

SLOW FASHION CONSUMPTION IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES FROM MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The global fashion industry is driven by a quick pace, and an 'out with the old, in with the new' character, while consumers are enticed with instant gratification through the rapid fashion cycle (Wang *et al.*, 2017). Unfortunately, fashion production and consumption leave behind disreputable waste and toxic effluents from textile production processes and large amounts of unusable or unfashionable clothing waste dumped in landfills (Anastasia, 2017). A lack of consumer awareness is one of the many hindrances to dealing with fashion waste responsibly (Enviroserv, n.d.). Movements calling for a minimalist lifestyle, such as the Voluntary Simplicity Movement, are growing in popularity because society is recognising the detrimental effects of consumption (Kennedy *et al.*, 2013). There is however limited information from emerging countries, pertaining to the millennial consumer's stance on fast and slow fashion and its impact on the environment. This paper intended to explore millennial consumers' awareness, perceptions and attitudes regarding slow fashion consumption, in South Africa. This research was qualitative and followed an exploratory and descriptive research design. Millennial slow fashion consumers made up the sampling group because millennial consumers are recognised as the most influential consumer group, with the greatest buying power regarding fashion. Interviews, from purposefully selected participants, were conducted to gain knowledge on the awareness of consumers in relation to slow fashion consumption South Africa, however all participants happened to be from Johannesburg, Gauteng. The findings

revealed awareness of the damaging environmental and social effects of fast fashion production. Most participants associated the fast fashion industry with money-making, reckless production practices and consumption of clothing at a dangerous pace. The participants recognised slow fashion as somewhat of an antithesis to fast fashion, with mindful consumption motivating consumption of clothing. However, slow fashion is viewed as a niche market, in terms of affordability and accessibility. Although it is the participants' view that consumers have the ability to change and revolutionize the clothing industry, an increase in awareness of slow and fast fashion alike is imperative. The paper contributes to the literature on slow fashion consumption from the perspective of consumers in an emerging market.

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has become known as one of the leading contributors to environmental pollution, with the excessive consumption practices of clothing consumers being one of the primary causes (Kusá & Urmínová, 2020; Anastasia, 2017). The urge to consume clothing in excess has been linked to psychologically led desires for social status or certain lifestyle ideals (Gupta *et al.*, 2019; Barber, 2018). Unfortunately, the excessive consumption of clothing results in excessive disposal of clothing resulting in a vicious cycle that has a dire impact on the environment (Biana, 2020; Cooper, 2016). The lifespan of clothing items has consequently reduced dramatically, where the excessive clothing consumption continues to inspire excessive production, contributing to increases in waste (Kusá & Urmínová, 2020). Although the clothing industry is facing continuous scrutiny of the environmental

degradation caused by the continuous consumption and disposal of such fast fashion items, the industry continues to grow (Niinimaki *et al.*, 2020).

The culture of overconsumption, not limited to mere clothing consumption, is a global phenomenon, and emerging countries are no exception to these alarming consumption practices. Statistics show that consumers from emerging countries consume more than double the number of resources that they should be consuming, in the context of resources available (Earth Overshoot Day, 2019; Taljaard, 2019). The Global Footprint Network released information stating that the planet's resources are being depleted 1.75 times faster than the ecosystem can regenerate it, with clothing consumption being one of the greatest contributors to this situation (Earth Overshoot Day, 2019; Gulati & Naude, 2017). For example, fashion brands are now producing about double the amount of clothing that was produced in the year 2000 (Niinimaki *et al.*, 2020). As a means to resolve this matter of overconsumption, consumer behaviour needs to be altered. Consumption of products in general have to be reduced and has to change to consuming more sustainable products, including clothing (Niinimaki *et al.*, 2020; Lang & Armstrong, 2018). Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM), described as a lifestyle choice, advocates embracing a simpler life and avoiding materialistic living, subsequently resulting in a reduction in the consumption of products (Taljaard, 2019; Kagan, 2020; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). The principles of VSM have therefore been identified as a theoretical framework from which to explore the awareness and by implication the perceptions and attitudes of millennial slow fashion consumers regarding slow fashion consumption.

The millennial consumer in particular has been noted as one of the biggest and most prominent consumers of clothing in general, while (somewhat contrastingly) being the most likely consumer to purchase sustainable, socially and environmentally friendly products

(Naidoo, 2018, The Fashion Law, 2018; Kibbe, 2014). Millennials are therefore regarded as key influencers in the movement towards ethically sound clothing consumption, even though they are also infamous for excessive consumption behaviour. VSM may be seen as a means to achieve slow fashion consumption, however, there is limited research available stemming from an emerging country. Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) explored the influence of the basic psychological needs and self-determination on female consumers' voluntary simplistic clothing practices in an emerging market. They concluded that female consumers were keen on adopting a voluntary simplistic lifestyle, although not yet exhibiting such behaviour. It is possible that these consumers are not aware of how to implement voluntary simplicity practically by applying the principles of the slow fashion movement. While Taljaard *et al.* (2018) (also from an emerging economy's perspective) conducted a quantitative study on male consumers' underlying motivation and intention to purchase eco-friendly apparel. They found that male consumers' attitudes and self-efficacy controlled the pro-environmental intent on purchasing pro-environmental apparel, indicating that attitude could influence behaviour relating to slow fashion. As millennial consumers are notorious for overconsumption of fast fashion while also being regarded to be sustainably aware (Naidoo, 2018, The Fashion Law, 2018; Kibbe, 2014), it is imperative to investigate the perspectives of slow fashion consumption among millennial consumers. Du *et al.* (2018) states that awareness comprises of perceptions and attitude (resulting in behaviour), which implies that these aspects needs to be investigated. This in conjunction with the fact that the millennial consumer is fashion conscious and the largest contributor to overconsumption, leads to the question of whether slow fashion millennial consumers in an emerging country are also becoming more aware of the negative impacts of their consumption patterns.

Although the majority of high consumption practices are steeped within the practices of developed countries, the issues related to high consumption rates and the effects thereof are not voided within the context of an emerging country (Taljaard, 2019; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019; Taljaard *et al.*, 2018). As a means to determine how slow fashion can become a more prominent theme in an emerging country, to contribute to a larger body of empirical research, it is imperative to identify what millennial slow fashion consumers' perceptions are regarding slow fashion. While this has been investigated from a quantitative perspective in an emerging economy (Taljaard, 2019), it is significant that this be done from a qualitative perspective as well in order to gain more in-depth insight to the problem at hand from the personal point of views of the millennial consumer. Qualitative studies anchor the experiences of the participants, while allowing the researcher to learn from the participants rather than addressing mere observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, according to Du *et al.* (2018) it is particularly important to understand awareness and by implication perceptions and attitudes regarding slow fashion and environmental concerns in developing countries undergoing rapid social change and development. Awareness and perception can influence attitudes about slow fashion and attitudes play a direct and influential role in consumer behaviour (Okur & Saricam, 2019). Consequently, this paper aims to explore millennial slow fashion consumers' awareness, perceptions and attitudes regarding slow fashion consumption from a qualitative perspective to obtain information that is more general and open. This information can be used to identify the strengths and pitfalls of the slow fashion model in an emerging country, through the perspective of the millennial consumer, as a means to create information that addresses the under-researched concept of slow fashion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consuming fashion

Consumption is notably an aspect that places great strain on the environment. Although consumption is needed to an extent, humans consume products and services far above the Earth's capacity to reproduce resources for the manufacture of said products (Osikumino & Bocken, 2020). The global clothing industry valued at nearly US\$ 4 trillion promotes overconsumption and contributes to the degradation of the environment (Lu, 2018). The industry is centred on the production of clothing in large quantities at a lower price, making clothing more accessible to a wider consumer base (Biana, 2020; Rose, 2007). Furthermore, shorter lead times enable new collections to enter stores at a surprisingly rapid and frequent pace, resulting in the system subsequently dubbed as 'fast fashion'. Fast fashion is described as the accelerated cycle of fashion production and consumption that adds pressure on brands to produce clothing speedily and cheaply (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020; Naidoo, 2018; Khan 2016). Fast fashion entices the consumer with new trends entering stores as frequently as every two to three weeks, prompting recurrent sales (Anastasia, 2017). Fast fashion therefore encourages clothing consumption, expounding the problem of overconsumption.

Fast fashion and the millennial consumer

Millennial consumers are the largest and most influential of the consumer population and are loyal to fast fashion vendors (Naidoo, 2018; Keiser *et al.*, 2017). The millennial consumer is driven by an insatiable desire for instant gratification through the frequent acquisition of cheap clothing, which is soon thereafter disposed of to make room for the new trend on the market (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020; Naidoo, 2018), contributing to overconsumption and excessive production of clothing. As an emerging economy, 27% of South Africa's population are millennials (Biz Community,

2020). The South African clothing retail sector is seeing steady increases in the consumption of clothing throughout the entire socioeconomic spectrum. H&M, a fast fashion retailer, reportedly experienced a 39% increase in sales in South Africa in 2017 (Dibb, 2017). Considering the demographics of South Africa, a country infamously known for having one of the most unequal income distributions on a global scale, it is an interesting occurrence that the international fashion brands are thriving (Flanders Investment and Trade, 2014). It is thereby evident that the fast fashion industry is making an extensive impact on consumers, from First through to Third World countries. The fore mentioned suggests that the millennial consumer in particular, is responsible for exuberant amounts of fast fashion consumption, expounding the problem of environmental degradation. As mentioned by Du *et al.* (2018), it is imperative to investigate such consumers awareness regarding the possibility of slow fashion consumption as a means to curb this overconsumption.

Waste implications of clothing consumption

The consumer's need to consume, which is facilitated by the retailer's provision of disposable and replaceable products, is proving to be a perilous threat to the environment (Reis, 2019). When analysing the clothing industry holistically, every aspect contributing to its purpose, from cultivation of raw materials for textile production, to manufacturing, through to consumption and disposal, has an impact on the environment (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020). It seems that the problem does not lie in the processes alone, but in the unprincipled way its processes are often carried out. The quality of the clothing production processes seems to be compromised as a result of the speed in which it is expected to run (Reis, 2019; Cortez *et al.*, 2014). Niinimäki *et al.* (2020) state that impacts from the fashion industry includes over 92 million tonnes of waste produced

annually with an addition of 79 trillion litres of water also being consumed. According to the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU), it is imperative that the future of the local clothing and textile industry is based on sustainable practices that pose no threat to the environment and society (PETCO, 2019). Ultimately, fast fashion needs to be slowed down (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). Naidoo (2018) identified that millennial consumers are becoming more aware of the negative impacts of consumption, which could result in an increasing popularity of the Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM).

The Slow Movement

The slow movement was initiated by the slow food movement of 1980, whereby the sale and promotion of fast-food products and services came under scrutiny (Leslie *et al.*, 2014) for ignoring the processes and benefits of quality wholesome meals produced in a careful and considerate manner. The slow cities movement which followed, focused on slowing down one's pace to enjoy an existence based on quality of living and appreciation of simplicities in life. The slow fashion movement, based on similar principles, identifies the ills of fast fashion production and consumption, from both a social and environmental perspective, and explores how a change of pace can make a positive impact on a larger scale (Gupta *et al.*, 2019; Fletcher, 2010). Slow fashion endeavours to re-align principles of clothing manufacture with high quality garments made to last for a long period of time, without the influence of ever-changing fads and trends that promote fast fashion production, consumption, and disposal (Reis 2019; Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019; Fletcher, 2010). In terms of slow fashion, every aspect of the production model is slowed down, from cultivation and harvesting of fibres for textiles, to the production and retailing of clothing. To investigate millennial consumers' awareness of slow fashion consumption, the approach of the voluntary simplicity movement (VSM) was adopted as the theoretical framework for this

qualitative paper.

According to Du *et al.* (2018), awareness, and thereby environmental awareness is assumed to be an important pre-requisite of environmental protection. Therefore, in order to investigate the perspectives of slow fashion from the millennial consumer, it is imperative to understand their awareness regarding slow fashion. The authors, along with McCann *et al.* (1997), continue to state that awareness consists of perceptions, (i.e. the act of understanding through senses) and attitudes, (i.e. an emotional response), favourable or unfavourable towards a topic. Awareness, consisting of perceptions and attitudes will thus be used as the foundation for the VSM framework applicable to the research.

Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM): A Theoretical Framework

VSM is a movement towards a simpler lifestyle. It was initially known to be a movement adopted by religious extremists living in small, isolated communities (Jin, 2020; Zratek, 2016). Over time the movement has gained recognition and popularity for its different dimensions, which have social, environmental, and financial associations. VSM is the result of a few core elements such as material simplicity, self-determination, ecological and often, social awareness, and personal growth.

The term "Voluntary Simplicity" was traced back to Richard Gregg, a student of Mahatma Gandhi, who firmly believed in the value of decluttering one's mind and life through reduction of possessions amongst other things (Zratek, 2016; Doherty & Etzioni, 2003). Elgin and Mitchell (1978) described the movement as how one could reduce stress levels and focus on a better quality of life, thus amplifying internal fulfilment and purpose, aspects related to **personal growth**. If one's goals are no longer focused on acquiring possessions and wealth, but on achieving internal wholeness, a reduction in stress

levels is not only imminent, but there are also numerous positive implications for the environment (Jin, 2020; Sandlin & Walther, 2009), indicating **material simplicity** and **ecological awareness**.

The “voluntary” part of VSM is a direct reference to the intentional decision to choose a path of simple living and excludes individuals who lead a life of simplicity involuntarily, because of a lack of means. Voluntary simple living requires an individual to make a conscious decision to live in a certain way, and to maintain that way of living through **self-determination**. VSM can be applied and maintained in the refinement of clothing production and consumption and is therefore in favour of slow fashions’ positive and responsible constructs. Consumption is concurrently regarded as an adversary of the simplicity movement, particularly in the fashion industry (Taljaard, 2019; Zralek, 2016). Gregg (1936) recognised that the increased complexity in lifestyles, resulting from the global development of mass production, and the international delivery systems for mass produce, trade, scientific and technological advancements, all countered the ideals of simple living (Zralek, 2016; Doherty & Etzioni, 2003). A consumer who chooses a life of simplicity would be exchanging the ideals of fast fashion for garments that are made to last and are not trend-dependent (Kowalski, 2018). This means that the consumer will purchase a garment for both functionality and aesthetic appeal, while making use of it for a longer period due to its superior quality and irrelevance to trends (Niinimaki *et al.*, 2020). Consumers who choose to adopt a lifestyle of simplicity through reduction in consumption will not have an easy path to follow (Alexander & Ussher, 2012), as it would require the re-evaluation of every aspect of their being.

Simple living has been associated with the endeavour to fulfil one’s purpose in life and achieve one’s goals. A life of **minimalism** can be described as a luxury and as such, a

simple and uncomplicated existence can be a rewarding one (Moody, 2020; Grigsby, 2004). From a holistic point of view, minimalism has shared principles with slow fashion and with VSM (Moody, 2020; Reis, 2019; Hara, 2017). Individuals who adopt this lifestyle will most likely find that they have more resources in the form of time, mental clarity and focus to accomplish their ultimate purpose for existence (Jin, 2020; Osikominu & Bocken, 2020). The distractions of a complicated lifestyle will not be able to play the role of a diversion, as these individuals will be solely focused on living to their highest potential. Applying this philosophy to a clothing consumer, a healthy, simplified existence would be evident in the consumer’s consumption of clothing solely for functional and practical use and with the intention for the clothing to fulfil a long-term purpose (Niinimaki *et al.*, 2020). Within the framework of VSM, this paper therefore aimed to explore millennial slow fashion consumers’ awareness, perceptions and attitudes regarding slow fashion consumption from a qualitative perspective in order to gain insight into the phenomenon being studied.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach

The research intended to gain a ‘richness and depth of data’ which cannot be quantified as previous studies conducted in an emerging economy context (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019; Taljaard *et al.*, 2018) and therefore a qualitative approach was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Jin (2020) explicably stated, that due to the increasing interest in VSM and growing consumer rejection of mindless consumption practices, it is beneficial that a qualitative study be done, to acquire in-depth, multifaceted information from these consumers. A qualitative research approach includes a wide variety of methods for exploring and understanding the meaning

individuals ascribe to a social or human problem and is therefore suitable for the study of natural social life (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016), such as the millennial consumers' awareness and by implication the perceptions and attitudes regarding slow fashion consumption.

Research design

Exploratory research is aimed at identifying the key factors that are to be found within the confines of the "environment in which the problems, opportunities or situations of interest are likely to reside" (Van Wyk, 2012). Exploratory research is an attempt to discover something new and to gain further insight (Swedberg, 2020). This paper therefore adopted the constructs of an exploratory research design to explore slow fashion consumption within an emerging country context. Additionally, the design was descriptive in nature, seeing as though the responses from the participants were described in detail.

Sampling

The sample population involved millennial slow fashion consumers, as defined in the context of this paper. Purposive and snowball sampling were applied. Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of participants who may provide rich information and who will be of value to the research, due to the qualities that the participant has (Lune & Berg, 2017; Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Snowball sampling occurs when participants suggest other possible participants for the research, often occurring when the sample type is difficult to find (Glen, 2014).

The selection criteria for inclusion in the purposive sample were the following:

- Male and/or female participants who were born between 1981 and 1996 (millennial consumers).
- Participants had to form part of the slow fashion consumption movement.

Consumers who purchased from slow fashion suppliers, and those that perceived themselves as socially and environmentally conscious consumers were identified to participate.

A proposal to recruit suitable participants was sent out on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The request was therefore open to and shared with individuals countrywide. However, participants who met the criteria and participated in the research were all females from Johannesburg, Gauteng province. A pilot interview was carried out to test the quality of the questions, pertaining to their ability to yield information that met the objectives of the study. The pilot interview pointed out the repetitive nature of some of the questions. The repetitive questions were eliminated, and it was ensured that the remainder of the questions addressed the purpose of the study.

The in-depth nature of qualitative research typically involves small numbers of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample size of 11 participants, was considered adequate when compared to other research studies carried out in this niche field (Harris *et al.*, 2016; Bly *et al.*, 2015), and specifically considering that data saturation was indeed achieved (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Malterud *et al.* (2016) established that the number of participants in a sample should be determined by the value or "power" of the information that is to be found within that sample size. Unlike the requirements of quantitative research, the sample size for qualitative research should depend on the sufficiency of the information found within the sample, and should be determined by "(a) the aim of the study, (b) sample specificity, (c) use of established theory, (d) quality of dialogue, and (e) analysis strategy". The purpose of the research was deemed focussed and somewhat of a niche area, determining that a smaller sample size was adequate (Okur & Saricam, 2019; Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). The sample was unintentionally made up of

participants that had some type of involvement in the fashion industry, either as students or designers. Sample specificity acknowledges that if the sample contains participants that hold characteristics that are highly specific to the purpose of the research, sufficient¹ information power can be achieved through a smaller sample (Malterud *et al.*, 2016, Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). An established theory, VSM, was applied to the research, further justifying a less extensive sample (Malterud *et al.*, 2016). The quality of dialogue was deemed to have produced higher information power, as the data collected from the in-depth interviews was highly focused and specific in relation to the objectives of the study, furthermore justifying a less extensive sample (Malterud *et al.*, 2016, Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). A sample size of ten participants was considered adequate, as it was found to be satisfactory in other research projects carried out in this niche field (Bly *et al.*, 2015; Harris *et al.*, 2016; Tripathy & Tripathy, 2017), provided that data saturation was reached at this point. Finally, content analysis was the strategy used to analyse the data in this research, as it is a systematic way of reorganising and reflecting on the qualitative data (Saldaña, 2011; Pickard, 2017). This strategy allowed for an in-depth analysis of narratives, advocating for the use of a less extensive sample size (Malterud *et al.*, 2016). Based on the wealth of information found within the selected sample, the sample of 11 participants was indeed deemed sufficient and adequate for the research.

Data collection

In order to “*see the world through the eyes of the participant*” (Creswell *et al.*, 2016), face-to-face, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with individual slow fashion consumers. Face-to-face interviews are

essentially a conversation between participant and interviewer (Moser & Korstjens, 2017), which allows for a topic to be explored in depth and to understand the participant’s point of view (Weller *et al.*, 2018). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) noted that restrictions such as pre-categorisation of the participants in terms of the selection criteria, could potentially create limitations in the field of study. Participants were allowed to have open discussions, that were initiated by the set questions presented, which proved to be valuable to the research (Lune & Berg, 2017). The semi-structured questions were guided by the purpose of the paper (Lune & Berg, 2017). The interview schedule comprised a brief introduction, in which the motivation behind the interview and the estimated time frame were mentioned to the participant. Interviews were conducted at locations convenient for each participant and suitable to the requirements of an interview (Lune & Berg, 2017). Interviews were recorded on a mobile phone, with the participants’ permission and were then transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The purpose and outcome of data analysis is to reveal to others, through fresh insights, what was observed and discovered about the human condition (Saldaña, 2011). Content analysis was used to analyse the data in this research because it is a systematic way of reorganising and reflecting on qualitative data and it is one of the most suitable data analysis methods for interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2011). Lindgren *et al.* (2020) states that content analysis may be seen as a standardised method of analysis that might result in lack of depth, scientific rigour and evidence when employed alone. To strengthen trustworthiness of the content analysis, a focus should be placed on abstraction and interpretation during the analytical process. Saldaña (2016) states that coding can be based on the themes identified in the literature. Open and axial coding were applied to analyse the data, seeing that

^[1]Information power is found in the amount of rich data found within a sample. It is understood that less participants are required if a sample holds a higher amount of data relevant to the study (Malterud *et al.* (2016).

TABLE 1: THEMES, CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES

Theme	Categories	Sub-categories
1 - millennial consumers' perceptions of slow fashion consumption.	Consumers' awareness of ecological issues pertaining to over-consumption of fashion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of problems related to overconsumption • Awareness of problems related to production and overproduction of clothing • Awareness of the effect of caring on the environment and disposal of clothing • Awareness of social issues.
	Consumer perceptions of fast fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution • Overproduction • Overconsumption • A money-driven industry.
	Consumer perceptions of slow fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow production • Slow trends (longevity) • Consumption out of necessity • High quality (longevity).
2 - millennial consumers' attitudes towards slow fashion consumption.	Self-determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious consumption • Consuming out of necessity • Personal growth.
	Material simplicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimalism • Quality of life and lived experiences • Improved spending habits
	Motivation behind choice of retailer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability • Quality and longevity • Convenience • Sustainable or ethically sound manufacturers • Locally manufactured.
	Motivation behind consumption,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity • Markdowns • Longevity • Priority purchases • Aesthetics.
	Actual clothing consumption behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of clothing consumption • Disposal of clothing
3 - millennial consumers' perspectives on the role of slow fashion towards sustainability in the local clothing industry.	Attitude towards slow fashions relevance in South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopeful • Sceptical factors.
	Perspectives on the general awareness of slow fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge • Lack of transparency and information from retailers • Misconstrued information • Lack of convenience • Excessive imports • Affordability of slow fashion (higher pricing and demographics) • The high cost of slow fashion.
	Perspectives on solutions to increase awareness of slow fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal learning • Informal learning.
	Perspectives on the relevance of consumer behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consumer as the key influence, retailer or industry as the influencer.

Lindgren *et al.* (2020) states that in order to apply rigour to content analysis, such analysis must be done on various levels. Open coding is the first level, which intends to dissect the data line-by-line to identify prominent patterns and themes, and these patterns and themes are ultimately intended to find regularities and to make sense of the data (Cassell *et al.*, 2018; Theron, 2015). Interpretation of the patterns and themes lead to the emergence and identification of categories and subcategories, according to the axial coding method, and is linked to the framework of the research and the existing research literature. Such methods allow for the content analysis to provide both descriptive and interpretive information, allowing both depth and meaning of the participants utterances (Lindgren *et al.*, 2020).

Data analysis revealed the themes, categories and sub-categories as set out in Table 1.

Data analysis from the last three interviews proved that data saturation had been reached, as no new themes, categories and minimal new information surfaced. According to Chen (2020), it is at this point that one can determine data saturation has been achieved.

Trustworthiness of the data

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, it is important to adhere to certain standards, as set out for qualitative research. The trustworthiness of data in research is recognised by the actions or applications undertaken when carrying out research (Statistics Solutions, 2018; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Trustworthiness concerns the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data involved and is crucial to any research project.

Credibility

Member checks are regarded as a sound method of ensuring credibility and were used in this paper (Creswell *et al.*, 2016; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985), by sending a copy of the transcribed interview to all participants, requesting their confirmation of accuracy of the transcription. Participants were asked to correct errors if any were found. To further ensure credibility, data collection was continued until data saturation was confirmed.

Transferability

The interviews were in-depth in nature to allow for a thorough understanding of the millennial participants' perceptions and attitudes towards slow fashion, contributing to thick description, thereby achieving transferability of the research.

Dependability

In order to enhance dependability in the research, an inquiry audit was done by an external researcher, to verify the accuracy of the findings of the study. Coding the data multiple times and by multiple coders contributed to reduced researcher bias and enhanced dependability (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability

The confirmability of the research has been achieved through the development of an audit trail, inclusive of documented notes and descriptions behind the chosen processes and reasonings throughout the development of the study. The direct quotations of participants were included in the paper, to allow the reader to contextualise the findings through the data from which it was derived, in an unbiased manner. This further reinforces the confirmability of the research.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was granted from the institution where the research project was conducted (Ethics clearance number: 2018/CAES/169), after which an invitation letter was sent to all participants prior to each interview, briefly informing them of the aim of the research and detail of the topic to be

discussed during the interview. A consent letter was also given to all participants, requesting consent for their participation in the interview. The consent letter explained the way the interview would be conducted and recorded, as well as the manner in which the information would be used, should they formally give consent to participate. It was made clear that the participants' information will be kept confidential, and that they will not be required to present any personal information. Voluntary participation was required, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any given point in time, should they wish, without penalty.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings, through data integration, revealed the participants' perspectives of slow fashion as framed in the theoretical framework on simplicity of living and VSM. The findings about millennial consumers' awareness, perception and attitudes are presented in terms of the similarities with the core elements of VSM, namely; ecological and social awareness, self-determination, personal growth and material simplicity (Elgin & Mitchell, 1978), as well as the philosophies of slow fashion and that of minimalism.

Ecological and Social Awareness

An awareness of ecological issues is one of the fundamentals of a VSM supporter according to Elgin and Mitchell (1978). The authors stated, "*A sense of ecological awareness which acknowledges the interconnectedness of people and resources is central to voluntary simplicity*". An awareness of the issues related to consumption and the impacts it could have on one's state of being, as well as on the environment, is said to enable or underpin changed behaviour in individuals (Jin, 2020; Taljaard, 2019; Elgin & Mitchell, 1978). The findings showed that participants were aware

of the ecological impact of fashion consumption on the environment. One participant discussed one of the impacts of consumption by stating, "*We're in a seriously consumerist behaviour when it comes to fashion, so I know like it's a real issue people are always buying and buying and buying and buying and landfills are getting filled up with empty clothes and leftovers*." The poor disposal of clothing post-consumption was also mentioned by other participants. One participant in particular referred to erroneous disposal of poor-quality fast fashion items by stating, "*It's going to fall apart and you're gonna throw it away ... you can't even donate it to other people and it's just going to go into a landfill and half of it is not gonna biodegrade*." Furthermore, it has been established that mass production which is often undertaken at a rapid pace to fulfil growing customer demand, tends to sacrifice social and ethical responsibilities in order to fulfil said production runs (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020). Participants revealed that they perceive overproduction to be contributing to waste and the negative environmental impact of fashion by stating, "*The increase in scale of landfills with discarded clothes is also linked to overproduction*." Similarly, another participant claimed "*Basically, we're making too much clothing and not enough people are actually buying the clothing so there's a lot of waste in the production of it*." It was found that millennial consumers in an emerging economy are aware of the impact of fashion consumption on the environment and they perceive production as contributing to the problem. Okur and Sarıcam (2019) found that an increasing knowledge of issues such as consumption and mass production are fundamental tools that initiate a change in consumer behaviour and practices. Furthermore, knowledge is capable of cultivating self-determination through personal growth in individuals, as was also found by Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) and will be elaborated upon in the following two sections.

Self-Determination

The concept of self-determination is fundamental to VSM, as per Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019). Self-determination necessitates mindful consumption practices amongst other aspects, such as the conscious decision not to consume in certain instances. Mindful consumption refers to the awareness one has of the impact of consumption both on a social and environmental level (Kerner, 2018), thus leading to mindful purchases of items only if there is a need for it. Participants confirmed their own mindful consumption practices by stating, *“When I have to make that purchase, I stand and I’m like, but I don’t need this, I like it ... but I don’t need it.”* Furthermore, another participant claimed, *“I don’t feel like I need to buy more clothes because I don’t need more clothes ... it’s a sustainable thing in terms of my cupboard and maintaining my wardrobe.”* These participants felt an obligation to identify if they indeed need a clothing item before purchasing it. This indicates that their awareness, perception and attitude towards fashion consumption has contributed to a change in their own fashion consumption behaviour. Other participants mentioned that they questioned if the manufacturer utilised environmentally and socially friendly production methods, before making a purchase. One participant stated, *“Before I would buy stuff and I would never wear... now if I am a little unsure of something, I don’t know if this [retailer] was [ethical], so I’ll rather [not purchase it] ... slow fashion is more that to me the conscious decision.”* Their perception of the producer or retailer as environmentally friendly and ethically responsible therefore influences their fashion purchasing decisions. These findings indicate self-determination through the participants’ conscious decisions to consume clothing solely out of necessity and to only purchase responsibly produced fashion items, such as slow fashion. Self-determination theory further identifies that psychological needs are often motivators that inspire a motive to grow and change on a personal level (Cherry, 2019; Taljaard, 2019).

Personal Growth

Personal Growth is another one of the core elements of VSM (Elgin & Mitchel, 1978). Individuals who favour VSM are inclined to seek new knowledge, information and education about external topics or internal self-exploration. Consumer perceptions regarding VSM were closely connected to their personal growth (Cherry, 2019; Čábyová, 2018). One consumer shared her personal growth by stating, *“I didn’t think where clothing came from and what happened to it afterwards and how many times, I wore it, whereas now that fuels my entire purchase decision. It fuels my entire consumption and disposal.”* Another participant also discussed her personal growth by noting a behavioural change. She claimed, *“I did follow trends ... and then I just completely changed my mind about it. I’m still trying to focus on being unique but sustainable in a way that you wouldn’t have to buy this item again.”* These participants expressed that they were not always concerned with a need to gain a quality life through simplification, or to practice environmentally and socially responsible behaviour, until exposure to knowledge brought about personal growth. Thus, this finding indicates the participants’ increased awareness changed their perception and attitude in terms of fashion consumption, which then led to a change in their behaviour as a fashion consumer. It was revealed that the ecological awareness of the participants impacts their consumption behaviour. This finding supports Osikominu and Bocken’s (2020) finding, that voluntary simplicity living can enhance and nurture increased education and increased wellbeing. The participants’ personal growth promoted self-determination towards a change in their thinking (perception and attitude) and behaviour as consumers.

Material Simplicity

Contrary to what consumerism sells, possessions have been referred to as fleeting satisfiers, unable to bring internal fulfilment to an individual (McGouran & Prothero, 2016;

Elgin & Mitchell, 1978). One of the participants reiterated this point by stating, *"It's your life and ... its experience ... it's not as materialistic."* This statement was made to express that she perceives life experiences to be more valuable than materialistic objectives. Temporary appeasement through material possessions seems to be regarded as inapt when taking a holistic approach to quality living (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2021).

Quality of life has been identified as a biproduct of VSM, which could be achieved through the simplification of one's lifestyle, in terms of the reduction of material possessions and obligations. Gregg (1936) expressed that for one to achieve internal richness one must be outwardly simple. Many participants expressed that they believed that placing emphasis in lived experiences held more value than the acquisition of material goods and wealth. One participant stated, *"[Lifestyles are] more about experience ... I'd be more happy if I have an experience with people so I think that's also changing the way we live"*. This statement is a direct reference to the effects of simple living on one's state of happiness or as Osikominu and Bocken (2020) mention, increased wellbeing. The finding confirms that much value is found in material simplicity. Simplicity of living in terms of the quality of life, is found in one's lived experiences instead of the possessions they acquire, as mentioned by Hara (2017) and Pozin (2016).

Minimalism

Minimalism embraces simplifying one's lifestyle by getting rid of unnecessary possessions and making use of only what is really needed (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2021). In relation to fashion, a VSM or minimalistic approach would imply purchasing clothing only out of need for a specific item, with no focus placed on trends and fads. One participant identified that her chosen method to reduce her consumption of clothing was based on the philosophies of minimalism by

stating, *"I went into a more minimalist wardrobe and tried to use minimalism to combat fast fashion."* Two participants expressed their perception regarding minimalism in society and in relation to slow fashion by claiming, *"[Society is going] back to minimalistic lives."* Another participant stated, *"I am minimalistic in my approach I don't necessarily go for trends ... I think that could also be a great starting point to embrace slow fashion."* The statement indicates the participant's awareness of slow fashion. Furthermore, the findings show that the perceptions of these participants greatly affected their consumption practices of clothing. Voluntary simplicity can therefore be seen as enlightenment for the consumer, seeing that it opposes conspicuous consumption through advocating a frugal approach in tandem with responsible consumption, functionalistic living and moderation, self-discipline and self-control in relation to consumption (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2021), thus supporting the philosophies of slow fashion.

Perspectives on slow fashion

The ills of consumption and fast fashion seem to have created a greater reaction on overseas platforms than it does in emerging countries. One participant detailed this as follows: *"I think slow fashion is very much a first world South African problem, more than like majority of the country."* When considering these factors, it could be determined that the demographic profile of South Africa, amongst other emerging countries, is vastly different from most First World countries and the positive aspects of slow fashion should therefore not be undermined from a local context by comparing it to such countries. The findings confirm that slow fashion has not yet filtered into mainstream popularity in emerging countries as fast fashion has (Moody, 2020). It is important to gain perspective on factors contributing to this, from the perspectives of South African consumers in this particular paper. The participants raised concerns about

several problems that prevent greater growth of slow fashion consumption, or that decrease consumption levels as a whole. The most common issue raised among participants was a lack of knowledge of the issues surrounding fast fashion consumption, as well as a lack of knowledge of the slow fashion industry and its constructs. One of the participants stated, “*I just don't think they're educating their customers [about slow fashion] ... I don't think [knowledge of sustainability is] available to many people.*” According to most of the participants, there is a lack of attention given to slow fashion, as well as limited access to information being shared in emerging countries regarding these matters, as was found by Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) as well. This is in line with the notion that increased awareness of and education on the topic of fast and slow fashion is an important aid to grow the appeal of slow fashion in the country (Saricam & Okur, 2019).

A facet linked to insufficient information, was directed at manufacturers and retailers. It seems that a lack of transparency about where and how sustainable items are being sourced or manufactured, negates one's acceptance of the product being sustainable, or a slow fashion item as reiterated by Niinimäki *et al.* (2020). One participant explained it as follows, “*...when people are going to make a decision, having all the information, all the different items available [is important], because that's how you make an informed decision.*” It seems evident that information, particularly relevant to the sourcing and production of the product is necessary and valuable in assisting consumers to make an informed decision (Heinze, 2020; Miller, 2017). Another factor linked to awareness was aimed at the retailer or supplier of clothing. Participants felt that there is a lack of conveniently available information that explains where and how sustainable items are being sourced or manufactured, which leads to a lack of transparency. One participant explained it as follows, “*... trying to get the information out there and when people are going to make a*

decision, having all the information, all the different items available, because that's how you make an informed decision.” It is evident that the participants value information that reveals a wealth of knowledge related to the production and make-up of their products (Heinze, 2020; Miller, 2017), to aid their and other consumers' purchase decisions. Even though there is an awareness of slow fashion among participants, they identified a need for more knowledge on how and where garments are produced, in terms of environmentally and socially responsible production.

Additionally, a lack of convenience arose as a hindrance to the slow fashion market in emerging economies. One participant stated, “*People would rather have the convenience ... it's the convenience of having something quickly and easily and cheap.*” The participants felt that big retailers in malls and online stores were more popular because of ease and convenience of access and for their widespread availability, whereas most consumers are unaware of where they should shop, if they were looking to purchase slow fashion products. Similarly, Holbrook (1999) established that one of the key factors that add value to a product or service, as per the consumer, is the convenience in acquiring the product. The lack of awareness of where to obtain slow fashion contributes to a perception that it is unavailable to the general consumer in emerging economies, and this should be addressed.

The matter of excessive imports has also been identified as a major concern, indicating that the influx of internationally imported clothing is perceived to suffocate the South African textile and clothing industry. Moody (2020) as well as May (2019) states that not only has the local clothing and textile industry been devastated by cheap imports, but it has also added to the rate of unemployment in the country as well. One participant expressively stated “*If there's a way to reduce imports ... specifically, Chinese imports especially when it comes to textiles ... because we're being flooded. It's hard for the customer or the*

consumer to understand the full impact of their decision.” Local designers have stated that not only is the influx of cheap imports taking away appeal from their locally produced clothing, but the cost of local products is higher because much of their textiles must be imported, due to a lack of local resources (May, 2019).

The affordability of slow fashion clothing, in relation to South Africa’s demographics, surfaced as a fundamental issue that influences the consumption of fast fashion items. As a possible result of lack of knowledge or, in this context a lack of correct knowledge, slow fashion clothing is perceived as overpriced (Moody, 2020; Dibb, 2017). However, it cannot be ignored that slow fashion is synonymous with being priced at higher levels because of the higher quality of textiles, construction methods and finishings that make up these garments (Biana, 2020; Davis, 2019). One of the participants stated that the perception of local clothing being overpriced can be attributed to “[t]he convenience of retail stores ... and the lack of public knowledge on designer brands”. According to one of the participants “A lot of people think that slow fashion is more expensive, most of us designers are cheaper than [Brand name], which is by [Retailer A] which is made in China.” Another participant had a similar understanding, which seemed to be underwritten by her theory of the clothing sector’s marketing strategies. She stated that “they’ve only actually targeted a niche market in spending ... so they’ll put slow fashion as not always affordable”, implying that the information is given to a limited part of the consumer market, and is marketed as unaffordable to others. Another participant stated, “as soon as more people are doing it, it will take down the cost of [slow fashion] in South Africa”, implying that the cost of slow fashion is currently high in South Africa and other emerging countries. It is noticeable that affordability is an important motivator of consumption. The higher price tag of slow fashion, together with the demographic profile and of the country and financial standing of its

residents, proves to be major issues that are yet to be overcome (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2021; Moody 2020). However, according to Dibb’s (2017) sources, if a consumer could afford to purchase from popular mainstream stores, this individual will most likely be able to afford locally produced slow fashion. Subsequently, a possible solution to the affordability perception seems to be an increase in accurate information to the public, pointing out the long-term benefits of slow fashion.

Because the millennial slow fashion consumer is an integral part of the research, it was beneficial to understand the millennial consumers’ opinion regarding the role of a consumer in the context of this paper. Many participants vehemently stated that the consumer has the greatest influence on the clothing industry and the direction in which it goes. According to one of those participants, “I’d say [consumers] have the biggest influence and their spending power gives that influence.” She went on to say, “What drove me to [sustainability] is seeing the impact that I could have as a consumer.” Gwozdz *et al.* (2017) express the same understanding as these participants, whereby the consumer is the ultimate influencer and driver in the fashion industry and could determine the future of the industry.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research intended to explore the awareness, perceptions and attitudes of millennial slow fashion consumers in an emerging country regarding slow fashion consumption through the lens of VSM. The research confirmed that slow fashion principles are closely tied to that of VSM. Fulfilment and quality of life is attained through lived experiences rather than material possessions. Personal growth in terms of what is valued as quality living can be altered for these millennial consumers by exposure to and awareness of ecological and social matters affected by fashion. It is concluded

that personal growth inspires self-determination as this is a requisite to live purposefully. Consumers need to be mindful of their purchases and self-determination tends to act as a guide for mindful consumption behaviour.

Although slow fashion is seen as relevant in emerging countries, the movement towards slow fashion faces many issues which leave room for adaptation and growth. The factors creating a hindrance to the slow fashion movement included a lack of consumer knowledge of and public focus on the topic, a lack of transparency from the retailer, the higher pricing that does not suit the demographics of the country, and the inconvenience in accessing these slow fashion producers. The excessive importing of fast fashion clothing is perceived as suffocating the local clothing industry, negatively affecting local designers, and contributing to job losses. Slow fashion is not seen as a mainstream concept in this country, it is a niche industry, familiar typically to those involved in the fashion or clothing industry in some way. However, awareness of slow fashion is growing, granting it the potential to develop into a substantial part of the fashion and clothing industry. Finally, the overall opinion of the millennial consumers is that the consumer has the greatest ability to influence and change the fashion industry. It is thus essential that awareness of slow fashion be increased in emerging countries, by providing information about fashion products and means to access slow fashion products and producers.

Limitations resulting from the small sample and the qualitative nature of the research include that the findings cannot be transferred to the entire millennial population of South Africa, even though generalising the findings was not the intention of the paper. To gain a true reflection of the topic at hand, from the millennial consumer, a random sampling strategy is suggested. It is therefore recommended that future research regarding

this topic should incorporate a quantitative and or mixed methods approach with a random sample to generalise the findings to the millennial consumer of an emerging country, similarly to what Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) and Taljaard *et al.* (2018) conducted. It is imperative to investigate the millennial consumers' perspectives of voluntary simplicity and slow fashion, seeing as though this group of consumers has the greatest spending power within emerging economies and as an oxymoron, simultaneously cares about the environment, while being highly fashion conscious and supportive of the fast fashion industry.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The contribution of the project can be regarded as two-fold, namely a theoretical contribution as well as a practical contribution. The findings of the research add to the body of literature in a theoretical capacity in terms of the slow fashion movement in an emerging country, explained from the theoretical foundation of the VSM and a qualitative, in-person perspective. This paper contributes to the understanding of slow fashion consumption specifically in the context of the millennial slow fashion consumer in an emerging economy. The main perspective that arises is that slow fashion is not a mainstream development within the country, as are fast fashion consumption practices. Slow fashion is perceived as a niche industry within emerging economies, which comes with its own severely detrimental environmental consequences. The slow fashion movement in terms of VSM is however gaining momentum and with the correct awareness campaigns, the movement has the potential to develop into a substantial part of the country's clothing industry. The practical contributions of the paper lies in findings that can be translated into practical solutions to educate consumers and to change fashion consumption behaviour, to mediate some of the negative effects of the fast fashion industry in an

acceptable manner within the growing consumer culture of slow fashion. With some of the awareness campaigns emanating from the theoretical contribution of the project, the resulting consequences might manifest in practical implications of the slow fashion industry. A decline in the fast fashion consumption industry and an increase in the mindful consumption of slow fashion items, might not only revive the local clothing industry to some extent, but will also serve to mediate the vastly negative environmental degradation currently experienced through the purchase and discarding of fast fashion items.

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