” style video, where the creator shows themselves wearing the clothes as a demonstration, as opposed to an “unboxing” style video, opening the products, such as the one that was shown. They also noted that they prefer it when the video creator verbally walks them through what the items are, rather than just displaying what they purchased:

*“She’s doing a whole unboxing, kind of showing what everything is in the package... there wasn’t even any sound or anything that I could hear.” (USA4)*

Further, they mentioned that they found this style of “unboxing” rather unconvincing as there was a lack of detail, and they may be more influenced by a more detailed style of video:

*“I don’t really find much benefit from a clothes haul if I don’t see them tried on, that’s a big thing for me, because if I don’t know what they look like on a body I’m not likely to buy them.” (USA3)*

*“I usually like when they say what these things are like. This isn’t doing anything for me, to be honest.” (USA6)*

After the Think Aloud Protocol, a similar sentiment was also expressed by a German participant:

*“If they [the influencer] try it on and talk a little, it kind of helps the viewers, like, see exactly what it looks like. It helps them see a vision.” (GER6)*

## **Material & Quality**

The final think-aloud category relates to the quality of the items in the video. Similar to the expressed concerns about the excessiveness of consumption, during the Think Aloud Protocol, the participants expressed concerns about the quality of the items, but it was not demonstrated that they considered this from an environmental viewpoint, or from the personal viewpoint of a potential consumer looking to purchase these items that could be of poor quality.



*“I don't know why you would need that much stuff...they all look really nice, but like, after a few years, they're gonna disintegrate.” (USA5)*

*“It's not very attractive because all the stuff looks pretty cheap, and there's nothing I would say, oh, that's beautiful or I want to maybe also have it.” (GER3)*

Further, they recognized that because of the poor quality of items, consumers are more likely to discard them quickly:

*“They're a very cheap brand. And I haven't ordered something from this brand, but I think the quality is very bad...maybe the people buy a lot of things and then throw it away.” (GER2)*

## **Influence**

During the rest of the interview, aside from the think- aloud discussions, in line with RQ2, it was found that participants were either positively influenced or uninfluenced by haul videos on social media which display overconsumption, with 3 main factors of influence being identified: (1) age and life experience; (2) economic concerns; and (3) fashion trends.

## **Uninfluenced**

Participants voiced mixed answers on whether they were influenced by haul videos or not. Some participants felt that they are aware enough to scrutinize and reflect when seeing haul videos. If they wanted to purchase an item that was displayed, they chose to instead look for a more sustainable version of the items:

*“Typically, if I find something I like on a haul video, I'll go to Mercari [or another second hand clothing website], because it's just cheaper...” (USA5)*

*“Maybe I would buy it but maybe I would also look for a similar item from another brand, which is of better quality. And yeah, I would not buy things from Shein...” (GER2)*

Others felt they were not ultimately influenced, unless there was a pre-existing need for an item:

*“If I see something that I'm like, Oh, I've been looking for an item like that, I'm more likely to buy it or take that recommendation. I try to not just buy things on a whim, but that's how I was before these videos got really big...” (USA3)*

### **Positively Influence**

Many noted that they have been persuaded by haul videos to buy something or go to a specific store or website, but others also noted that even if they haven't purchased an item because of an ad, haul videos still make them desire to shop:

*“Seeing hauls makes me more prone to wanting to shop more.” (USA1)*

*“I'm sure it [haul videos] will inspire me if there's something cool, I feel like it is just a good, influential way to see something and then know exactly where I can buy it.” (GER6)*

*“I actually get tricked by these videos... I catch myself running into stores because some videos are just like oh, you have to get this new dress from Zara and I'm like, why can't you just go to Zara to check it out?” (GER1)*

*“When I'm in a mood for shopping, and then I go on Instagram, and then I have a haul video where they're showing sportswear that I need or I don't need, then for sure it will affect it [purchasing behaviors].” (GER4)*

For participants that felt they were influenced by haul videos, there were themes that emerged in regard to what factors of haul videos persuade them to shop at fast fashion, or what they believe makes other people more likely to “fall into the trap” and be influenced to buy fast fashion:

**Influence Factor of Age.** One particular influential factor that was noted by many participants is age. They often stated that they believe that females younger than themselves, such as teenagers, may be more influenced by the consumerism being promoted by haul videos:

*“I can't imagine being a teenager right now with all this fast fashion and videos like this, and being exposed to a million more products than we were, and having that just be normalized. So I think it's a very different experience.” (USA1)*

*“Especially young people, but also others who are maybe more interested in fashion, or for those who fashion has a higher value...It can influence a lot of people, especially when they use a lot of social media everyday.” (GER3)*

It was also noted that influencers serve as “idols” that many young people, who have not yet developed a strong sense of self, may try to imitate:

*“One of the biggest things to just bring home is just how easy it is to be influenced by social media, especially the generation below us, that's kind of everything that they see...And I think that with the pressure to fit in, and then the way that the economy, at least like in the US is right now, everyone's kind of looking for the cheapest thing.” (USA4)*

*“For young females, I don't know. Influences are like an idol or something like that for them and they easily get influenced. And they want to have the same clothes as them or something like that.” (GER2)*

In particular, some participants felt that at their age and life experience, they know themselves and their style enough to assess and evaluate this kind of social media content, but see how others are easily influenced:

*“I think younger people are especially influenced. Because I've learned now how to think about what I want to buy and also have a look at the quality and for clothes which I will also like in several years...when you're younger, you're looking for your style and you don't have so much money so you easily get influenced by some trends.” (GER2)*

**Influence Factor of Economy.** A common recurring theme was the price of the items displayed in the haul videos. Participants noted that due to economic struggles, people may be attracted to content showing how a large quantity of clothing could be purchased cheaply through fast fashion retailers:

*“I think something that's hard with social media, and also with inflation, is that you get such a constant pressure to always be following the latest trends... people are looking to find how they can stay in trend and keep up with the latest styles while still remaining on a slim budget.” (USA4)*

Even if the participants themselves felt that they were in a comfortable economic position to buy clothing that isn't fast fashion, they still understood and had empathy for people that may not be able to afford higher quality brands:

*“I’ve had help from my parents and now, a job, so I haven't had to result to a lot of fast fashion and I'm willing to pay a little bit more and consider what's better for the environment. But I think there's a lot of people who maybe are of a lower socioeconomic status who would buy Shein.”* (USA6)

Similarly, they realize that in comparison to some socioeconomic groups, they have the privilege and ability to reflect on their consumption behaviors:

*“Maybe people with lower socioeconomic status or so don't reflect their consuming behaviors that much.”* (GER2)

*“You have to be able to afford sustainability, and depending on where you come from, it either doesn't matter at all, or it matters a lot... maybe it's not even part of the conversation.”* (GER5)

**Influence Factor of Trends.** The final major influence that was identified is trends.

Many participants voiced that they feel more motivated to buy clothes based on haul videos because they cater to timely fashion trends, and that they desire to keep up with the newest “in” item:

*“When I see these types of videos, it definitely makes me want to purchase more clothes, and especially because these videos are typically centered around trends that are going on.”* (USA2)

*“With the trends in fashion, and seeing like, oh, well, this isn't in anymore, or this is the new shoe for fall. And it's like, I just bought shoes again and now I need more. I thought the shoe was last year and now it's out, or whatever. I can't keep up.”* (USA3)

One participant mentioned that although fast fashion is “trendy”, they have the experience that there is also an opposite ongoing trend, which is encouraging more sustainable behaviors:

*“On the one side there is the fashion trend, but on the other side, there's also the trend to sustainability.”* (GER2)

## Environmental Impact

In regard to RQ3, it was found that every participant was able to name at least one environmental concern that they associated with the shown haul video, or haul videos in general, when prompted by the follow up questions. When prompted, most participants expressed concerns about the plastic and packaging waste, but other issues were less commonly discussed. However, as previously mentioned, only 4/12 participants brought up environmental concerns during the think-aloud process, demonstrating that this is not the first thought that comes to mind when consumers are viewing haul videos on their social media feeds, even if they may consider themselves to be more environmentally aware.

It was found that the most common environmental issues discussed by the participants were (1) packaging waste, (2) supply chain issues, and (3) quality and reusability of the products.

### **Packaging Waste**

The participants demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the packaging and plastic waste demonstrated in haul videos. To illustrate:

*“The just made me think of how much packaging waste there was, whereas if you go out to, like the thrift store or pretty much any other store, the only waste is, like a plastic bag if you use one at checkout” (USA5)*

*“The products, they were in plastic wrap. And this just shows how instead of maybe putting them in paper, they use plastic and then even more packaging.” (GER6)*

*“Also that there was, like a lot of packaging. It would be interesting to see the mountain in the end, just throwing it away.” (GER3)*

Moreover, it was very commonly noted that they believe each item being individually wrapped in plastic is an unsustainable and unnecessary practice in the fast fashion industry:

*“Each clothing product individually came with one of those Ziploc bags, which that's pretty bad for the environment...if you're just kind of like an everyday person scrolling, you're not necessarily paying attention to the amount of bags that everything is coming out of and more just to the product.” (USA4)*

*“I think the big issue with Shein especially is everything that they ship comes in individual plastic bags... I don't think they need to be all individually packaged before they go in the same box.” (USA3)*

### **Quality and Reusability**

A large majority of the participants expressed major concerns about the quality of the items in the haul video, and in fast fashion in general. They were able to recognize that poor quality leads to less reusability, and demonstrated a high level of environmental awareness regarding this environmental impact:

*“The issue with Shein is that all these things are not good quality material. So if these aren't going to last or she isn't gonna wear them, is it just gonna get donated immediately?” (USA1)*

*“Like I said while the video was playing, it is a large amount of clothes, so it does make you wonder, like, are they actually getting use out of that? Or, how long will they use it? Either they will be throwing away that item or hopefully they would donate it.” (USA2)*

It is also notable that in addition to recognizing the issues of quality of the items, participants also voiced their concerns about the conditions that the clothes are produced in:

*“I also think the conditions where the clothes are produced are not good for the environment. There is also the fact that it's probably bad quality and maybe you throw the clothes away after a few months.” (GER2)*

*“Producing clothes means a lot of hazardous things, and also micro plastics go into the environment when you wash them. Because it's like fast fashion, people sometimes maybe don't wear it even five times, possibly even less, and then throw it away. So it's also a huge waste problem, just in general, and the resources that are needed to produce all the stuff.” (GER3)*

## **Supply Chain**

Although it was less commonly mentioned, a few participants noted the supply chain impact of fast fashion products and the impact of shopping from brands which use different countries to produce clothes:

*“It’s based in China, so the transportation, the [environmental] cost of shipping that to you is going to be significant, and then wherever it ends up after being shipped, it has to drive to your house.” (USA5)*

*“It’s also a huge waste problem, just in general, and the resources that are needed to produce all the stuff. Also the transport...” (GER3)*

## **Individual Cultural & Societal Influences**

To provide insight into RQ4, the participants were broadly asked to reflect on their personal lives and individual backgrounds, such as the society that they grew up in, and consider any factors that could influence their attitudes or understanding of these videos, especially regarding the environmental impact of fast fashion. The following themes were most commonly discussed: (1) education, (2) familial and social circle, (3) geographic influence, and (4) generational influence.

## **Education**

Many participants expressed that they believe their education had a significant impact on how they perceive fast fashion haul videos by increasing their awareness of certain environmental issues:

*“I know that I’m probably more aware of things than a lot of people are...It’s definitely, like a matter of education... I think having the educational background of just knowing what’s going on with the world primed my perception of things...” (USA1)*

Some expressed that they have a personal interest in the environment which drove their educational pursuits and made them more aware and conscious about their behaviors:

*“Nature has always played a big role when I was a small child and today, studying environmental and resource management, which is an important thing to me.” (GER3)*

*“Not everybody has a degree in environmental science [like herself]. Not everyone has been trained to think this way...” (USA5)*

### **Familial and Social Circle Influence**

It was commonly expressed that the participants believed their familial upbringing has affected their purchasing behaviors in general. Due to different reasons, including economic factors, participants felt that their values and habits in adulthood regarding consumption were significantly shaped by the behaviors their families modeled:

*“My mom, for instance, still has shirts that she has had since approximately 1999 and wears them still. I mean, we grew up with like back to school shopping basically being our big shopping events.” (USA1)*

*“It was very normalized in my family to go to thrift stores. Growing up, we bought a lot of things secondhand. So that definitely helped make me be more aware of sustainability... I would rather get something secondhand than buy something new and then it just ends up in a landfill.” (USA2)*

Similarly, some participants explained that their family, or other social circles, have made them aware of the issues with buying from fast fashion sites, which then caused them to reflect and change their behavior:

*“I think three years ago, it was the first time my sister told me, she told me about the background of producing their [Shein] clothes and how the workers' conditions are. And after this, I didn't buy anything from here...” (GER5)*

*“I studied a few years in Heidelberg and had a lot of friends that were more into the help for the environment and all eating vegan for this reason, and you know, you get the influence from them...I am not thinking about buying these brands again, because I know how bad they are, and I know that my friends would never. This was really a big influence.” (GER4)*



### **Geographic Influence**

Participants described the feeling that where they live and the environment they live in or grew up in could have an influence on their interpretation of haul videos. For example, their geographic location and having limited access to shopping:

*“I grew up in a pretty rural area, so when we went shopping, you know, we had to buy things that would last a while, because it's not like there was a mall right down the street. You couldn't replace it if it broke, it was like an hour away.” (USA3)*

Others felt, in a broader sense, that the societal norms and cultural framework of where they live has shaped their view of fast fashion and how social media promotes overconsumption:

*“I live in Europe, so already a pretty different cultural background than, for example, in Africa or Asia. There are also people who do not have, like, this connection or this interest for the environment, there are people who maybe don't know about all the problems.” (GER3)*

*“I think that a lot of people don't even think about these things... And if you don't have a good education, or you're in a part of a country where everybody does this, or if this is a good thing, then for sure it would affect it [purchasing behaviors].” (GER4)*

*“A lot of people in the United States, maybe they're not focused on things like their footprint. They're focused on, you know, purchasing items that they can afford, which, I can't blame them for that, but it's disappointing that the United States doesn't prioritize the education of educating consumers.” (USA5)*

*“Obviously, I live in an American very fast fashion world. And I feel like there are always trends that are coming and going. And you go to second hand stores and you see them all over.” (USA2)*

### **Generational Influence**

It was noted by some participants that their generational experiences influence their attitude toward fast fashion and how these videos appeal to them, as well as how they have begun to think more critical about these types of products. A particular aspect they feel is key to

their generation is the influence of the presence of social media in their lives, which other previous generations were not affected by and may have a different experience:

*“Growing up with social media and all that you see, for example, for the last couple of years, there's been more environmentally friendly posts... The first thing I thought, when I saw the video, was oh yeah, lots of stuff, cool...But then I really think about what it means having it.”* (GER6)

*“I feel like older generations didn't feel the need to mass consume the way we do. We think it's so normal to order all this stuff, because you see your favorite influencer is doing it.”* (USA6)

*“I think growing up, or just being in the age or generation that we're in, like we didn't have online shopping for our entire life, so we're getting to start using it and exploring it...But I think it's kind of lost its appeal over the years...”* (USA3)

## **Discussion**

To the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first to explore in detail the attitudes towards and influence of haul videos on young female consumers. The rich, descriptive interview data provides in-depth insight into the attitudes and response to haul-videos which display overconsumption of fast-fashion goods on social media, thus showing the impact of this type of digital media on young consumers and the need to increase awareness of the fast-fashion industry's impact. Overall, 5 categories and 19 subcategories of analysis emerged. The interview study ultimately revealed that some participants, of both nationalities, are thinking critically about their consumption and the influence of social media on their purchasing behaviors, especially when prompted. Further, in relation to RQ3, several environmental themes emerged during thoughtful discussion, including concerns about packing waste and product quality. This shows that members of this age group in both countries are mindful of their consumption and aware of the conditions in which their items are produced and the effect that this industry has on the planet. However, there is still a significant persuasive effect of social media and haul videos,

as observed by the participant responses detailing how they are influenced to consume more after seeing these videos and their lack of environmental concern shown while thinking aloud.

Additionally, our analysis showed that participants felt that when they are aware and educated about the impact of fast fashion on the environment, they are more likely to look critically at haul videos on social media than less educated viewers, which is in line with recent research (Chun et al., 2021; Papadopoulou et al., 2022). This finding suggests that it is necessary to generate and encourage societal discussion regarding the impact of fast fashion on the environment so that more individuals become aware and begin to thoughtfully assess social media content such as haul videos. Practically, companies and nonprofits with a sustainable focus could use social media as a platform for environmental awareness campaigns and suggest sustainable alternatives, and policy makers should consider integrating environmental and media literacy into education curriculums.

It is important to note that, in line with RQ5, there was not a significant difference observed between participants from Germany and participants from the United States, especially in their responses to their personal background and factors such as education and their recognition of environmental issues, which is at odds with previous research and surveys which suggests that German participants could be more educated and mindful of environmental topics, and more willing to make changes in their personal lives to fight climate change (Bell, 2021; Dryzek et al., 2002). However, consistent with Consumer Culture Theory (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Arnould & Thompson, 2005), the interview questions that explored the influence of haul videos on the participants and how their individual backgrounds have affected their perceptions of such videos revealed that familial and peer connections and societal framework significantly impacted the participants' views and future behaviors, suggesting that these influences could be

harnessed to further promote more sustainable and mindful consumption practices. As an example, nonprofits with the goal of educating consumers to be more mindful of clothing consumption could consider focusing on local and community focused initiatives, such as clothing swap events or clothing repair workshops, as a way to engage with the social aspect of environmental influence.

Another major finding that emerged is that the participants believe that consumers younger than themselves, such as teenagers, would be particularly influenced by haul videos, more so than their own age group. This is partially contradictory to recent studies which indicated that twenty-somethings, the majority of the participant's age group, are a main target of this type of social media content (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022; Jefferies, 2011; McNeill & Moore, 2015). This finding suggests that campaigns providing education about the harms of fast fashion should focus on reaching teenagers, and future research could explore how much these even younger consumers, such as "Generation Alpha", are affected by haul videos and what their attitudes are. Additionally, economic concerns and socioeconomic status also emerged as a major perceived factor of influence for buying fast fashion, highlighting a need to provide consumers with information on affordable alternatives to fast fashion. In regard to theoretical implications, future research could take participant's income level into consideration when looking at the influence of and attitudes toward haul videos.

Furthermore, using a Think Aloud Protocol allowed us to understand the thought process of these consumers when initially viewing a haul video. It was observed that frequently, the initial reaction to haul videos has to do with the products or the style of the video, and less often with the waste produced or the overconsumption of clothing, illustrating on a deeper level how environmental concern and awareness can be lost due to the persuasive and stimulating effect of

haul videos. Further, it was commonly noted that the speed of these videos was very addictive which is supported by recent research on the immersiveness of short-form video content compared to traditional social media research (David & Roberts, 2024; Yan et al., 2023). This also agrees with similar studies that have applied the ELM to online content, and found that it is heuristically processed and looked at with less scrutiny (Rohde & Mau, 2021; Metzger et al., 2010). Another way for those involved in awareness campaigns, such as nonprofits, to combat this viral behavior may be to encourage consumers to find satisfaction and stimulation from different sources, rather than bulk fast fashion shopping. This has also been demonstrated through recent “de-influencing” trends on TikTok, which encourage users to think consciously and reflectively before buying so-called “must-have” viral items (Lobad, 2024).

Overall, our results suggest that it is imperative to combat the influence of overconsumption displayed on social media through fast fashion and haul videos. The challenge for educators, nonprofits, sustainable businesses and similar groups now lies in countering the persuasive influence of this media and fast fashion culture. Even when individuals are aware of the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion, shifting consumption norms proves to remain difficult. However, this study offers suggestions on techniques such as targeting young consumer groups and focusing on education campaigns that inspire mindful consumption in order to reduce the appeal of fast fashion.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations within this study that should be addressed. Because the research includes a cross-country comparison approach, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom due to the geographical location of the interviewees and the author/interviewer. An in-person interview format could possibly reveal greater detail from the participants. Additionally, the

German participants gave the interviews in English, and while all participants were fluent in English, there is the possibility that they are more comfortable expressing themselves in their mother-tongue and therefore some of their answers could be less complete. Further, future research could benefit from this study being replicated across several different countries and cultural contexts, as encouraged by the CCT, and it could be useful to have each country complete the interviews with an interviewer that speaks their native language.

Another limitation of this study is that there was not much variance in age of the participants, although this study chose to focus only on a small age group due to their recognized social media usage and that they are found to be targeted by these fast fashion brand's advertisements. In addition to different cultural contexts, it could also be interesting for future research to replicate the interview and think-aloud format with older generations that are less familiar with social media to determine the influence of haul videos on someone who may have not seen one before and compare the attitudes of different generational groups.

Additionally, it is important to consider social-desirability bias. To demonstrate, since the participants were more likely to consider the environmental consequences of fast fashion when prompted, after the initial think aloud stimuli, they could have answered the question with regard to what they anticipated the interviewer wanted to hear or what they perceived to be socially accepted. In the same vein, future studies could include an observational component because there could be a difference in how participants respond to questions about their sustainable behaviors and how they act when encountered with real life decisions that involve acting sustainably, due to this social-desirability bias.

Finally, it is important to note that during the interviews, the author received feedback from a number of participants, especially U.S. participants, stating that they usually prefer or see

“try-on” style haul videos, and that they felt the “unboxing” style video where the items are displayed one at a time without being shown how they will be worn was not the best demonstration of a haul video. The author purposely chose a video where the creator was not displaying themselves or their bodies, partially to keep the creator anonymous, but also to avoid the interviews focusing on the creator’s appearance. This was intended to avoid conversations regarding body image and body positivity, which has also become a huge discussion in recent years on social media and keep the focus purely on the fast fashion items and the overconsumption of these goods (Vandenbosch et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). However, this may have swayed the attitudes toward the videos to be more negative than they would be if the video were of a different style. A future study could use a “try-on” style haul video, while also making a disclaimer to the participants that they should focus more on the products, not on the influencer/actor.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study provides detailed insight into how videos on social media affect young consumers at an individual level, regarding influence, attitude, and environmental awareness of the impact of this type of social media content. The results provide important information for decision makers within governments, socially responsible corporations, and nonprofits, and allow us to better understand how to combat the harmful impacts of the fast fashion industry. Interventions should focus on providing education and accurate information about the industry and its impact, encouraging and harnessing peer influence, and targeting even younger consumers such as Gen Alpha. Since there was not a major difference observed between young consumer groups from different countries, more research is needed to understand how a larger demographic group is affected by this social media content and how a wider range of

consumer cultures differ in their attitudes. This research provides a first basis for future studies as there are now determined categories that can help to break into the discussion about how to prevent fast fashion consumption.



## References

- Ajzen, I. (1991), “The theory of planned behavior”, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 179-211.
- Arnould, E., & Thompson, C. (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868–882. doi: 10.1086/426626
- Askegaard, S., & Linnet, J. T. (2011). Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory: Phenomenology and the context of context. *Marketing Theory*, 11(4), 381–404. doi: 10.1177/1470593111418796
- Bartolini, S., & Sarracino, F. (2017). Twenty-Five Years of Materialism. *Social Indicators Research*, 133(2), 787–817. doi: 10.1007/s11205-016-1381-7
- Bell, J. (2021, September 14). In response to climate change, citizens in advanced economies are willing to alter how they live and work. Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/09/14/in-response-to-climate-change-citizens-in-advanced-economies-are-willing-to-alter-how-they-live-and-work/>
- Bick, R., Halsey, E., & Ekenga, C. C. (2018). The global environmental injustice of fast fashion. *Environmental Health*, 17(1), 92–94. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-018-0433-7>
- Brandão, A., & Costa, A. G. da. (2021). Extending the theory of planned behaviour to understand the effects of barriers towards sustainable fashion consumption. *European Business Review*, 33(5), 742–774. doi: 10.1108/EBR-11-2020-0306
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Cesarina Mason, M., Pauluzzo, R., & Muhammad Umar, R. (2022). Recycling habits and environmental responses to fast-fashion consumption: Enhancing the theory of planned behavior to predict Generation Y consumers’ purchase decisions. *Waste Management (Elmsford)*, 139, 146–157. doi: 10.1016/j.wasman.2021.12.012

- Chun, E., Joung, H., Lim, Y.J. and Ko, E. (2021), “Business transparency and willingness to act environmentally conscious behaviour: applying the sustainable fashion evaluation system ‘higg index’”, *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 437-452.
- Cut fast fashion's staggering environmental impact. (2022). *Nature* (London), 609(7928), 653–654. doi: 10.1038/d41586-022-02914-2
- Davies, B., Turner, M., & Udell, J. (2023). The Importance of Social Cues When Browsing Appearance-Focused Social Media Content: A Think Aloud Protocol Analysis Using Fitspiration Images and Instagram Feed Browsing. *Media Psychology*, 1–27. doi: 10.1080/15213269.2023.2242251
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities’ Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 1–7.
- Dryzek, J. S., Hunold, C., Schlosberg, D., Downes, D., & Hernes, H.-K. (2002). Environmental Transformation of the State: the USA, Norway, Germany and the UK. *Political Studies*, 50(4), 659–682. doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.00001
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *A new textiles economy: Redesigning fashion’s future* (2017).
- Ending fast fashion: Tougher rules to fight excessive production and consumption: News: European parliament. Ending fast fashion: tougher rules to fight excessive production and consumption | News | European Parliament. (2023, April 27). <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230424IPR82040/ending-fast-fashion-tougher-rules-to-fight-excessive-production-and-consumption>
- Ericsson, K.A., & Simon, H.A. (1998). How to study thinking in everyday life: Contrast-ing think-aloud protocols with descriptions and explanations of thinking. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 5(3), 178–186
- Freiling, I. (2019). Detecting misinformation in online social networks: A think-aloud study on user strategies. *SCM Studies in Communication and Media*, 8(4), 471-496.

- García-de-Frutos, N., & Estrella-Ramón, A. (2021). You absolutely (don't) need this!examining differences on customer engagement components for (anti)haul youtubers' videos. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 15(1), 86–103. doi: 10.1108/JRIM-11-2019-0181
- Haines, S., Fares, O. H., Mohan, M., & Lee, S. H. (2023). Social media fashion influencer eWOM communications: understanding the trajectory of sustainable fashion conversations on YouTube fashion haul videos. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 27(6), 1027–1046. doi: 10.1108/JFMM-02-2022-0029
- Harnish, Richard J., and K. Robert Bridges. "Mall haul videos: Self-presentational motives and the role of self-monitoring." *Psychology & Marketing* 33.2 (2016): 113-124.
- Jeffries, L. (2011). The Revolution Will Be Soooo Cute: YouTube "Hauls" and the Voice of Young Female Consumers. *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33(2), 59–75.
- Lee, J., & Cho, M. (2022). The (in)congruency effects of message framing and image valence on consumers' responses to green advertising: Focus on issue involvement as a moderator. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 28(6), 617–636. doi: 10.1080/13527266.2021.1900893
- Lee, J. A., Sudarshan, S., Sussman, K. L., Bright, L. F., & Eastin, M. S. (2022). Why are consumers following social media influencers on Instagram? Exploration of consumers' motives for following influencers and the role of materialism. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1964226>
- Lobad, N. (2024). Inside TikTok's "No-buy 2024" Movement. *WWD*, 30–30.
- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution. *Klagenfurt*. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173>
- McIntyre, N. A., Draycott, B., & Wolff, C. E. (2022). Keeping track of expert teachers: the affordances of think-aloud elicited by two different video perspectives. *Learning and Instruction*, 80, 101563. doi: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2021.101563
- McMahon, L. (2024, November 14). Amazon launches Temu and Shein rival with "crazy low" prices. *BBC*. Retrieved November 16, 2024, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyv0yp130go>.

- McNeill, L., & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(3), 212–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12169>
- Metzger, M. J., Flanagin, A. J., & Medders, R. B. (2010). Social and Heuristic Approaches to Credibility Evaluation Online. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 413–439. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01488.x
- Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., & Gwilt, A. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. *Nature Reviews. Earth & Environment*, 1(4), 189–200. doi: 10.1038/s43017-020-0039-9
- Papadopoulou, M., Papasolomou, I., & Thrassou, A. (2022). Exploring the level of sustainability awareness among consumers within the fast-fashion clothing industry: a dual business and consumer perspective. *Competitiveness Review*, 32(3), 350–375. doi: 10.1108/CR-04-2021-0061
- Peters, G., Li, M., & Lenzen, M. (2021). The need to decelerate fast fashion in a hot climate - A global sustainability perspective on the garment industry. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 295, 126390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126390>
- Petty, R.E., Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. In: *Communication and Persuasion*. Springer Series in Social Psychology. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1_1)
- Prameswari, C. (2022). The Influence of Social Media Marketing Towards Fast Fashion Brands. *Jurnal Entrepreneur Dan Entrepreneurship*, 11(2), 125–138. doi: 10.37715/jee.v11i2.3092
- Perri, J. (2023, January 18). Shein holds largest U.S. Fast Fashion Market Share. Bloomberg Second Measure. <https://secondmeasure.com/datapoints/fast-fashion-market-share-us-consumer-spending-data-shein-hm-za>
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2020). *Qualitative research : bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (Second edition.). [Washington, D.C.]: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Riva, F., Magrizos, S., Rubel, M. R. B., & Rizomyliotis, I. (2022). Green consumerism, green perceived value, and restaurant revisit intention: Millennials' sustainable consumption with moderating effect of green perceived quality. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 31(7), 2807–2819. <https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1002/bse.3048>
- Rohde, P., & Mau, G. (2021). “It’s selling like hotcakes”: deconstructing social media influencer marketing in long-form video content on youtube via social influence heuristics. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(10), 2700–2734. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-06-2019-0530>
- Schouten, A.P., Janssen, L., Verspaget, M., 2020. Celebrity vs. Influencer endorsements in advertising: the role of identification, credibility, and Product-Endorser fit. *Int. J. Advert.* 39 (2), 258–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1634898>. Shaver, K., 1977. *Principles of Social Psychology*. Winthrop Publishers, Cambridge, M
- Stewart, S.-J. F., & Ogden, J. (2022). Motivating or stigmatising? The public health and media messaging surrounding COVID-19 and obesity: a qualitative think aloud study. *Health Education (Bradford, West Yorkshire, England)*, 122(4), 374–386. doi: 10.1108/HE-04-2021-0067
- Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. (2015). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2024). *Textiles: Material-Specific Data*. EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/textiles-material-specific-data>
- Vandenbosch, L., Fardouly, J., & Tiggemann, M. (2022). Social media and body image: Recent trends and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45, 101289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.12.002>
- Villarrubia-Gómez, Cornell, S. E., & Fabres, J. (2018). Marine plastic pollution as a planetary boundary threat – The drifting piece in the sustainability puzzle. *Marine Policy*, 96, 213–220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2017.11.035>

- Waqas, M., Hamzah, Z. L., & Salleh, N. A. M. (2022). Branded content experience in social media settings: a consumer culture theory perspective. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 29(2), 225–240. doi: 10.1057/s41262-021-00268-0
- Wang, Z., Kasimon, D., Abas, W. A. W., Ma, Y., & Ruan, Q. (2023). Research Trends in Different Social Media Platform and Body Image. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(5), 1918 – 1927.
- Wicker, A. Fast Fashion Is Creating an Environmental Crisis. *Newsweek*. September 1, 2016; Available from: <https://www.newsweek.com/2016/09/09/old-clothes-fashion-waste-crisis-494824.htm>
- Yan, Y., He, Y., & Li, L. (2023). Why time flies? The role of immersion in short video usage behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14(April), 1127210. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1127210>

## **Appendix**

### **Interview Guide**

#### ***Introduction Questions***

1. How often do you see these videos?
2. Can you describe what they are usually displaying, and on what platform?
3. What comes to mind when you think of these videos?
4. Do you find them attractive?
  - a. If yes, why? If no, why not?

→ Next, a Tiktok haul video will be played once and participants will be asked to share their thoughts aloud.

#### **Interviewer Think Aloud Protocol Explanation:**

“Within this study, I am interested in what you think about while watching the social media video that I will show you. In order to do this, I am going to ask you to think aloud as you watch it. What I mean by thinking aloud is that I want you to tell me everything you are thinking from the time the video starts until the end. Let the video influence what you say. I would like you to think aloud constantly. I do not want you to try to plan out what you will say or try to explain to me what you are saying, just act as if you are alone in the room speaking to yourself. Most importantly, do not stop talking. If you are silent for too long, I will ask you to continue talking. Do you understand what I mean?” (Adapted from Freiling, 2019; Ericsson & Simon, 1998).

→ Participants will be prompted if silent for extended periods, over 20 seconds at a time, for example.

#### ***Follow Up Semi-Structured Interview Questions***

##### **Attitudes**

1. What additional thoughts/ feelings do you have about the video that you just saw that did not come up while you were thinking aloud about them?
2. What elements of this video did you find to be attractive?

3. What elements of this video did you find to be negative?
4. What was your overall takeaway of the video?

#### Influence

1. Reflecting on the video, how do you think it might affect your own purchasing behaviors?
2. Have you ever purchased products because of a haul video, or would you ever purchase something in the future?
3. Do you believe influencers have a significant impact on viewers when it comes to fashion choices and purchasing decisions, by normalizing their shopping behaviors?

#### Environmental Awareness

1. Did you recognize any environmental implications related to fast fashion in the TikTok video? If yes, what specific environmental implications/consequences do you recognize?
2. On a scale from low to high, how would you rate your overall awareness of environmental issues, specifically related to the fashion industry?
- 3.

#### Consumer Culture

1. Reflecting on your background, such as where you are from and how you grew up (for example, education and family life), do you think there are any factors that may impact your attitude toward this video?
2. In your opinion, could individuals from different societal or educational backgrounds interpret the environmental impact of fast fashion haul videos differently?

#### Final Remarks

1. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss regarding the video and its impact, or fast fashion in general?

→ Following the interview, participants will be thanked for their time and responses.