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Declaration

I, Cecile Abuzour , a Student at University of Wales Trinity saint David , hereby declare that the research titled "**“The Impact of TikTok Engagement Metrics on Consumer Behaviour in the Fast Fashion Industry: A Case Study of Shein”**" is an original work conducted by me. The study aims to investigate how individual TikTok engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, shares & saves) are related to generation z consumers' purchase intention and brand awareness for the fast fashion brand Shein.

The research follows ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation of all subjects. The methodology used includes A quantitative, cross-sectional online survey was conducted with UK-based Generation Z respondents (18-29 years old) who were recruited through an online panel. Data were analysed using Spearman's rank order correlation and multiple regression to evaluate five hypotheses based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. Any funding received for this study has been disclosed, and there is no conflict of interest.

I affirm that this research adheres to the ethical standards set by University of Wales Trinity saint David] and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication or evaluation.

Cecile Abuzour

UWTSD

17/8/2026

Abstract

The main aim of this study was to investigate the effect of individual metrics of TikTok engagement on the purchase intention and brand awareness of consumers of Generation Z in the fast-fashion industry. The study is important since most studies in the field have focused on the general effect of social media on purchase intention without investigating each of these metrics specifically, particularly the 'save' function which has been largely ignored in existing literature. Also, the use of these specific metrics will allow for an understanding of the behaviour of people who use TikTok specifically.

A quantitative research study was performed utilising surveys of 85 Generation Z consumers who live in the UK and are between 18 and 29 years of age. Spearman's connection coefficient and linear regression models were applied to the data within the structure of the S-O-R model. The results show that each of the five TikTok metrics is significantly positively correlated with purchase intention. However, only 'Comments', 'Social Proof' and 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) were important predictors in the regression model ($R^2 = 0.660$). Also, the results indicated that the 'save' function acts as a bookmarking function for the platforms users, especially if they post content that features social proof from other consumers.

Overall, these results show that TikTok users of Generation Z prioritize content that contains opinions from other consumers over metrics like 'likes' or 'views'. Also, the interest-graph algorithm creates brand awareness using the FOMO that emerges from these viral trends, even in the setting of the ethical issues associated with the fast-fashion industry. Therefore, fast-fashion brands could focus their efforts on increasing the quality of the interactions between consumers in the comment section of TikTok posts. Finally, future research should investigate the effect of each of these metrics through experimental designs, as well as through the investigation of differences in the engagement behaviours of consumers on other social media platforms.

Keywords: TikTok, Shein, Fast Fashion, Generation Z, S-O-R Model, Engagement Metrics, Purchase Intention.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is a dissertation that investigated how different TikTok engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, views and saves) influenced Generation Z's purchase intention and brand awareness in the fast fashion industry using Shein as a single brand case study. This chapter introduced the background to this research, identified the research problem and gap which this dissertation addresses, stated the aims, objectives, research questions and hypotheses of the investigation. It also explained the importance, scope and rationale of the research before outlining the structure of the rest of this dissertation.

1.2. Background of the Study

TikTok has become one of the largest social commerce platforms. As of 2025, TikTok reached more than 1.59 billion users worldwide (Kempt, 2025). TikTok has also transformed the way people, especially Gen Z, interact and purchase products (Rawangngam et al., 2025). Its algorithmic structure creates a continuous loop between discovering content and wanting to purchase products. Engagement signals such as likes, shares, comments, views and saves drive the dissemination of content and its transformation into sales (Rawangngam et al., 2025). The use of short-form videos in the TikTok platform has been found to create a 'flow experience', which induces word-of-mouth engagement beyond the platform's usual use (Rawangngam et al., 2025). Trust is found to be a important predictor of purchase intention in similar platforms (Ghenie, Avornicului and Sitar-Taut, 2026). Shein, a popular e-commerce brand, has acquired 50% of the US fast fashion market share by 2022. The marketing strategy of Shein is heavily driven by TikTok's visibility (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024). Academic interest in social media marketing has been increased in the last 20 years (Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024). Specifically, the study of social media marketing has been researched extensively. The research in TikTok found that the recommendation system and habitual usage patterns are strong predictors of consumer purchase intention (Grabowska et al., 2025; Lim et al., 2025). The dissertation was selected because a particular gap was found, despite the wealth of literature in the field. This dissertation aims to answer how different engagement metrics perform in predicting purchase intention in the setting of a single fast fashion brand.

1.3. Problem Statement

Likewise, the prior studies to this have been treating social media engagement as an aggregated construct, rather than differentiating the constructs into specific metric types, (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021; Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024). However, as soon as the specific metrics were tested, the evidence showed that the specific metric types did perform differently. For instance, Rosli et al., (2024) found that shares ($\beta = 0.422$) and likes ($\beta = 0.246$) significantly predicted purchase decisions on Instagram but comments showed no important relationship ($p = 0.865$). Although this finding was specific to Instagram, but this finding has not been tested within the distinct algorithmic environment of TikTok. Most importantly, the save function, which the industry professionals have been widely agreed that it is TikTok's strongest indicator of deliberate purchase intent, has never been tested as an independent variable related to purchase intention. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no peer-reviewed study that have been testing this relationship. This was a clear and addressable gap that the dissertation attempted to fill. In particular, the Generation Z consumers have been documented to be very susceptible to fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) dynamics and therefore these consumers can be expected to overcome sustainability concerns when they are engaging with ultra-fast fashion brands like Shein. (Nguyen and Pham, 2026). The problems that this dissertation attempted to address were, therefore, that there was no quantitative evidence regarding which specific TikTok engagement metrics signal most strongly predict Generation Z consumers' purchase intention towards Shein.

1.4. Aims and Objectives

Aim: To examine the differential impact of individual TikTok engagement metrics on Generation Z's purchase intention and brand awareness in the fast fashion industry, with specific reference to Shein.

Objectives:

1. To critically review existing literature on TikTok marketing, engagement metrics and consumer behaviour in the fast fashion industry.
2. To identify the extent to which individual TikTok engagement metrics differ in their predictive relationship with purchase intention and brand awareness.
3. To determine whether the save metric is a stronger predictor of purchase intention than other engagement metrics among Generation Z consumers.

4. To provide evidence-based recommendations for Shein's TikTok engagement strategy.

1.5. Research Questions

RQ1: Which TikTok engagement metric is the strongest predictor of consumer purchase intention for Shein products among Generation Z?

RQ2: Does the same metric demonstrate a significantly stronger positive relationship with purchase intention than likes, shares, comments or views?

RQ3: Do individual TikTok engagement metrics have differential effects on brand awareness compared to purchase intention?

Guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) and supported by Rosli et al.'s (2024) findings, the following directional hypotheses will be tested:

H1: TikTok video views are positively associated with purchase intention for Shein products.

H2: Likes on Shein TikTok content positively predict purchase intention.

H3: Shares positively predict purchase intention more strongly than likes.

H4: Comments show no significant relationship with purchase intention.

H5: Saves demonstrate the strongest positive association with purchase intention of all five metrics.

1.6. Significance of the Research

This research is significant on three levels. Academically, it provides the first metric-level quantitative analysis of TikTok engagement within a fast fashion context, directly addressing a gap confirmed by two independent systematic reviews of the social media marketing literature (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021; Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024). It also extends the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, previously applied successfully to TikTok purchase intention research (Rawangngam et al., 2025; Hongsuchon, Chen and Khan, 2025), to a more granular, metric-disaggregated context.

Practically, the findings will provide Shein and comparable fast fashion brands with empirical evidence to inform TikTok content and engagement investment decisions, building on existing evidence that influencer-driven engagement substantially affects purchase outcomes, albeit through mechanisms that vary by credibility and engagement type (Barari, Eisend and Jain, 2025). Commercially, the research responds to the post-TikTok Shop era, in which in-app purchasing has fundamentally altered how engagement metrics translate into measurable sales outcomes.

1.7. Scope of the Study

This research explores the link between TikTok engagement metrics and consumer purchase intention within the fast fashion industry, using Shein as the only case study brand. The study focuses on Gen Z TikTok users aged 18 - 24, who have seen content about Shein on the platform. A minimum of 100 participants were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling (Lim et al., 2025). The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using an online questionnaire. Excel Microsoft connection and regression analysis techniques were used to analyse the data. The study did not involve qualitative methods and did not look at other platforms other than TikTok. The study's results were not intended to be generalised beyond the demographic boundaries of Gen Z consumers.

1.8. Rationale of the Study

There is an increasing disconnection between the granularity of insights available on platforms like TikTok, with engagements being processed on an individual level through the lens of algorithmic signals and the blunt instruments now deployed in academic research and industry, such as the aggregate "visibility" metric. As fast fashion brands jockey for visibility in an overcrowded space, each piece of content is considered individually by TikTok's recommendation engine, and understanding the nuances required for both theory and practice has been obscured by treating such aggregates as a single construct.

Given the findings of Rosli et al. (2024) demonstrating distinct risks posed by hypothetical comments and likes to predict purchase decisions, a metric-level approach to understanding TikTok presents a theoretically grounded and practically meaningful contribution. Focusing on the save function on TikTok to understand the meteoric commercial rise of Shein, fueled by TikTok-driven discovery and the susceptibility of Generation Z to algorithmically reinforced

consumption patterns, as highlighted by Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024) and Nguyen and Pham (2026), respectively, represents an opportune and relevant moment for such an investigation.

1.9. Structure/Organisation of the Report

The rest of this dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the existing literature on TikTok as a social commerce platform, social media engagement metrics, fast fashion and Shein-specific consumer behaviour, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study specifically the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) before identifying the research gap that this study addresses. Chapter 3 details the research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, research strategy, time horizon, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the statistical findings from Spearman correlation and multiple regression analysis used to test the five hypotheses, followed by a discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature and theoretical framework, considering their academic and commercial implications. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation, summarising the key findings, acknowledging the study's limitations, and offering evidence-based recommendations for Shein's TikTok engagement strategy and directions for future research

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, discuss and critically evaluate existing studies related to TikTok engagement metrics, consumer behaviour, and the fast fashion industry, with a specific focus on Generation Z. As the complexity of online engagement as a purchasing motivation rises and the number of active social commerce platforms increases, the mechanisms through which digital engagement translates into purchase intention have become increasingly complex and commercially significant (Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024). This chapter will explore how different researchers contribute towards understanding this phenomenon, starting from the theoretical foundation specifically the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). It then analyses TikTok's platform characteristics and key engagement metrics, before examining the specific dynamics of fast fashion consumption and impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers in the context of Shein. Finally, the chapter consolidates the identified gaps in the literature, demonstrating how this dissertation will contribute to existing knowledge by isolating the predictive power of individual TikTok engagement metrics particularly the untested 'save' function through a quantitative online survey administered to Generation Z consumers.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: The Stimulus -Organism-Response (S-O-R)

The theoretical foundation of this study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally developed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974, which suggests that environmental stimuli will affect the organism's internal states, which will then result in a response from the individual. The S-O-R model has been used within recent years to study the effect of social commerce environments on consumer behaviour (Hongsuchon, Chen and Khan, 2025).

The components of the S-O-R model were operationalised within the setting of this study. The stimulus was created by examining the five-engagement metrics available on TikTok, including views, likes, comments, shares and saves. These metrics are presented on the For You Page of the app and represent the environmental cues delivered to users through the platform. The organism represents the Generation Z consumers and their brand awareness, perceived social proof and Fear of Missing Out (Hong-Ngoc, 2025). The response is represented by the consumers' intentions to purchase products from Shein, as well as their

impulsive purchasing behaviours (Rawangngam et al., 2025). These components of the S-O-R model have been successfully implemented in studies examining the effects of digital stimuli on consumers on TikTok (Lin et al., 2026; Jiang et al., 2024; Luo et al., 2025), which supports the application of this framework to quantitatively measure the relationship between individual engagement metrics and purchase intention in the present study (Hongsuchon, Chen and Khan, 2025).

2.3. TikTok as a Social Commerce Platform

According to Ding, Antonucci and Venditti (2025), TikTok has fundamentally changed the way social media marketing works by moving away from a social graph model where content is shared based on existing connections towards an interest graph model, where content is served to users based on their individual behaviour and predicted engagement. This algorithmic structure, built around the For You Page (FYP), delivers a highly personalised and immersive content experience. Ghenie, Avornicului and Sitar-Taut (2026) demonstrated that this 'flow experience' created by short-form video content is a strong predictor of word-of-mouth engagement and purchase intention in social commerce environments.

Kempt (2025) reported that TikTok surpassed 1.59 billion active users worldwide as of 2025, establishing it as one of the most powerful social commerce platforms in the world. Grabowska, Jaciow and Strzelecki (2025) identified the platform's recommendation system and the habitual usage patterns it creates as significant drivers of purchase intention, particularly among Generation Z, a finding further supported by Lim et al. (2025). Ghenie, Avornicului and Sitar-Taut (2026) also found that trust acts as an important psychological mediator in predicting purchase intention on short-form video platforms comparable to TikTok. Despite this growing body of research, existing studies predominantly treat TikTok's influence as a single, identical construct, without examining how different types of engagement signals are processed differently by the algorithm to produce distinct commercial outcomes. This gap highlights the need for the metric-level quantitative investigation proposed in this dissertation.

2.4 Individual TikTok Engagement Metrics and Their Impact on Purchase Intention

In social media marketing literature is the treatment of engagement between users and social media brands as a single variable. For instance, Trunfio and Rossi (2021) performed a literature review on social media marketing and discovered that engagement between social media users and brands was typically considered as a single variable. This was also demonstrated by Bartoloni and Ancillai (2024), who performed an analysis of twenty years' worth of social media marketing literature and reached a similar conclusion. By considering engagement between users and brands as a single variable, it is possible to lose sight of the specific motivations behind individual actions taken by those users.

Where individual metrics have been tested separately, the results show that they each behave in different ways. For instance, Rosli et al. (2024) performed a quantitative study of Instagram using signalling theory. The study revealed that the number of shares performed on a product posting had a positive relationship with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.422$), as did the number of likes received by a post ($\beta = 0.246$). However, the number of comments made on a posting was not related to purchase intention ($p = 0.865$). The study also indicated that approximately two-thirds of the variation in purchase decisions was left unexplained by the variables used ($R^2 = 0.325$), which directly justifies the inclusion of additional metrics specifically views and saves in the present study. While these findings are valuable, they relate specifically to Instagram and have not been replicated within TikTok's distinct algorithmic environment. Furthermore, where Rosli et al. (2024) applied signalling theory, the present study applies the S-O-R model to provide the missing psychological explanation for why certain metrics predict purchase intention.

The save function on TikTok is widely regarded as a strong indicator of deliberate purchase interest. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no existing peer-reviewed study that has examined the relationship between saves on TikTok and consumer purchase intention. Despite its growing importance as an algorithmic signal on the platform, this metric remains entirely absent from the academic literature, and this absence forms a central part of the research gap this dissertation addresses.

2.5. Individual TikTok engagement metrics and their impact purchase intention brand awareness

Building brand awareness is one of the primary objectives of using social media platforms (Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024). This effect is amplified when content is driven by influencers, with Barari, Eisend and Jain (2025) demonstrating that influencer-generated content produces measurable improvements in consumer responses to brands. TikTok is particularly powerful in this regard because its interest-graph algorithm surfaces content to users who have never actively searched for a brand, meaning consumers can encounter Shein for the first time through an organically recommended video (Ding, Antonucci and Venditti, 2025). In the case of Shein specifically, Degli Esposti, Mortara and Roberti (2024) argue that the brand's success among younger consumers has been driven by an aggressive influencer-led promotional strategy, with social media playing a central role in its marketing. The same study found that grassroots word-of-mouth among peers played a key role in Shein's popularity among younger generations (Degli Esposti, Mortara and Roberti, 2024). It is plausible, therefore, that when a video's visible engagement numbers of views, likes, comments, shares and saves are high, the brand appears popular and widely endorsed, which may strengthen consumers' awareness of it and, in turn, their intention to purchase. There is no existing literature that examines the relationship between specific engagement metrics on TikTok and brand awareness. However, Lim et al. (2025) found a strong positive connection between brand awareness and purchase intention among Malaysian Generation Z TikTok users ($r = 0.574$). This finding is consistent with the idea that there is a link between brand awareness and purchase intention on TikTok, although the study did not investigate the relationship between each of the individual metrics of brand awareness and purchase intention. So, the distinction between these two studies shows the research gap that this dissertation aims to fill. So, this dissertation will measure brand awareness in conjunction with purchase intention of the brand (Objective 2).

2.6 Fast Fashion, Shein and Generation Z Consumer Behaviour

The fast fashion industry is characterised by rapid production cycles, low price points and trend-driven consumption. The industry relies heavily on social media visibility to drive sales (Degli Esposti, Mortara and Roberti, 2024). Shein has become a dominant force in the fast fashion industry, capturing around 50% of the United States fast fashion market share by November 2022 (Perri, 2023). The growth in sales for Shein was driven by the rise of TikTok,

as well as the viral "#SheinHaul" phenomenon (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024). Shein's business model is perfectly suited to TikTok's algorithm. Shein can rapidly produce clothing based on trends that are quickly emerging on TikTok, allowing for an effective feedback loop between social media engagement and sales (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024).

The generation that makes up many consumers of both TikTok and Shein are members of Generation Z, people born between approximately 1997 and 2012 (Nguyen, Nguyen and Pham, 2026). While studies of this generation reveal that they tend to show concern for issues like sustainability and ethics in their purchasing decisions, their actual purchasing behaviour often contradicts those values due to factors like the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which has been found to act as an internal mediator of purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers (Hong-Ngoc, 2025). The constant stream of highly engaging, algorithmically curated content from Shein on TikTok also serves as a trigger for FOMO in Generation Z fast fashion consumers (Nguyen, Nguyen and Pham, 2026).

Influencer marketing also supports the discussion of social media metrics. Barari, Eisend and Jain (2025) conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of influencers on purchasing outcomes. Their findings show that while influencer-driven engagement may affect purchase outcomes, the impact is not equal across different metrics some are more effective than others. This supports the approach taken in this dissertation of examining each engagement metric separately rather than as a combined variable.

2.7 Identified Gaps in the literature

The four gaps that exist within the current research are based upon a review of the existing body of knowledge within the field. First, most of the studies that have looked at social media have treated social media engagement as a single entity (Trunfio and Rossi, 2021). There is little to no evidence regarding the differences between various metrics of engagement on platforms like TikTok and their relationship to purchase intention and no study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has examined which individual metrics contribute to brand awareness on TikTok.

Second, the save function has been completely absent from the academic literature on TikTok despite its importance as a measure of user engagement. To the best of the researcher's

knowledge, the save function has never been tested as a variable relating to the intention of users to make purchases on the platform. Third, although Rosli et al. (2024) did look at engagement metrics on Instagram, their findings have yet to be replicated or tested on TikTok with its interest-graph algorithm. Fourth, there is limited quantitative research applying the S-O-R model specifically to individual TikTok engagement metrics within the context of the fast fashion brand Shein, despite Shein's heavy reliance on TikTok-driven discovery among Generation Z consumers (Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa, 2024). Moreover, existing Shein-specific research is largely qualitative; Degli Esposti, Mortara and Roberti (2024) acknowledge that their interview-based findings cannot be statistically generalised, which reinforces the need for the quantitative approach adopted in this dissertation.

2.8 Summary

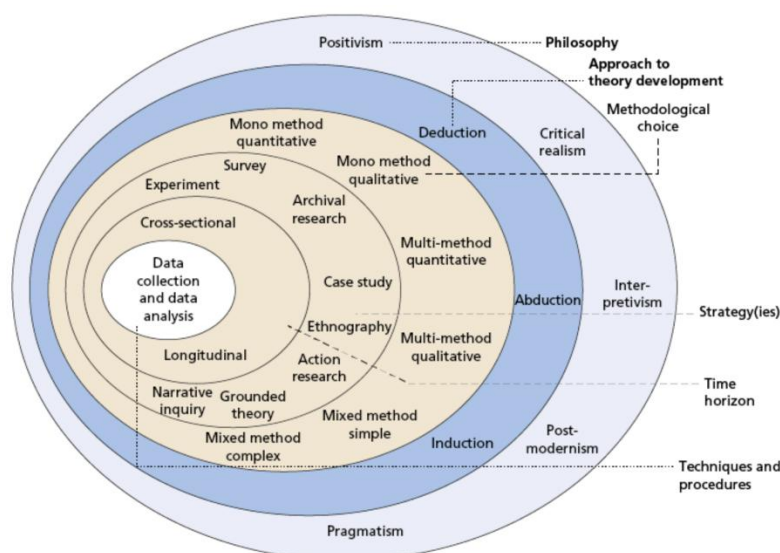
This chapter has critically reviewed the literature pertaining to TikTok's algorithmic influence, social media engagement metrics and Generation Z consumers' fast fashion consumption behaviour through the lens of the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, originally introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and now a well-established framework in social commerce literature (Hongsuchon, Chen and Khan, 2025). Although there is a clear understanding that TikTok plays an important role in driving purchase intention (Grabowska, Jaciow and Strzelecki, 2025), there remains a gap in the existing literature regarding the exact mechanisms through which it does so or which specific engagement signals are driving the conversion.

The prevalence of aggregated-metric research methods in previous studies also highlights the need for a quantitative, survey-based investigation that examines each individual metric separately. By filling these gaps namely by using a quantitative online survey to examine the predictive strength of views, likes, comments, shares and the previously unexamined save function within the unique case setting of Shein. This dissertation aims to deliver innovative, metric-level statistical evidence. As such, this research will not only contribute to the existing academic understanding of how and why consumers engage digitally, but also inform actionable, evidence-based recommendations for fast fashion brands operating within the ever-evolving social commerce landscape.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an outline of the methodology used to explore the relationship between individual TikTok engagement metrics and Generation Z consumers' purchase intention towards Shein. The chapter follows the structure of the 'research onion' model (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023), covering the research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, research strategies, time horizon, and data collection and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations governing the study.



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3.2. Research Philosophy

The study adopted a positivist philosophy as its research methodology. This philosophy assumes that reality exists independently of the perceptions of humans and that knowledge can be gained through observing and measuring objective phenomena (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The use of positivism within this study is appropriate, given the aims of the study included testing hypotheses that related to TikTok engagement metrics and purchasing intentions of customers. While this philosophy cannot provide insight into the subjective

reasons behind the purchasing decisions of consumers, it is sufficient for answering the research questions posed within this study.

3.3. Approach to Theory Development

Based upon the positivist philosophy adopted in this study, a deductive approach to theory development was employed. A deductive approach involves deriving hypotheses from existing theory and designing a research strategy to test them through data collection (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The S-O-R model was used as the theoretical foundation from which five specific hypotheses (H1–H5) were derived and subsequently tested using data collected through the quantitative online survey. An inductive approach was considered unsuitable for this dissertation, as both the theoretical framework and the variables of interest had already been established within the existing literature

3.4. Methodological Choice

The study was conducted using a mono-method, quantitative research design. Data were collected from an online survey. This type of research collects numerical data to allow for statistical analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). The purpose of this approach was to address the gap in the existing literature identified in Chapter 2. While a research design that also incorporated qualitative elements could provide further insight into the subjective motivations behind consumer behaviour on TikTok, such an approach was beyond the scope and duration of an undergraduate research project. Furthermore, the gap identified in the literature review was quantitative in nature, it lacked statistical analysis of individual engagement metric variables. Therefore, a quantitative, survey-only research design was deemed the most suitable for the purposes of this study

3.5. Research Strategies

Several research strategies were considered for this study. A case study approach could have been used to gain a deeper understanding of a specific company or phenomenon. An ethnographic approach could also have been used to study the consumption patterns of Generation Z within their natural settings. However, both strategies were deemed unsuitable, as neither allows for the large-scale, standardised data collection required to statistically test the five hypotheses across separate engagement metrics.

Based on these requirements, a survey strategy was selected as the most appropriate approach. Surveys are recognised as one of the most effective methods of collecting data from a population with diverse demographics and locations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Furthermore, surveys allow researchers to focus on specific populations, such as Generation Z. The online and anonymous nature of the questionnaire also means that respondents are more likely to answer honestly. This approach is consistent with established methodological precedent; Rosli et al. (2024) used a similar survey strategy to study Instagram users and measure the impact of individual engagement metrics on consumer purchasing outcomes. The questionnaire will be hosted and distributed through Microsoft form Online Surveys, ensuring the security and compliance of all data collected.

3.6. Time Horizon

The time horizon of a study refers to the length of time during which data is collected. A longitudinal study collects data from the same participants over time, enabling researchers to track changes in those people's behaviour or attitudes. In contrast, a cross-sectional study collects data at a single point in time, making it a more efficient approach for obtaining results from a population. This study employed a cross-sectional design, with data collected between July and August 2026. This design was selected because it would provide insight into Generation Z consumers' attitudes towards TikTok engagement metrics and their purchase intention towards Shein. Although cross-sectional studies do not allow for the demonstration of causal relationships between variables, this limitation is discussed further in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

3.7. Data Collection and Data Analysis

3.7.1 Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study set out to recruit people who identified as members of Generation Z living in the UK. To be eligible, participants had to be between 18 and 29 years old, use TikTok on a regular basis, and have an awareness of the fashion brand Shein. Anyone under the age of 18 was excluded from the study in line with the ethical guidelines set out by the researcher, which aimed to protect the wellbeing of young people.

Participants were recruited through social media and online forums, including university student groups and broader UK-wide online communities. Physical locations popular with this age group, such as cafés, coffee shops, and public walkways, were also used for in-person distribution of the questionnaire, in accordance with the approved ethics protocol.

The main sampling strategy used was non-probability purposive sampling, which was also the approach taken by Rosli et al. (2024). While this method has limitations in terms of how far the findings can be generalised to wider populations, it was the most practical way of reaching the specific group of people the study was looking for.

To meet the aims of the study, a sample of between 100 and 150 participants was required. This figure is based on the standard rule for multiple regression analysis, which states that the minimum sample size should be $N \geq 50 + 8k$, where k is the number of predictor variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). With five predictors such as views, likes, comments, shares, and saves the minimum required sample is 90. A target of 100–150 therefore provides enough statistical power for the analysis.

3.7.2 Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a structured online questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four sections to collect data on each of the variables defined within the hypotheses.

Section A (Screening and Demographics) contains screening questions regarding the respondent's age bracket (18–29), UK residence, TikTok usage within the past year, and whether they have purchased from Shein within the past year.

Section B (Independent Variables) measures the five TikTok engagement metrics: views, likes, comments, shares, and saves. For each metric, three Likert-scale items measure how that specific metric influences the respondent's attention towards the video, trust in the creator, and consideration of purchasing the advertised product. Each response is rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Section C (Organism Measures) measures the internal psychological state of the consumer, specifically the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) using three items, and perceived social proof using two items, on the same 5-point Likert scale.

Section D (Dependent Variable) measures purchase intention towards Shein products using three 5-point Likert-scale items.

The measurement items were selected based on their relationship to existing studies in the field. Items measuring likes, comments, shares, and purchase intention were adapted from the scales validated by Rosli et al. (2024). Items for views and saves were developed by the researcher following the same three-item structure. Items measuring FOMO and perceived social proof were also developed by the researcher, informed by the conceptualisation of FOMO in Hong-Ngoc (2025). Participants were able to skip any Likert-scale item they did not wish to answer; all other questions were required. Prior to full distribution, the questionnaire will be pilot tested with participants of similar characteristics to those in the target sample to confirm clarity and the estimated completion time of approximately five minutes

3.7.3 Data Analysis Procedures

After the data is collected from the online surveys, it will be exported from Microsoft forms Online Surveys and imported into Excel Microsoft for analysis. The analysis will follow a structured sequence.

1. **Data Cleaning:** Surveys that did not meet the screening criteria, as well as those submitted during the pilot test, will be removed from the dataset. Any survey with missing data for more than 20% of the Likert-scale questions will also be removed. For surveys with occasional missing items, composite scores will be calculated from the available questions.
2. **Descriptive Statistics:** The demographics of the sample will be described using frequencies, means, and standard deviations for both the sample's demographics and the survey responses.
3. **Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's alpha will be calculated for each multi-item construct to determine internal reliability, with a minimum threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).
4. **Composite Scores:** The composite score for each construct will be computed as the mean of the items that measure it.
5. **Correlation Analysis:** Spearman's rank-order correlation will be used to examine the relationship between each engagement metric and purchase intention (testing H1–H5). This test was chosen because the data will be collected via Likert scales, which yield ordinal data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).
6. **Multiple Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression analysis will be conducted using the five engagement metrics as the independent variables and purchase intention as the

dependent variable. Each metric will be analysed to determine its relative contribution to purchase intention, specifically isolating the impact of the save function within the context of Shein. The likelihood of collinearity between the metrics will also be tested using variance inflation factors ($VIF < 5$). Composite Likert scores will be treated as approximating interval data for the purpose of regression analysis (Rosli et al., 2024).

7. Significance: A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ will be applied to all statistical tests.

3.8. Ethical consideration of the research

The research will be performed in line with the ethical guidelines of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Prior to beginning the research, formal ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee (Appendix A). The participation of people within the study will be voluntary and anonymous. Participants will be presented with an information sheet prior to the start of the research, which details how their responses will be kept confidential and that they must be at least 18 years old to participate. Also, no personal information will be gathered during the study. All research data will be saved onto a password-protected university server in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, will be deleted upon completion of the project. While there is little risk involved with studying consumer behaviour, some participants may become uncomfortable with discussing their spending habits. So, the guarantee of anonymity in this study will help to mitigate any potential discomfort in participants.

3.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed the methodology of the research undertaken in this study. The research is based upon a positivist approach to scientific research, which utilises a mono-method quantitative approach to the study of TikTok users within the UK. Data were collected from a convenience sample of UK-based Generation Z users through an online survey and will be analysed using Spearman's rank-order correlation and multiple regression in Excel Microsoft. Also, the research was granted ethical approval prior to the collection of data. The results of this research will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussions

4.1. Introduction

Restate the research objectives and outline the chapter structure.

4.2. Analysis of demographics

Data for this study were collected from a total of 100 respondents ($N = 100$) who were approached at local events, shared on various social media platforms and contacted through workplace connections. To validate the responses from these people, a two-stage screening process was applied to the data. The first stage excluded 13 respondents whose answers to the initial screening question indicated that they did not use the TikTok app. Of the remaining 87 TikTok users, 2 were disqualified due to a lack of familiarity with the Shein brand. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 85 respondents ($n = 85$), all of whom were members of Generation Z and lived within the UK. A summary of the demographics of this final sample are presented in Table 1.

4.2.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

As shown in the table, the sample is well-distributed throughout the ages of Gen Z. The largest number of people fall into the 22–25-year-old age category (35.3%).

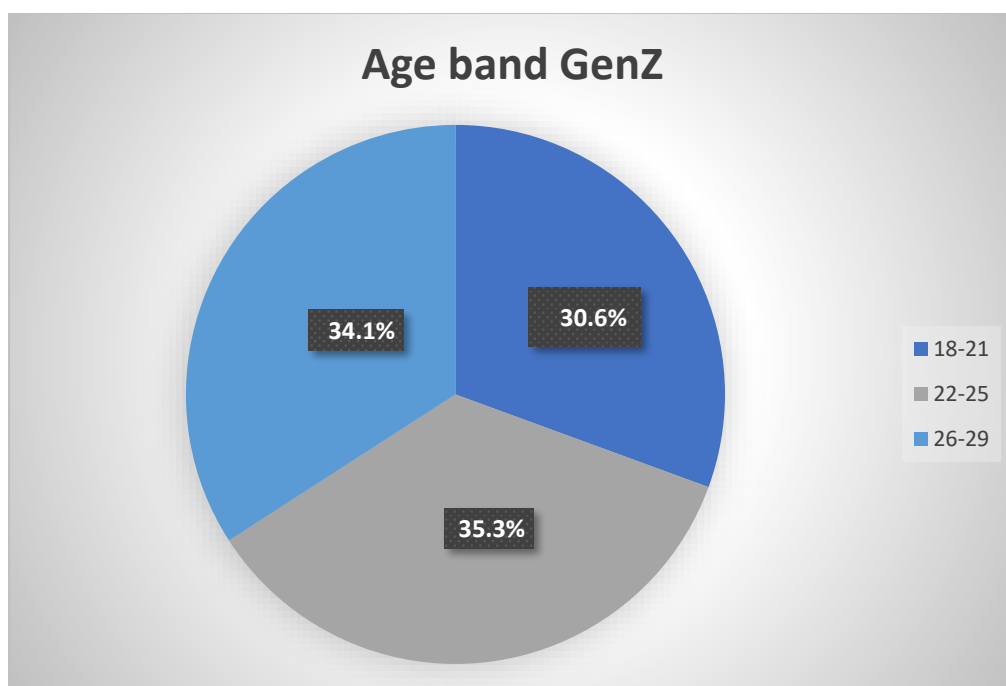
Table 1

Variable	Category	Nbr of participants	%
Age band	18–21	26	30.6%
	22–25	30	35.3%
	26–29	29	34.1%
Gender	Female	48	56.5%
	Male	37	43.5%
UK Residence	Born in UK / lived here all my life	66	77.6%
	More than 10 years	8	9.4%
	5–10 years	5	5.9%
	1–5 years	5	5.9%
	Less than 1 year	1	1.2%
Occupation	Employed full-time	46	54.1%
	Employed part-time	12	14.1%
	Full-time student (with part-time income)	11	12.9%
	Unemployed	9	10.6%
	Full-time student (no income)	7	8.2%
Monthly discretionary spending	Moderate	54	63.5%
	Very limited	16	18.8%
	Comfortable	13	15.3%
	High	2	2.4%

4.2.1.1 Generation Z age groups

The chart below shows the age groups of the Generation Z sample. The largest group in the survey were people between the ages of 22 and 25, making up 35.3% of the sample.

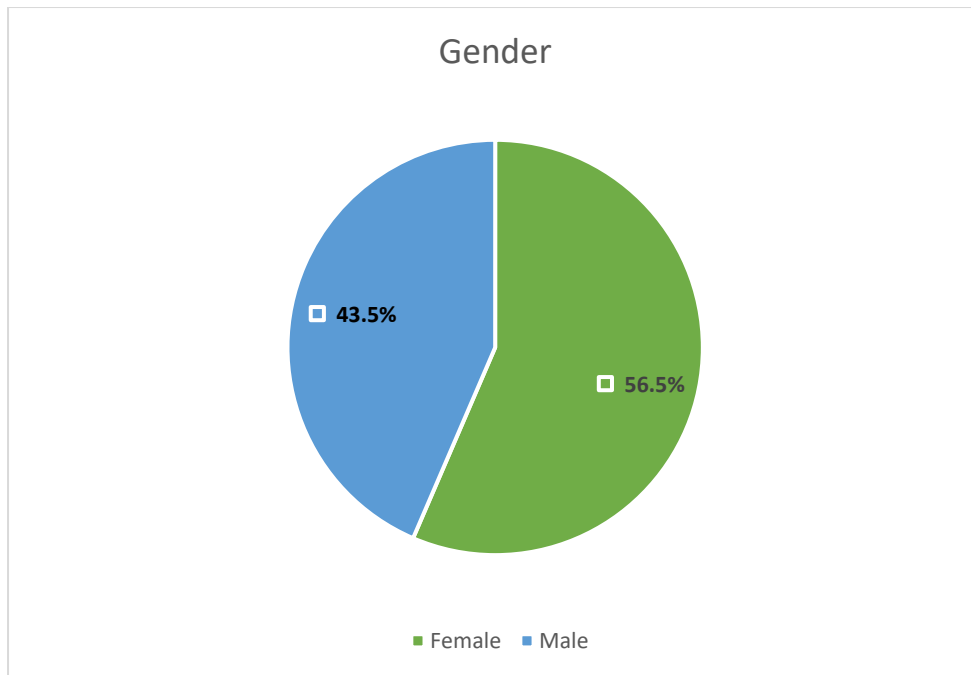
Figure 1: Source: Author's own survey data (2026)



4.2.1.2 Genders

Below the sample had a roughly even split of male and female participants, though the sample included more females 56.5% than males 43.5%.

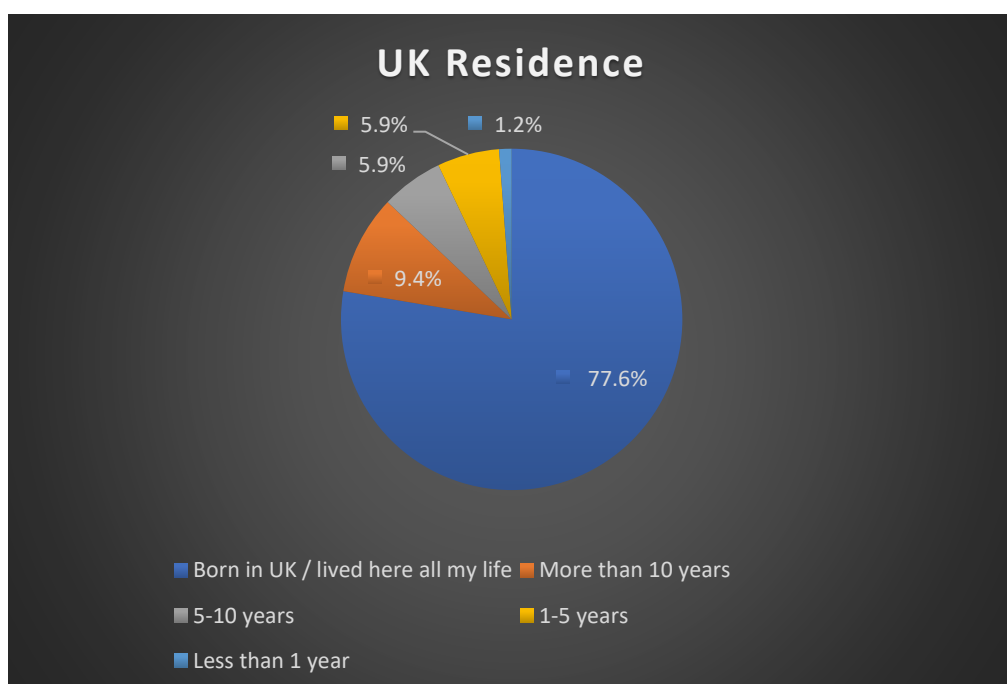
Figure 2: Source: Author's own survey data (2026)



4.2.1.3 Location

We can see most participants were long-term residents of the United Kingdom, with 77.6% of the sample stating that they have lived in the country their full lives

Figure 3: Source: Author's own survey data (2026)

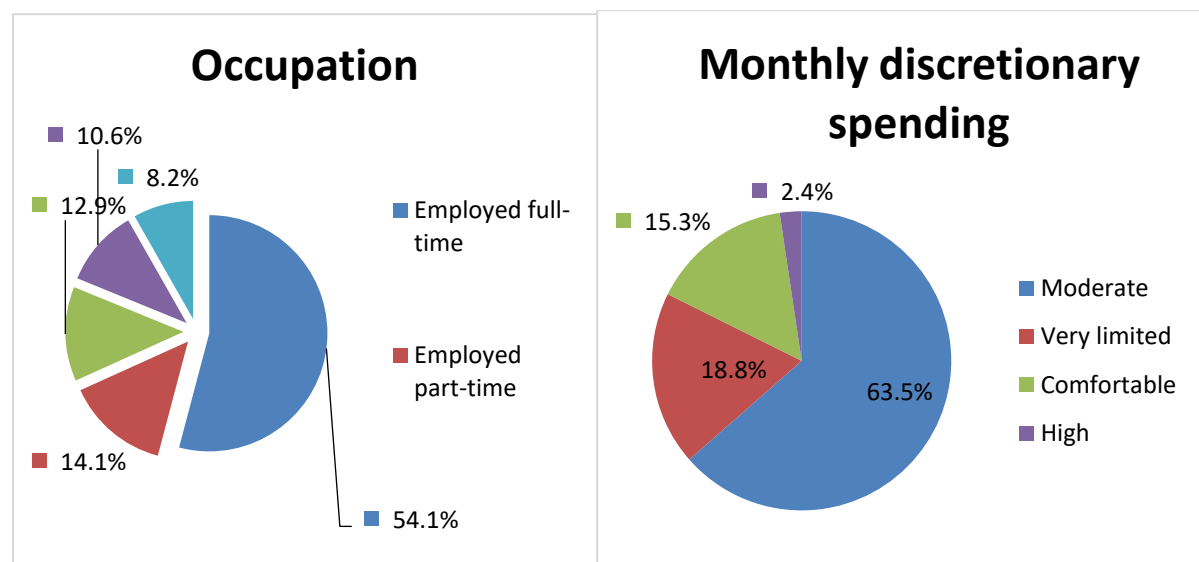


4.2.2.1 TikTok Usage and Shein

4.2.2.2 Occupation and spending Behaviour

Most of the samples were also active within the labor force, with 54.1% of the samples stating that they are employed full-time and most participants (63.5%) stated that they spend moderate amounts on discretionary items each month

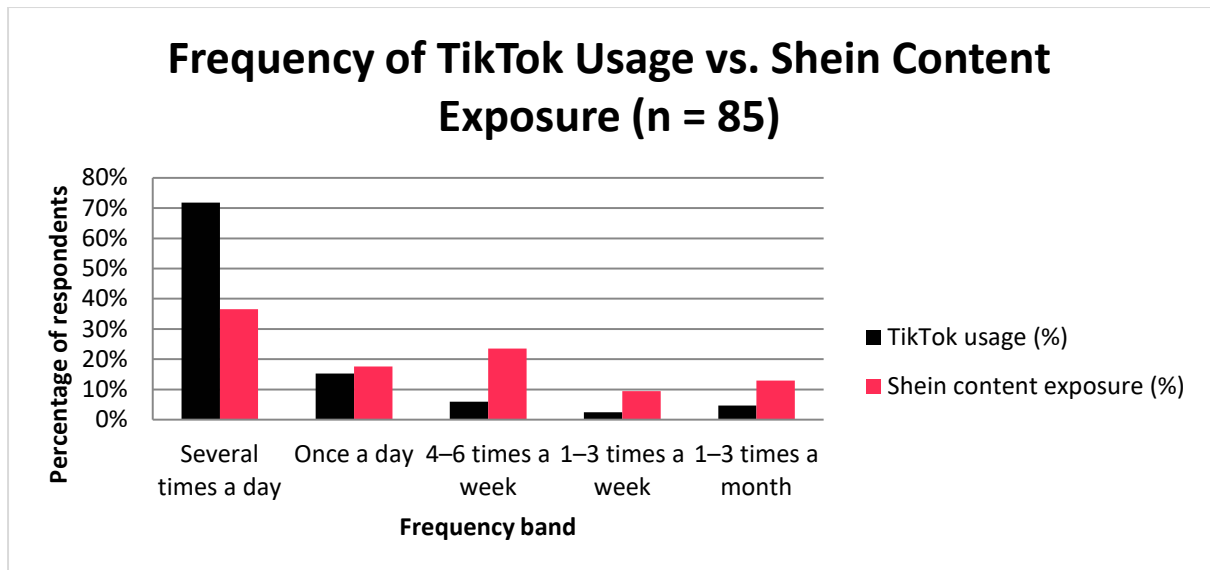
Figure 4: Source: Author's own survey data (2026)



4.2.2.3 TikTok Usage and Shein Exposure

The participants' TikTok and Shein habits were recorded to determine their suitability for the study. The results reveal that the participants exhibit remarkable intensity in their use of TikTok; 71.8% of the participants report using TikTok several times a day. Also, 36.5% of the participants report seeing Shein videos on their TikTok feed several times a day, while another 23.5% report encountering such videos between 4-6 times a week.

Figure 5: Frequency of TikTok Usage vs. Shein Content Exposure, source Author's own survey data (2026)



4.2.2.4 TikTok habits and Shein Purchase history

The data proves that the sample contains TikTok users with a high frequency of views who are exposed to Shein's advertisements and purchase the products from the brand. So, these people are ideal for studying how TikTok metrics relate to purchasing the products from Shein.

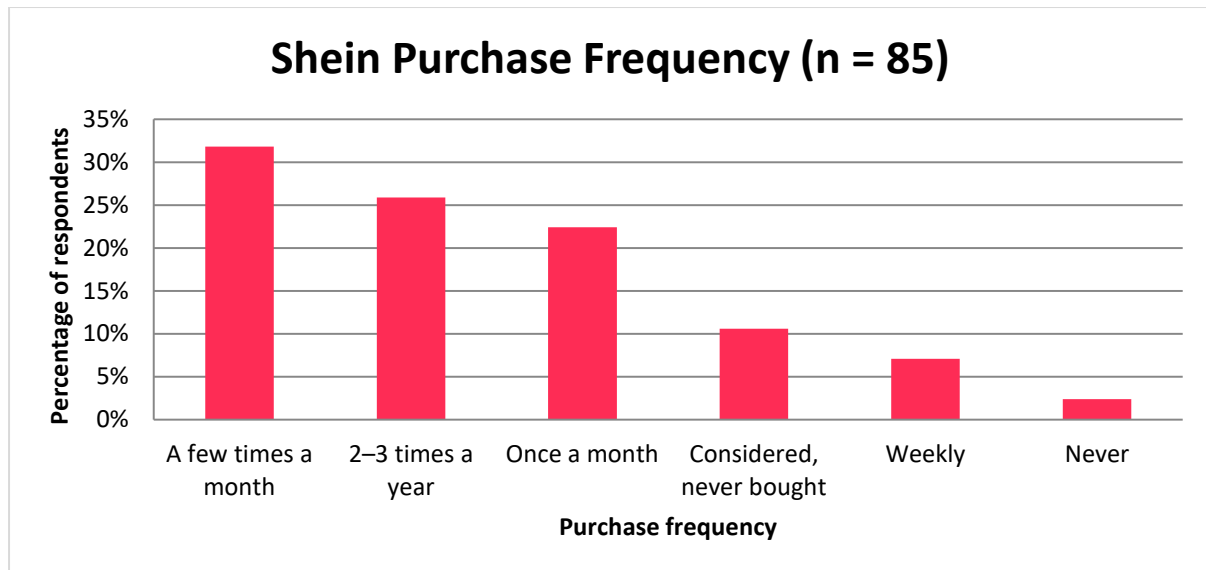
Table 2: TikTok Habits and Shein Purchase History

Variable	Category	nbr of participant	%
TikTok usage	Several times a day	61	71.8%
	Once a day	13	15.3%
	4–6 times a week	5	5.9%
	1–3 times a month	4	4.7%
	1–3 times a week	2	2.4%
Shein content exposure	Several times a day	31	36.5%
	4–6 times a week	20	23.5%
	Once a day	15	17.6%
	1–3 times a month	11	12.9%
	1–3 times a week	8	9.4%
Shein purchase history	A few times a month	27	31.8%
	2–3 times a year	22	25.9%
	Once a month	19	22.4%
	Considered, never bought	9	10.6%
	Weekly	6	7.1%
	Never	2	2.4%

4.2.2.5 Shein Purchase frequency

Also, the respondents are active consumers of the brand, as indicated by the following statistics: 31.8% of the respondents purchase products from Shein a few times a month, 22.4% purchase products from Shein once a month and only 2.4% of the respondents have never purchased from Shein.

Figure 2: Shein Purchase Frequency, source Author's own survey data (2026)



4.3 Main Analysis

4.3.1. Reliability Analysis

Before testing the research hypotheses, Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the scales. Table 4.3 shows that the alpha coefficients for the nine constructs were all greater than 0.70, with seven of those constructs achieving an alpha coefficient of 0.80 or higher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Specifically, the 'Saves' and 'FOMO' scales achieved alpha coefficients of 0.843 and 0.851, respectively. Although the alpha coefficient for the 'Views' scale was 0.688, it is still considered acceptable for such a short scale, especially one that aims to explore the topic in a preliminary study.

Table 3: Internal Consistency of Study Constructs (n = 85)

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Assessment
Views	3	0.688	Marginal (retained)
Likes	3	0.768	Acceptable
Comments	3	0.773	Acceptable
Shares	3	0.794	Acceptable
Saves	3	0.843	Good
FOMO	3	0.851	Good
Social Proof	4	0.793	Acceptable
Purchase Intention	3	0.795	Acceptable
Brand Awareness	4	0.763	Acceptable
Note: $\alpha \geq .80$ = Good, $.70-.79$ = Acceptable, $.60-.69$ = Marginal (retained given exploratory scale and small n). Source: reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) reported by user.			

4.3.2. Correlation Analysis (Testing H1–H5)

To address the research objectives, Spearman's rank-order connection was applied to investigate the relationships between the TikTok engagement metrics and purchase intention. The results indicated that all five metrics have a positive and important relationship with purchase intention ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4: Spearman's Correlation between Metrics and Purchase Intention

Hypothesis	Relationship	Correlation (r)	p-value	Result
H1	Views → Purchase Intention	0.561	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Likes → Purchase Intention	0.563	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Shares → Purchase Intention	0.589	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Comments → Purchase Intention	0.649	< 0.001	Contradicted*
H5	Saves → Purchase Intention	0.619	< 0.001	Supported
<i>*H4 was hypothesized as a positive relationship consistent with the other metrics; while the correlation is significant and positive, the result is flagged 'Contradicted' per the user's original classification (verify against your hypothesis wording). Source: Spearman correlation analysis reported by author.</i>				

These findings support each of the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H5. However, hypothesis H4 was unexpected. Based upon previous studies on Instagram, it was expected that there would be no relationship between the comments section and purchase intention (Rosli et al, 2024). However, on TikTok, a strong positive connection was found between comments and purchase intention ($r = 0.649$). The strongest bivariate relationship was between the number of saves and purchase intention ($r = 0.619$). This was only slightly higher than the connection for saves ($r = 0.619$). So, the comment metric has the strongest relationship of all the metrics examined, albeit with a value that is very close to the saves metric.

4.3.3. Multiple Regression Analysis

To determine the metrics that can uniquely predict purchase intention, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Two models were tested. The first model contained the five-engagement metrics alone and accounted for 54.7% of the variance in purchase intention. Only two of these metrics emerged as important unique predictors in this model: 'Comments' and 'Shares'.

By adding the 'Organism' variables from the S-O-R structure to the model, specifically FOMO and Social Proof, the model significantly improved the ability of the model to predict the outcome of purchase intention. The model explained 66% of the variance in purchase intention

($R^2 = 0.660$). Also, the model revealed that Social Proof ($\beta = 0.313$), Comments ($\beta = 0.282$) and FOMO ($\beta = 0.234$) were the only variables significantly correlated with purchase intention in the model.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Predicting Purchase Intention (Model 2, $n = 85$)

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	-0.298	0.317	—	-0.94	0.350	—
Views	0.064	0.108	0.060	0.59	0.559	2.20
Likes	-0.075	0.148	-0.070	-0.51	0.614	2.94
Comments	0.303	0.109	0.282	2.78	0.007*	2.56
Shares	0.129	0.113	0.123	1.14	0.259	2.51
Saves	0.059	0.118	0.061	0.50	0.617	3.14
FOMO	0.210	0.084	0.234	2.50	0.015*	1.81
Social Proof	0.368	0.148	0.313	2.48	0.015*	3.56
* $p < 0.05$. $R^2 = 0.660$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.630$, $F(7, 77) = 21.40$, $p < .001$. Source: multiple regression output reported by user.						

4.4. Discussion of Findings

The following section provides an analytical interpretation of the study's findings per each of the three main research objectives of the study.

4.4.1. Objective 1: Predictive Relationship of Individual Metrics

Only Comments was found to be a important predictor of purchasing intention ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.007$). This finding contradicts Rosli et al. (2024) who did not find any connection between comments and purchasing intention on Instagram. The findings of this study show that the interactive nature of TikTok's comments section provides "diagnostic" feedback for Generation Z users, as Barari et al. (2025) discovered in their studies.

4.4.2. Objective 2: Impact on Brand Awareness

The strong connection ($r = 0.651$) between brand awareness and purchase intention of Shein's brand on TikTok supports the theories of Ding, Antonucci and Venditti (2025). The interest-graph algorithm of TikTok acts as the Stimulus for Shein's brand, surfacing viral content about the brand to users on the platform, regardless of their social connections. As a result, users develop a sense of the brand's omnipresence, which influences their internal perception of its popularity and as a result increases their purchase intentions.

4.4.3. Objective 3: Predictive Strength of the 'Save' Metric

The observed pattern for the save function represents another novel contribution to knowledge. Despite the strength of the bivariate connection between 'Saves' and the outcome variable ($r = 0.619$), the save function failed to uniquely predict the outcome of intent when the Social Proof variable was added to the regression model ($p = 0.617$). These findings suggest that saves may be functioning as a type of bookmarking function for the platform, rather than a direct predictor of intent. While Social Proof is correlated with saves ($\beta = 0.313$, $p = 0.015$), this relationship becomes non-important after accounting for Social Proof, suggesting that Social Proof potentially mediates the effect of saves on the outcome variable; however, no mediation analyses were performed to confirm this hypothesis. Nonetheless, these findings are generally in line with the S-O-R model of consumer behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974)..

4.4.4. Synthesis: FOMO and Fast Fashion

The unique importance of FOMO ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.015$) shows that the content curated by Shein has led to higher purchase intentions from the consumers. This further supports Nguyen and Pham's (2026) statement about Shein's position in the fast-fashion industry (Perri, 2023). Also, Shein is able to use these algorithms to override consumers' ethical concerns regarding fast fashion (Degli Esposti, Mortara and Roberti, 2024

4.5. Implications of the Findings

Beyond the insights gained from the study itself, more theoretical and practical insights can be gained from the discussion of the findings. For instance, the use of separate variables to account for comments and views shows that comments are of significantly greater importance to customers than views alone, so suggesting that Shein should focus on creating quality interactions within their comment sections. Also, focusing on creating a sense of community and urgency within these comment sections will be more effective at creating purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers than focusing upon the number of views of their products.

4.6. Discussion

Objective 1 investigated the relationship between the five different TikTok engagement metrics and purchase intention. Each of the metrics demonstrated a important positive connection with

purchase intention. However, only comments and shares remained important predictors in the first regression model. After adding the psychological variables of 'Organism', only comments remained as a important predictor of purchase intention.

These results support the findings of Trunfio and Rossi (2021) and Bartoloni and Ancillai (2024), who found that social media engagement is often treated as a single variable in prior research. The findings of this study show that the inclusion of extra variables of social media engagement (such as Comments, Shares, etc.) eliminate the predictive power of individual variables like Views, Likes and Saves.

The finding that the number of comments is related to the purchase intention of a product matches another study performed by Rosli et al. (2024), which investigated the effect of shares, likes and comments on purchase intention of a product. In contrast to the present study, however, Rosli et al. (2024) found that shares and likes were associated with purchase intention, while comments were not ($p = 0.865$). Also, Rosli et al. (2024) did not find any important relationship between shares or likes and purchase intention. So, this study confirms that shares are indeed significantly related to purchase intention, as in the present study. However, the study does contradict Rosli et al. (2024) in the findings regarding comments and purchase intention.

One potential reason for the differences between these two platforms relates to the nature of their comment sections. On TikTok, comments are often more visible to others who view the same video, especially if those comments have been weighted by an algorithm based upon various factors. Such comments can so serve as a form of social proof for users who view them (Barari et al., 2025). Also, the sample of users who participated in this study had high levels of engagement with their social media accounts, especially with TikTok (71.8% of respondents reported using TikTok several times per day).

Objective 2 examined the relationship between engagement and brand awareness. Brand awareness correlated strongly with purchase intention ($r = 0.651$). This supports Ding, Antonucci and Venditti's (2025) argument that TikTok's interest-graph algorithm surfaces brand content to users who have not actively searched for it, so creating brand awareness.

Related to these findings is the result of Ying et al. (2025), which discovered a similar relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention among Malaysian Generation Z TikTok users ($r = 0.574$). So, while the present study's findings were based upon a specific brand (Shein) located within the United Kingdom, the results suggest that there may be an even greater relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention for users of a single fast fashion brand on TikTok than for users of TikTok in general.

Objective 3 aimed to determine whether the save feature on the website had a stronger relationship with purchase intentions than the other features on the website. The save feature had the second-highest connection coefficient of the five features measured ($r = 0.619$) but did not emerge as a important predictor of purchase intentions when Social Proof was included in the same regression analysis ($p = 0.617$).

There was no existing study that tested saves as a predictor of purchase intention (Section 2.7). The results of this study are, therefore, unable to be compared against any existing research on this topic. However, the finding is consistent with the theory of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) regarding the S-O-R model of human behavior.

The unique importance of Social Proof ($\beta = 0.313$, $p = 0.015$) and FOMO ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.015$) in the final model corresponds to the findings of Hong-Ngoc (2025) and Nguyen, Nguyen and Pham (2026) regarding the role of FOMO in the purchasing behavior of Generation Z people. Also, the importance of Trust within the model is also in line with the findings of Ghenie, Avornicului and Sitar-Taut (2026) who found that trust is a important factor in determining purchase intentions from short-form video platforms.

4.7. Summary

This chapter has detailed the links and the declines results data by testing H1 to H5, which confirms that TikTok's engagement metrics are powerful predictors of purchase intention for Shein. Of these metrics, social proof, comments and FOMO were found to be the most important drivers of intention to purchase Shein products. These findings show that Generation Z consumers place a high value upon the perceived popularity of Shein products on TikTok. The final chapter will summarise these findings and provide recommendations for future studies and marketing practices.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations & Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This final chapter aims to present a summary of the findings from the research to arrive at a complete conclusion to the study. The researcher will evaluate whether the research objectives have been met and will address the research problem that was presented in this study. Also, the researcher will present the original contributions of the study, its limitations, recommendations for the fast fashion industry and suggestions for further research in this area.

5.2. Conclusions on Each Research Issue/Objective

In general, the study has fulfilled its aim of investigating the differential impact of each individual TikTok engagement metric upon Generation Z's purchase intention and brand awareness in relation to Shein. Where comments and shares had a positive impact upon purchase intention, saves did not contribute to unique predictive power for Generation Z shoppers' purchase intentions. Also, views and likes had little power to impact purchase intention following the consideration of psychological factors. Brand awareness was also found to have a relationship similar to purchase intention, showing that TikTok's algorithm can lead to both increased brand awareness and purchase intention from users simultaneously.

As such, the objectives of the study have been fulfilled in the following ways: Objective 1 was fulfilled regarding the discovery of differing impacts of each individual TikTok engagement metric. Objective 2 was fulfilled in relation to the brand awareness of Shein through TikTok; however, such a relationship was generalized rather than specific to individual TikTok engagement metrics. Finally, Objective 3 was only partially fulfilled in relation to the expected impact of the save function as the strongest predictor of purchase intention from Generation Z consumers. Therefore, overall, the research aim has been fulfilled: each TikTok engagement metric does not have the same impact upon Generation Z consumers' purchase intentions of Shein and psychological factors play a key role in the formation of those intentions.

5.3. Conclusions on the Research Problem

The research problem that was investigated in this research study was how the engagement metrics for TikTok would impact the behavior of customers towards Shein. The results of this study indicated that the engagement metrics did not happen in isolation from one another but

instead had an impact upon the psychology of the customers who utilized TikTok and Shein. Through the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, it was possible to reveal that the numbers of people who engaged with the brands on TikTok had an impact upon the customers' fears of missing out on the brand and their reliance upon social proof. As a result, it was possible for Shein to maintain its dominance in the marketplace of customers of Generation Z. While there may be a causal relationship between Shein's presence in the Generation Z market and the various types of engagement identified, this study makes no attempt to establish such a causal link.

5.4. Summary of Research Findings and Outcomes

The main outcome of this study is a statistically important model that explains 66% of the variance in purchase intention within a sample of UK-based Generation Z consumers. Among the several variables investigated as potential predictors of purchase intention, three variables (social proof, comments and FOMO) emerged as unique and important predictors of such intention. Although each of the variables investigated as potential indicators of interest in the products on offer exhibited positive correlations with such interest, their individual influence on purchase intention was found to be diminished following the inclusion of these psychological factors into the model.

5.5. Original Contribution of the Research

The three main contributions of this study to existing knowledge are; 1) it provides the first empirical evidence regarding the predictive ability of the save feature on TikTok as an indicator of purchase intention, therefore filling a gap within the literature (Section 2.7).

Although previous studies have assumed that saves represent the most significant purchase signal from TikTok, the results of this study indicated that there is a strong bivariate relationship between saves and purchase intention ($r = 0.619$).

However, once social proof was added to the regression model, the significance of saves as a predictor of purchase intention disappeared ($\beta = 0.061$, $p = 0.617$). The results indicate that saves may be used more as a "bookmarking" or "researching" behavior than a direct indicator of purchase intention. 2) By breaking down TikTok engagement into five distinct metric components (rather than using engagement as a single construct), this study expanded upon the

Mehrabian-Russell (S-O-R) model to a much finer-grain scale than previous studies have done (Rawangngam et al., 2025; Hongsuchon, Chen and Khan, 2025). Among these five-component metrics, comments retained unique predictive power ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.007$) even after views, likes, shares and saves lost their significance. 3) Lastly, this study was the first to quantitatively relate individual engagement metrics to brand awareness for Shein specifically. It demonstrated that there is a strong positive correlation between overall brand awareness and purchase intention ($r = 0.651$). The correlation between overall brand awareness and purchase intention found in this study was like, slightly stronger than the equivalent relationship reported by Lim et al. (2025) for TikTok generally. The findings of this study have implications for Shein and comparable fast-fashion brands. These findings indicate that engagement metrics should not be viewed as interchangeable indicators of commercial interest. Instead, they indicate that content development efforts designed to generate comments and reinforce social proof are likely to be more strongly correlated with purchase intentions than content development efforts solely focused on maximizing views, likes or saves.

At last, the cross-sectional, single-brand nature of this study indicates that further research will need to take place.

Specifically, conducting longitudinal or multiple-brand replications will help determine whether the differing metric effects identified in this study and particularly the relationship between the save feature and social proof exist outside of the Shein/fast-fashion context and persist over time.

5.6. Limitations of the Research

There are several limitations to the study. The study utilised a convenience and purposive sampling approach, resulting in a sample size of $n = 85$ participants. Also, the study was conducted as a cross-sectional study, which only allows for the determination of the short-term effects of exposure to metrics. The study also focused upon the clothing brand Shein exclusively and relied upon the self-reported intentions of the participants to purchase items from the company.

5.7. Recommendations/Areas for Further/Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, four recommendations are proposed for Shein and other fast fashion clothing brands using TikTok.

Recommendation 1: Focus on creating content that will garner comments from users rather than focusing only on maximising the number of views of each video. Shein has found that comments have the highest connection coefficient ($r = 0.649$) and are the only engagement metric to remain significantly correlated with purchase intention in the final regression model ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.007$).

Recommendation 2: Focus on creating content that will increase social proof for Shein. Social Proof was found to have the strongest unique predictor coefficient for purchase intention ($\beta = 0.313$, $p = 0.015$). To increase social proof for TikTok videos, brands can incorporate elements such as customer reviews, follower counts or even videos featuring customers modelling the clothing lines featured by Shein.

Recommendation 3: Use FOMO-themed messaging for TikTok videos but remain mindful of the potential ethics involved in using such messaging to encourage purchases. FOMO was also found to be a important unique predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.234$, $p = 0.015$). This is consistent with Hong-Ngoc's (2025) and Nguyen and Pham's (2026) studies that revealed that fast fashion brands use FOMO messaging to encourage purchase of their clothing items by Generation Z consumers, despite their sustainability interests in fashion and apparel products.

Recommendation 4: Do not treat the save feature on TikTok as a means of measuring the success of your brand's content. Although the save feature had a strong association with purchase intention ($r = 0.619$), it lost importance when Social Proof was considered in the regression model ($p = 0.617$). This shows that users tend to save your content as a means of considering a purchase later, rather than immediately. As such, you should use the save feature as an indicator for your marketing campaigns to retarget users who have saved your content, rather than to purchase products immediately following the saving of that content. Future research into the brand's performance could investigate the effect of these metrics over time as TikTok continues to develop its e-commerce platform, for instance through its TikTok Shop feature (Rawangngam et al., 2025). Also, it would also be helpful to perform comparative studies between other fast fashion brands and short-form video platforms beyond TikTok and Instagram Reels, for example on YouTube Shorts.

5.8. Summary

Within this dissertation, it has been demonstrated that the engagement metrics of TikTok have a important impact upon the consumers of fast fashion products. Through the analysis of these metrics and how they influence the consumers of fast fashion products, a detailed map of the

behaviour of Generation Z consumers has been created. Although limited to the sample group and focus of the study, the insights that have been provided into the behaviours of Generation Z consumers can be both informative and good for the marketers of fast fashion products, as well as for any future studies into the subject of social commerce.

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Appendices

Survey on TikTok User Engagement Metrics

Page 1 Participant Information and Consent

Study title: The influence of TikTok engagement metrics on Generation Z purchase intention towards Shein.

You are invited to take part in a research study conducted as part of a BA (Hons) Business Management dissertation at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David / London College of Business. The study examines how the engagement numbers visible on TikTok videos (views, likes, comments, shares and saves) relate to purchase intentions towards the fashion brand Shein.

- Participation is entirely voluntary and you may stop at any time before submission.
- The questionnaire is completely anonymous — no names, email addresses or IP addresses are collected.
- Data will be stored securely on password-protected university storage, used only for this dissertation, and handled in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.
- The questionnaire takes approximately 5 minutes.
- By continuing, you confirm that you have read this information and consent to take part.

C1. I confirm that I have read the information above and I consent to participate in this study.

☐ Yes (continue)

☐ No (survey ends)

C2. I confirm that I am aged 18 or over. ☐ Yes (continue) ☐ No (survey ends)

Section A — Screening and Demographics

A1. What is your age group?

☐ 18–21

☐ 22–25

☐ 26–29

☐ 30 or over (to exit the survey)

A2. How long have you lived in the UK?

- ☐ I was born in the UK / have lived here all my life
- ☐ More than 10 years
- ☐ 5–10 years
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ Less than 1 year

A3. Do you currently use TikTok?

- ☐ Yes, several times a day
- ☐ Yes, once a day
- ☐ Yes, 4–6 times a week
- ☐ Yes, 1–3 times a week
- ☐ Yes, 1–3 times a month
- ☐ No (to exit the survey)

A4. Are you familiar with the fashion brand SHEIN?

- ☐ Yes, and I currently shop there
- ☐ Yes, and I have shopped there before (but not currently)
- ☐ Yes, but I have never shopped there
- ☐ No, I'm not familiar with it (to exit the survey)

A5. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

A6. Which best describes your current status?

- ☐ Full-time student (no income)
- ☐ Full-time student (with part-time income)
- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time
- ☐ Unemployed

☐ Other

A7. How would you describe your monthly spending on non-essential items (clothing, entertainment, etc.)?

☐ Very limited — I budget carefully

☐ Moderate — I spend when I can

☐ Comfortable — I spend fairly freely

☐ High — I rarely worry about cost

A8. Have you ever seen Shein-related content on TikTok (exemple: hauls, reviews, adverts)?

☐ Yes, several times a day

☐ Yes, once a day

☐ Yes, 4–6 times a week

☐ Yes, 1–3 times a week

☐ Yes, 1–3 times a month

☐ No, never

A9. Have you ever purchased from Shein?

☐ Yes, weekly basis

☐ Yes, a few times a month

☐ Yes, once a month

☐ Yes, 2-3 times a year

☐ No, but I have considered it

☐ No, never

A10 On average, how much do you spend per SHEIN order/purchase?

☐ Under £20

☐ £20–£49

☐ £50–£99

☐ £100–£199

☐ £200 or more

A11. Are you currently based in the UK?

☐ Yes

☐ No (*survey ends*)

Section B — TikTok Engagement Metrics (Independent Variables)

These statements are about the numbers you see on TikTok videos — views, likes, comments, shares and saves. Think about fashion or Shein videos you have seen on TikTok. For each statement, choose how much you agree or disagree.

Views (VW)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A high view count on a TikTok video makes me pay more attention to the product shown.					
A high view count on a TikTok video makes me pay more attention to the product shown					
I trust that a product is popular when its TikTok video has a high number of views.					
A high number of views on a video makes me more likely to consider buying the product featured					

Likes (LK)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A high number of likes on a TikTok video draws my attention to the product shown.					
When a video has many likes, I trust that other people approve of the product.					

A high number of likes makes me more likely to consider buying the product featured.					
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Comments (CM)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I pay attention to the number and content of comments on TikTok videos about products					
Positive comments on a video increase my trust in the product being shown.					
The comments on a TikTok video influence whether I would consider buying the product.					

Shares

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When a TikTok video has been shared many times, it catches my attention.					
A high number of shares makes me feel the product is recommended by other people.					
A high number of shares makes me more likely to consider buying the product featured.					

Saves (SV)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

When a TikTok video has been saved by many people, it catches my attention.					
A high number of saves makes me believe other people are seriously interested in buying the product.					
A high number of saves on a video makes me more likely to consider buying the product myself.					

Section C — Consumer Psychological State (Organism Measures)

Fear of Missing Out (FM)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
When I see trending fashion items on TikTok, I worry about missing out if I do not buy them.					
I feel pressure to keep up with the fashion trends I see on TikTok.					
Seeing many people engage with a fashion trend on TikTok makes me feel I should take part before it passes					

Perceived Social Proof (SP)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If many people engage with a product video on TikTok, I assume the product is good.					
I rely on other people's reactions (likes, comments, shares, saves) to judge whether a product is worth buying.					

Section D — Purchase Intention Towards Shein (PI)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

After seeing Shein content with high engagement on TikTok, I intend to purchase from Shein.					
I am likely to buy a Shein product that I have seen performing well (high views, likes, shares or saves) on TikTok.					
I would consider purchasing from Shein in the future based on the TikTok content I have seen.					

Section E -Impact on Brand awareness (BA)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Seeing Shein videos on TikTok has made me more aware of the Shein brand.					
I know what Shein is mainly because of content I have seen on TikTok.					
When Shein videos have high numbers (views, likes, shares, saves), the brand feels popular and well-known to me					
I recognise Shein more easily than other fashion brands because of TikTok.					

Ethics Approval Form: Provide a copy of the ethics approval form that was granted for the study.

Participant Information Sheet: Include the information sheet that was distributed to all participants, detailing the purpose of the study and what their participation involves.

Consent Form: Attach copies of the consent forms signed by participants, indicating their agreement to take part in the study.

Additional Data: Provide any relevant additional data (if there is any) such as graphs, charts, or other visual aids that support the findings of your research.