

The Interplay of Pricing, Quality Perception, and Global Logistics in Ultra-Fast Fashion: A Google Trends Analysis of Shein's Worldwide Consumer Interest

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Abstract

Purpose: The research aims at revolutionizing the global apparel industry, probably one of the greatest side effects of ultra-short fashion retailers (just think of a label like Shein). While part of their great success can be attributed primarily to aggressive pricing and wise production methods, another aspect that has been so far underinvestigated seems related to it: the role international logistics plays in consumer perception. The aim of this study is to explain the complex interaction between consumer search interest in Shein's core product attributes, price, and quality, and their shipping and customs infrastructure. As such, the primary objective is to describe the process by which consumers search for information that relates to determining how much logistical components are affected by or exist as a component of basic assessments of products.

Methodology: The research involves a one-year data set (August 2023 to August 2024) of global search interest shown through Google Trends, by using the quantitative and longitudinal methods. A multi-method analytical framework was implemented, incorporating: 1) A time-series analysis to capture trends over time; 2) Pearson correlation to identify the strength of linear relationships; and 3) Cross-correlation to assess tentative dynamic inter-temporal relationships between consumer queries. The previous approach was executed against three search queries: specifically using "Shein quality", "Shein prices", and "Shein shipping and customs duty," related to this context, thereby allowing for modeling the linear and synchronicity of consumer interest.

Findings: Results reveal a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.94$) between search interest in "Shein prices" and "Shein quality," indicating that consumers evaluate these two dimensions concurrently. Time-series analysis further identifies a behavioral sequence in which price interest emerges slightly ahead of, or simultaneously with, logistical Interest, suggesting that price functions as the primary trigger for broader consumer engagement. Quality-related searches exhibit a co-occurrent association with "Shein shipping and customs duty," implying that consumers assess product condition, delivery reliability, and returns accessibility as part of an integrated quality evaluation. **Research implications and limitations:** This paper adds to the literature on consumer behavior, specifically addressing pathways of information-seeking in e-commerce, by empirically delineating information-seeking relevant to product-centric versus logistical queries. The results confirm a well-rounded schema of perceived value and risk where logistical elements may be peripheral but are still nonetheless deemed critical secondary evaluative criteria. A limitation of this study is the use of search data that were aggregated and contextualized, which inhibits causal inference and demographic segregation. Additionally, the 12-month observation window may constrain the generalizability of temporal patterns identified.

Practical implications and limitations: Results from the study indicate that practitioners in the ultra-fast fashion sector should adopt an integrated marketing strategy that reinforces their price value proposition with clear quality assurances. Critically, when price-driven promotions are activated, these should be actively supported

by transparent communication regarding delivery timelines and customs procedures, as this proactively shapes consumer expectations and sustains engagement beyond the initial price attraction. Addressing quality perception, on the other hand, requires that returns' policies be not only clearly articulated but also internationally accessible and straightforward to navigate since the ease of cross-border returns is itself a logistical outcome that directly influences how product quality is perceived. Finally, as the data used in this study are sourced globally, their applicability may be limited in regional markets with distinct consumer behaviors and logistical profiles.

Originality: *This study makes an original contribution by applying cross-correlation analysis to publicly available search data to map the consumer consideration process in an ultra-fast fashion. It provides empirical evidence that logistical factors, specifically shipping and customs, are not evaluated in isolation, but are intrinsically assessed alongside core product attributes, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how value is perceived in international direct-to-consumer retailing.*

Keywords: *Ultra-Fast Fashion; Shein; Google Trends; Consumer Behavior; Global Logistics; Shipping; Customs; De Minimis; Price; Quality; Cross-Correlation.*

1. Introduction

The ultra-fast fashion retailers have quickly reshaped the global retail landscape. These characteristics are driven by China-based e-commerce juggernauts, such as Shein, which have disrupted traditional clothing supply chains and consumer shopping habits around the world (Degli Esposti et al, 2024; Qu, 2024). One of the reasons Shein is unique is its proven speed from design to production (highest), on-demand manufacturing, and strategies for pricing that even lead to offering an array of accessories, such as jewelry (Kilpatrick, 2022). With the incorporation of real-time data analytics and agile execution right into manufacturing produced directly at the consumer (DTC) line, it has taken away first financial shares, literally changed the paradigm in accessibility to cost-effective & fashion trends, especially with the young audience (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023).

Practically, Shein is supported by an intricate digital supply chain that involves large international networks that are engaged from production to retail channels. The movement of millions of parcels around the globe depends on such a big and complex plastic system: large numbers of parcels are delivered every day to clients in many different continents, and this effective international transport comes entangled with dense customs rules (FreightAmigo, 2024; Sabio, 2023; Portless, 2023). Its expenditure scheme and accelerated processing have the implementation of "de minimis" regimes as its most important feature (see e.g., U.S. Section 321, which creates duty-free treatment for packages valued below \$800, so that ground shipping tariffs are avoided (Wang, 2022)). In short, Shein's competitive advantage is rooted in its ability to provide super low prices while managing a global supply chain from the factory.

However, this fast growth scheme poses other crucial

concerns, such as product quality indeed manufacturing quality or around the environmental consequences (externalities) from abstract expenditure use and ethical limits in its supply chain concerning labor exploitation allegations and vague consideration of corporate social responsibility codes of practice (Degli Esposti et al. 2024; Donker & Fromke, 2023; Renz, 2022; Qu, 2024; Bowman, 2024). From the consumers' perspective, the biggest draw of Shein thus far has been value; chic items at unbeatable prices that other retailers simply cannot offer. Nevertheless, this value proposition is inextricably linked to a perpetual debate around two aspects: the gap that exists between its true quality and the market quality of their offerings, as well as the efficiency or transparency degrees of shipping and customs procedures included in their very own delivery (IIMS Pune 2023; Xiao & Qinxin 2024). Price and quality are direct features and attributes, shipping and customs are indirect but still deeply impact final cost, delivery time frame, and customer experience, thus defining the global perception of value, which in turn drives the purchasing decision.

While the existing literature has extensively examined Shein's business model and its broader economic impact, including its influence on global logistics networks and customs movements, the direct relationship between consumer interest in Shein's pricing and quality attributes and the underlying logistical infrastructure remains largely underexplored. Existing studies tend to focus on how consumers are drawn to Shein through its pricing or quality proposition, yet the simultaneous examination of these product-centric concerns alongside logistical and customs-related search behavior has received limited academic attention. In this regard, Google Trends data offer a particularly valuable lens, as it captures aggregated

public search interest rather than individual purchasing intent, thereby reflecting broader patterns in how consumers collectively seek and process information (Boufous, 2024; Deore, 2024; Vervology, 2024).

The purpose of this research is to untangle the biggest consumer problems from global search interest. Therefore, this paper intends to investigate the estimation of global consumer search interest with respect to Shein price and quality, as well as shipping/customs associated with the brand. More specifically, we focus on:

- Global Interest trends for Shein quality, prices, and shipping and customs duty over a 12-month period
- Quantifying how related these search terms are to examine the degree of co-variation among the public Interest in them.
- Using cross-correlation for inferring behavioral sequences with respect to related product attributes and logistics concerns to determine any latent sequential relations.

In a world where global direct-to-consumer platforms seem to take precedence, the research creates awareness on consumer interactions with these aspects and is especially relevant for sectors relating to logistics and supply chain management, e-commerce strategy, and international trade policy development.

2. Literature Review

As the retail sector undergoes rapid transformation driven by the widespread adoption of digital technologies and evolving consumer behaviors, ultra-fast fashion has emerged as one of the most disruptive forces in the industry. This literature review establishes the theoretical framework for the study by examining the interrelationships among price, quality, and logistics within Shein's global ecosystem. It reviews the existing literature on ultra-fast fashion business models, cross-border e-commerce logistics, de minimis thresholds in international trade, and consumer behavior in online fashion retailing.

2.1. The Ultra-Fast Fashion Business Model

The ultra-fast fashion model, of which Shein is one of the most pronounced examples, has evolved beyond fast fashion, as it has even more increased the speed of design, production, and distribution (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Cheng & Li, 2023). This new model was defined by several foundational pillars. The former is the on-demand/small production strategy, which can

ensure less waste and fast response to real-time trends/adaptations in the fashion scene or consumer needs, thus minimizing inventory risk (Wang & Zhang, 2021; Qu, 2024). More specifically, Shein utilizes extensive data analytics (referred to as "real-time intelligence") to identify trends before they go mainstream and apply those designs to new products almost immediately (Kilpatrick, 2022). Such rapid-fire iteration (and constant stream of new styles – sometimes in the thousands, per day) is also indicative of its operational dexterity (Degli Esposti et al., 2024).

Second, the ultra-fast model completely skips traditional retail intermediaries, instead operating through a direct-to-consumer (DTC) e-commerce channel for most of their processes. This type of vertical integration, from design to customer delivery, allows for better control over the supply chain and significant cost savings that can then be passed on to consumers in the form of ultra-low prices (Sproles & Burns, 2017; Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023). This method of interaction lets you obtain real-time data on preferences, tastes, and purchases, creating a continuous loop for product generation and more nuanced marketing (Vertex AI Search Snippets, n.d.). The paradigm is different in that its digital structural nature enables economies of scale but worldwide access with little dependence on foreign-led market physical infrastructures and depends more heavily on strong digital marketing and social media presence in the region (Donker & Fromke, 2023).

2.2. The Second Country: Global E-commerce Logistics and Cross-border Problems

The audience providing it a warm reception can be explained when ultra-fast fashion, and more so ultra-fast fashion, very stealthily hiding behind thick walls of their single production base (with China being the greatest experiment, aka testing ground), are seen to be in an inseparable relationship with unmatched worldwide e-commerce logistics. That is, challenges related to geographical proximity and heterogeneous regulatory frameworks, as well as the consumer demand for just-in-time (Christopher, 2016; Lai et al., 2015). International freight forwarding, nearby warehouses and fulfillment centers, last-mile delivery collaboratives, and returns handling are typical critical logistics components (DMO based on the special topic sections of FreightAmigo, D 2020; Portless, D 2024). For example, companies such as Shein heavily invest in an advanced logistics network, with a more unified strategy of air and sea freight used based on the urgency of shipment to meet market needs, and millions of local courier services must be utilized for last-mile delivery only (Sabio, 2024). By putting out the low-price mode, they further ride on the total volume of parcels delivered daily, which creates connected economies of scale in terms of shipping charges (Bowman, 2024). Still, the complex

arrangement of a worldwide network of suppliers, producers, and logistics providers generates risk points like delivery postponements as well as product spoilage in transit, not to mention higher environmental costs linked with long-haul shipping (Grant: 2020; Renz: 2022). Service quality, such as efficiency level in tracking and tracing shipments, communicating delivery estimates, and managing returns covering international shipments, is important to contemplate as it affects customer satisfaction of cross-border e-commerce (Grewal et al., 2004).

2.3. Importance of De Minimis Thresholds to Trade Across Borders

One important, but usually unnoticed, principle regarding ultra-low prices and the successful shipping of an item via Shein or such platforms is the principle of de minimis thresholds in international trade regulation. De minimis rules that exempt low-value imported goods from taxes, duties, and lengthy customs inspections improve the efficiency of imports (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, n.d.; WTO, n.d.). For example, in the United States, goods valued at \$800 or less are imported duty-free when entered by one person on one day (U.S. CBP, n.d.). Similar thresholds can be found in other jurisdictions, although the applicable values differ (e.g., EU €150; UK £135) (European Commission, n.d.; GOV.UK, n.d.).

Shein's use of direct-to-consumer shipping, one-order-at-a-time, and low-cost parcels can therefore rely on these de minimis provisions liberally. In this way, entering under the allowed exemption of de minimis—a law in the United States that permits some imports to arrive duty-free if the value is below \$800, while decreasing any import duties calculations for the end-user (Wang 2022) also avoids tariffs that would be assessed on larger consolidated shipments to retailers. Opponents contend that this provides an unfair competitive edge to foreign goods over their domestic counterparts and practices by guaranteeing tax-free treatment for packages imported in limited amounts, while further undermining efforts aimed at labor and environmental compliance (Bowman 2024). On the other hand, de minimis thresholds can readily be mathematically converted to cheap lower prices and, as a gala recipient to the end auctioneer, is a soft-faced, less mucky sales experience which further adds global purchasing power attractiveness (Portless 2024).

2.4. Online Fashion Demand: Price, Quality, and Delivery in What Consumers Consider

Therefore, dealing with consumer behavior in a complex fashion context of online media where the price and quality delivery expectations play key roles (Grewal et al., 2004; Kotler & Armstrong, 2020) requires an in-depth

understanding of the interplay between lower-order and higher-order factors. This is clearly the most basic building block of ultra-fast fashion allure, as consumers can stock up their wardrobe with newer styles without any real financial outlay (Donker & Fromke, 2023; IIMS Pune, 2023). The allure of rock-bottom prices is offset, however, by post-purchase regrets as we face a form of product guilt. Often, customers balance between affordable prices and a few other determinant indicators, which include its wearability, non-fabrication quality, and ultimately environmental viability²⁹ (IIMS Pune 2023; Qu 2024). It is through online reviews and social media that expectations are shaped long before a purchase (Cheema & Papatla, 2019).

The third leg we will ask for after the product and delivery expectations is also an enormously sensitive aspect of the online shopping experience. From food delivery to groceries, consumers demand not only fast, reliable, and transparent delivery services but also up-to-the-minute information about every order and notifications on any possible delays (Christopher, 2016; PwC, 2024). It appears that increasingly only a few customers are prepared to wait for weeks, if necessary, for their shipment monopolies in exchange for prices / the price tracking that is usually much lower (example: Products from international sellers), but unplanned delays / little transparency during customs delegation will always be annoying and lead to dissatisfaction overall (FreightAmigo n.d.). So, settling this is necessary; linkage of these aspects is critical, and unacceptable delivery may cause disregard for prices energized by quality and, on the contrary, a satisfactory (& reliable) delivery experience might better increase value created through a product (Xiao & Qinxin 2024). For retailers operating in global e-commerce, we outline how consumers rank and inter-relate their concerns.

However, this fast-growth model prompts additional critical inquiries into things like product quality, the environmental externalities of speed consumption (a.k.a. fast fashion), and ethical principles within its supply chain, which allegedly engage in exploitable labor alongside an ambiguous formulation of Corporate Social Responsibility practices (Hakiel et al., 2024; Donker & Fromke, 2023; Renz, 2022; Qu, 2024; Bowman, 2024). To consumers, the first allure of Shein is the obvious value, on-trend duds they can score at prices not found anywhere else. By issuing beacons, however, this value proposition is irretrievably bound to a timeless debate around two fronts: the testing quality and A-class quality of their products and spectrum gradients of shipping and customs procedures within their very transport (IIMS Pune 2023; Xiao & Qinxin 2024). Price and quality are direct factors, shipping and customs are indirect but still relevant elements in its approach that directly impact the final cost, delivery times, and overall satisfaction of customers with a direct

impact on their perception of value in global terms, as well as their purchasing decision.

3. Methodology

More specifically, this paper adopts a quantitative perspective on their public search interest, using publicly available and objective data from Google Trends, an increasingly-used source of real-time and large-scale behavior patterns summarized by consensus across research domains of consumer behavior (Choi & Varian, 2012), fashion retail (Silva, Hassani, Madsen & Gee, 2019; Skenderi, Joppi Denitto & Cristani, 2021). Underpinned by the justification of Google Trends as a proxy for market sentiment and consumer demand in previous research, we plausibly stand behind this approach of empirically measuring ultra-fast fashion dynamics. The employed methods aim to analyze the time series and relationships of consumer interests in price on Shein, quality on Shein, and all logistics sub-practices related to transporting goods and customs documents. Traditional datasets based on surveys or transactions are often limited by geographic, demographic, or platform aspects, whereas Google Trends provides a global scale of search behavior with full transparency. And so, it is well-suited for units of analysis that include digital-first brands such as Shein, where much of the consumer journey occurs online. For this reason, Google Trends is justified in the current research by three overall methodological arguments.

First, Google Trends is an immediate big data signal of behavior: how people are consuming information has previously established that it is a reliable data source to predict and explain consumer demand, retail dynamics, and market sentiment across domains (Choi & Varian, 2012; Goel et al., 2010; Preis et al., 2013). So far, the platform has mostly been used in fashion and retail disciplines for monitoring trend adoption patterns and anticipating product seasons/inquiries to different price-quality cues (Silva et al., 2019; Skenderi, Joppi, Denitto & Cristani, 2021). Those applications discuss associating and evaluating effects that are intended to be measured by this study's aim among consumers who perceive the core value dimensions of Shein.

Second, Google Trends is known to be useful for monitoring logistics and supply chains across nations or ambiguity that transcends national borders. Several studies have used search data to monitor public Interest in shipping disrupters, customs operations, and logistic bottlenecks (Jun et al. 2018). Their business model is driven by the international shipping logistics, customs processes they navigate, and de minimis ceilings governing what tariff-exempt goods can be imported into countries (namely the United States), making the

search volume phenomenon around logistic-related queries unique in opening a window into consumer hesitations that conventional data sources would otherwise have failed to capture.

Third, it fits the objective of the study, which requires testing how inquiries among consumers evolve and connect over time. Experiments with search terms can be illustrative of how consumers move from price assessment → quality assessment → logistical feasibility as consumer search behavior is a frequent early step in travel planning and consumption, and these relationships can be measured using time-series and cross-correlation analysis. This is well aligned with Google Trends, as it provides low-lag data at high frequency and can reveal lead-lag behaviors among interconnected problems (Vosen & Frömmel, 2011; Jun & Park, 2016).

3.1. Data Source and Collection

The main data source of this research is the public web service Google Trends that exposes how popular search queries have been over time, with comparisons between different geographical and linguistic areas (Vervology, 2024; Boufous, 2024). For terms, Google Trends data are scaled from 0 to 100, with 100 representing peak popularity for a period and region (Deore, 2024), and numbers closer to zero indicating insufficient data. This type of normalization enables the comparison between relative search interest for different terms, even with absolute differences in search volumes (Vosen and Frömmel, 2011). Use of Google Trends data as proxies for both public attention and passing Interest through information-seeking inquiry (but not capturing absolute search counts; Jun & Park, 2016) could be applied to data up to October 2023.

The data based on worldwide search trends were derived from the 12 months running from August 25, 2023, to August 24, 2024 (to mirror contemporary consumer mood and hyped-up fast-fashion fads), while the dataset had been exported directly as a CSV file from Google Trends.

3.2. Search Terms and Timeframe

The study also specified three search queries as per the objectives of the survey, highlighting their relevance for Shein across operational-related and consumer-related dimensions (shown in Table 3)

- “Shein quality” (Worldwide)
- “Shein prices” (Worldwide)
- “Shein Shipping and duty” (Worldwide)

These descriptors were chosen to capture not only direct consumer interest in product attributes, such as quality and price, but also the logistical infrastructure (shipping, customs) required to enable delivery partnerships between producers, parties responsible for trade facilitation/streaming of products from A to B per se, and the ultimate consumer. Now, regarding the second of these points, even more specifically, we need to emphasize that a generic term like “Shipping and customs duty” would be immediately associated with Shein, along with the surprising “Shein quality” and “Shein prices”. The “worldwide” filter was applied, in accordance with Shein’s international market coverage, and enabled a global view of consumer behavior. We initially set the dataset to a resolution of head weekly, so that we might capture some finer uptrends and shorter cycles in user interest.

3.3. Analytical Framework

This analytical framework included three overarching stages, which have been detailed as follows:

- **Time-Series Analysis** – First, the interest level for each keyword (over a 12-month period) has been plotted individually on a time-series plot. This made it easy to get a graphical overview of trends, highs and lows, and generally the stability or volatility in public Interest of each search term, followed by a composite time-series plot for easier direct visual comparison and concurrent trends across all three terms.
- **Pearson Correlation Analysis:** A Pearson correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between each of the search terms. For three items of Interest (Shein quality, Shein prices, and Transportation and Customs), this measure ranges from -1 (perfectly negatively correlated) to + 1 (perfectly positively correlated). Additional information about the co-move property of both items across the entire analysis span can be found in Benesty et al. (2009).
- **Cross-Correlation Analysis:** Cross-correlation analyses were conducted to explore possible lead-lag dynamics. This approach looks at the degree to which two time series are correlated over various lags, allowing us to determine if Interest (in our first search term) leads (precedes) or lags (follows) Interest in a second search term (Box & Jenkins, 1970). This is particularly important in inferring the temporal sequence of consumer concerns, for example, whether Interest in pricing or quality leads to (or lags) Interest in logistics, unlocking the consumer inquiry and decision journey. Lags of up to ± 3 weeks were detected for short-term leading or lagging indicators.

3.4. Limitations of Data and Methods

Although Google Trends provides some perspective on the broader searching patterns of humans, it has its own unavoidable set of shortcomings. Before we come to the results, it should be noted that the volume of searches between terms is measured relatively and not absolutely; this requires caution when making comparisons between different cross-terms of search terms (Vosen & Frömmel, 2011). Second, Google Trends data are aggregated, anonymized (no demographic segmentation), and qualitative: reasons that cause searches to happen. Third, it chooses search terms that are hard to discriminate between. While this methodology is not the best thing (it should have been a hypothesis-based search, with Shein shipping delay, Shein custom duty, or even Shein tracking) because of the law of large numbers and little mega enticing words search interest, still, I have no problem receiving sufficient returns from Google Trends for that tag. This means that the broader term of “Shein shipping and customs duty” was used instead, with its outcomes looked at in relation to “Shein prices” and “Shein quality,” providing context when viewing Shein-specific search traffic. Last but not least, correlation does not imply causation: Cross-correlation suggests lead-lag patterns among search interests, but this method alone cannot prove a clear relationship of cause and effect. The trends we experience may not be the same as in the future, and so this analysis is limited by an arbitrary suspension of time, limited to a particular dataset.

4. Results

The following section displays the results through a series of different analyses performed on Google Trends data: the statistics outline general global trends over time, whereas correlation and cross-correlation analyses show some statistical measures quantifying relationships.

4.1. Overview of Search Interest Trends

Our insights showed that, globally, Google trend analysis over the months from August 2023 to August 2024 presented specificities regarding “Shein quality,” “Shein prices,” and concerns regarding shipping and customs duty. It is a scale of search interest from 0 to 100, with the maximum for that term in the decade labeled as 100.

Search Interest for “Shein quality” (Figure 1): Between August 2023 and roughly March 2024, search interest for “Shein quality” was consistently low and stable, with an index value (on a scale of 0–100) mostly between 10 and 20. Search interest began climbing slowly in April

2024, with a peak of 83 at the start of August 2024. In the weeks after this peak, search interest fell away steeply and quickly before leveling out at relatively lower levels by the end of our analysis window.

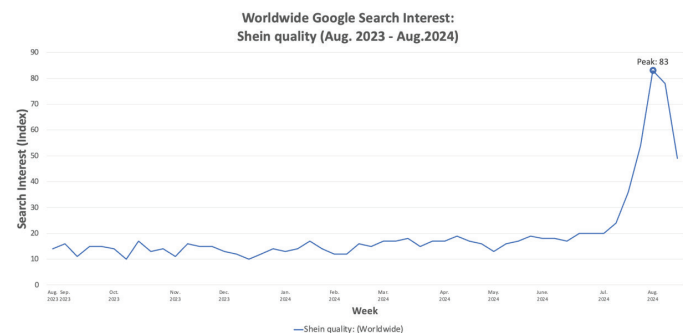


Figure 1: Worldwide Google Search Interest for "Shein quality" (August 2023 - August 2024).

Shein Prices (Fig 2): "Shein quality" started off rather slowly with values between 7-8 in the early days and spending a lot of time <10 but then climbing slowly from late 2023 onwards, and yet the associated insights on price attracted much more attention much earlier. Peaking at its all-time high index value of 100 in April 2024. After this spike, far Interest was a lot less pronounced (although not quite "Shein quality") and remained fairly constant at lower tiers until August 2024.

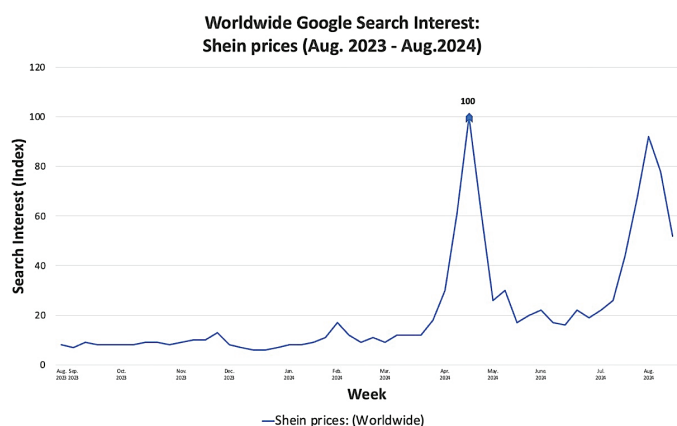


Figure 2: Worldwide Google Search Interest for "Shein prices" (August 2023 - August 2024).

Shein shipping and customs duty (Figure 3): At once, so idiosyncratic among the other two terms, both "Shein shipping and customs duty" experienced levels of search interest too low across the entire 12-month timespan to derive any valid index values, resulting instead in indexes at or around 0 through to 7 for most months, representing an entirely more rudimentary lower level of absolute public engagement. It rose at a comparatively gentle pace, peaking at 7 in early August

2024 before tapering back down again, but compared to what we witnessed for Nelson, "Shein quality" or "Shein prices", no wild spikes or peaks.



Figure 3: Worldwide Google Search Interest for "Shein shipping and customs duty" (August 2023 - August 2024).

Combined Trends (Figure 4): Figure 4 illustrates the results of the three search terms into one combined image, where it is clear to see that searches are high for Shein prices and Shein quality, versus little Interest in Shein shipping and customs duty. The vertical bands indicate when the Shein brand was having a unique moment of media attention (note that individual term data is normalized by Google Trends it may not be appropriate to sum absolute index values from differing queries) and show further these peaks being expressed in time for "Shein quality" (August 2024 - peak value time frame) and "Shein prices" (April 2024; with fellowship of prices interest along-side quality again at July-August 2024). So, the evidence that interpreting "Shein shipping and customs duty" as a sign of marginal Interest is that queries with low volume indicate indices 5–10 times lower than much higher volume brand-specific terms.

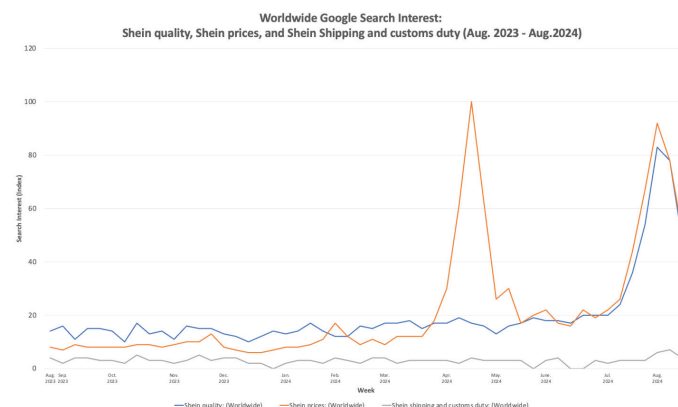


Figure 4: Worldwide Google Search Interest for "Shein quality," "Shein prices," and "Shein shipping and customs duty" (August 2023 - August 2024).

The approximately four-month gap between the peak in "Shein prices" interest (April 2024) and the peak in

“Shein quality” interest (August 2024) warrants further consideration. One plausible explanation lies in the sequential nature of consumer information-seeking: price-related searches may represent an earlier, exploratory stage of the purchase journey, whereas quality-related searches emerge later as consumers move toward evaluation and commitment. This temporal gap may also reflect external factors active during this period, including heightened media scrutiny of Shein’s product standards and labor practices in mid-2024, viral social media content questioning the brand’s quality claims, or the anticipation of major promotional events, such as back-to-school campaigns in late summer. Additionally, the lagged rise in quality interest could suggest that consumers who were initially attracted by price promotions in April subsequently sought to validate their purchases through quality-related research in the following months. While the data alone cannot confirm causality, these possible explanations are consistent with established models of consumer decision-making in which price acts as an initial attractor and quality serves as a subsequent evaluative filter (Zeithaml, 1988; Grewal et al., 2004).

4.2. Behavioral Analysis: Correlation and Cross-Correlation

Pearson correlation and cross-correlation analyses were performed to gain further insight into how the search interests are related to one another.

4.2.1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Table 1 contains the Pearson correlation matrix, which measures how strongly and in what direction the search terms are linearly related to each other.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Worldwide Google Search Interest

	Shein Quality	Shein Prices	Shein shipping and customs duty
Shein Quality	1.00	0.94	0.77
Shein Prices	0.94	1.00	0.70
Shein ship. and cost. duty	0.77	0.70	1.00

The results were consistently high positive correlations between each pair of search terms, as follows:

Shein Quality and Shein Prices ($r = 0.94$): the extremely high positive correlation serves as supporting evidence that worldwide search interest in product quality and pricing are exhibiting similar movement due to both variables appearing simultaneously used by consumers as complementary sources of information; overall,

relative to prior work flow around other brand query dynamics, they seem to take into account at a similar level of granularity.

Shein Quality and Shein shipping and customs duty ($r = 0.77$): the interests appear to dominate the quality of products, which has a strong positive correlation with contemporaneous but smaller magnitude spikes on shipping and customs duty searches.

Shein Prices and Shein Shipping and Customs duty ($r=0.70$): a high positive correlation with commercial intent was also found between Shein price searches and shipping & customs logistical score metrics, indicating that the overwhelming majority of consumers search for price information just before they search for how they can receive their goods.

Overall, the positive associations of IoU are quite well pronounced, which suggests that despite significant fluctuations in absolute search volumes, public interests in distinct operational domains of Shein go hand-in-hand and are quite likely interconnected.

4.2.2. Cross-Correlation Analysis

In order to investigate the potential lead-lag relationship between our searches, cross-correlation analysis was applied to have a better understanding of which aspect of Shein consumers are likely to turn toward in sequence.

Cross-correlation (maximum, $r = 0.70$) for Shein Prices vs Shein shipping and customs duty, Bi-lag at a Lag 0 suggests simultaneous movement; alternatively, at Lag +1 week, this cross-correlation could propose that Interest in Shein Prices preceded searches in Shein shipping and customs duty by one week. Such observation tells us that the behavioral pattern of increasing keyword interest related to “Shein prices” is, in fact, occurring at around the same time, or slightly preceding, consumer searches for information regarding “Shein shipping and customs duty”. So, it moved from price attraction as a main button that forces the consumer to make an effort in finding out about its delivery (shipping times, costs, customs implications) during a second phase.

To find out which queries were traveling together, I computed the cross-correlation of each one with all others across lags from -15 to 15 lags. Shein Quality vs. Shein shipping and customs duty – This yielded my highest cross-correlation ($r = 0.77$) at Lag 0, showing that search interest in “Shein quality” mostly coincides with “Shein shipping and customs duty.” Synchrony could imply that consumers assess product quality (e.g., durability, materials, reviews) together with logistical considerations, such as transport types and return

options linked to quality characteristics attributable to transport and customs links (20).

In general, the cross-correlation results imply an interaction in consumer evaluation processes such that price interest leads logistics checks by a small margin, while choice factors per product quality and delivery impact each other concurrently, which came back to match with the integrated structure of decision making before rapidly acquiring ultra-fast fashion.

5. Discussion

This study examines the symbiotic relationship of consumer search for “Shein’s prices”, “Shein’s quality”, and related logistic questions, framed as “Shein shipping and customs duty” in an unclear sense, in addition to regarding brand logistics reference information, but as a separate term irrelevant to regulatory description search interest, controlling for that group referring to the research sample. The 12-month Google Trends analysis can provide unique insight into the way in which consumers are engaging with the ultra-fast fashion space as a whole and through a lens that is particularly relevant for an industry behemoth like Shein.

5.1. The Role of Price and Quality, Logistics in Consumer Search on Shein

In the time-series analysis (Figures 1–4), search interest in the term “Shein prices” clearly outweighs that for “Shein shipping and customs duty,” with similar results being observed for “Shein quality.” Broadly, this means that the consumer alert bells ring red in Shein’s identification at least as far as product value proposition, or even more basic properties of a product. As evidence, “Shein shipping and customs duty” has apparent operational relevance for global DTC retailers (Christopher, 2016; Sabio, 2024), while likely a less explicit concern or more implicitly relevant issue within the general online populace. It appears to be fundamental within the buying method; however, its low related Interest in search shows that, for the average purchaser, logistics and customs in general are not being prioritized as issues or concerns unless ache points have come to a head.

The possible results (Table 1) showed an extremely high correlation of 0.94 between “Shein quality” and “Shein prices,” supporting previous literature advocating for the combined view of cost and quality needed when considering consumer purchasing decision-making, especially for markets where value is among the top five considerations (Grewal et al., 2004; IIMS Pune, 2023). And so, consumers are not only price sensitive, but they also actually try to measure the resulting quality, most likely the implied value for money. Not only

were search interests in both terms spiking at the same time (Figure 4), but also the stair step structure with another additional spike in July-August 2023 suggests public awareness or discourse was also increasing, and consumers were considering Shein offerings, price, and quality as a key consumption consideration. These increased mentions may be triggered by large marketing pushes, prominent media coverage, or viral social content or releases corresponding to a notable product launch/event that brings attention to the cost performance of Shein, but also attributes aspects of its product quality claims.

5.2. Some Consumer Insights: The Consumer Journey

The cross-correlation analysis provided key behavioral insights into the temporal ordering of consumer inquiry. More specifically, the fact that searches for ‘Shein prices’ either correlate with or even lead to a bi-weekly interest in Shein shipping and customs duty suggests coherent progression in consumers’ evaluative processes. Given that the brand is characterized by its ultra-low pricing strategy (Kilpatrick, 2022), it would follow that price could immediately be recognized as an initial point of Interest for consumers. After initial attraction, consumers often quickly turn to ask logistical-related questions of importing those things - for example, how they will be shipped to her, when she might expect delivery, and potentially even customs implications (Portless 2024). This means an efficient pricing strategy is an entry ticket to any other consumer involvement, where logistical factors become more and more relevant.

In contrast, the clear parallelism at Lag 0 of “Shein quality” and “Shein shipping and customs duty” Interest means there is likely a strongly synchronous dynamic. Specifically, consumers may do this if they are doing research into Shein’s quality whether by reading reviews of Shein clothes and comparing them with cheaper alternatives to discover products that might be viewed as economically superior (Donker & Fromke, 2023) or whether through media stories providing ‘bigger picture’ perspectives such as Shein’s environmental impact which lightly reframes the meaning of what quality means in the context of how global delivery comes about. Such concerns can be with regard to delivery conditions (risk of damage while in transit), feasibility and expense of returns from abroad for defective goods, or perhaps the potential dilution of quality due to long shipping durations (FreightAmigo, n.d.). Thus, this suggests that regarding quality assessment, standalone logistic factors, such as how application and product attributes are, are intrinsically bound with one another from the initial stage of the consumer’s exploratory process.

At the same time, consumer worries over “quality” may have found a yet deeper conceptual level of what

properties of durable or material features are, and about ethics and environmental dimensions like human rights, conditions of labor for manufacturing items, as well as environmental sustainability processes. Environmental concerns were more visible as public discussions of Shein often mentioned related topics like overproduction, waste generation, and the carbon emissions from international shipping. So, in conclusion, linking search terms for product quality with ultra-fast fashion implies that consumers are not just questioning the quality of products but also considering the environmental impact intertwined with it. Transparent logistics, including reporting carbon emissions, sustainable packaging methods, or green-shipping efforts, may become increasingly important as consumers identify perceptions about product quality with environmental and social sustainability issues overall.

What the behaviors suggest is a relatively sequential but prioritized process of information searching by the consumer. While explicit search terms reflect varying degrees of direct involvement (or lack thereof), price, quality, and logistics are not thought of in isolation but rather represent an interconnected “price-quality-logistics” nexus vis-à-vis consumers’ perceived meaning. The lower relative Interest in “Shein shipping and customs duty” in accordance, despite its strong correlation with the other two terms, further confirms the point that logistical factors are usually considered as part of a broader assessment of value and purchase, not as a standalone paramount concern.

5.3. Ultra-Fast Fashion Implications for the Shipping and Customs Sphere

The findings highlight the important but largely invisible role of shipping and customs in allowing ultra-fast fashion companies like Shein to flourish. Despite lacking high-frequency explicit search, the high positive correlations and observed lead-lag dynamics suggest logistical efficiency; in addition, strong custom frameworks (de minimis laws, for example, Wang 2022) are quietly aiding the brand’s core value proposition as expressed both affordably and in terms of trend readiness.

Spikes in Interest for the term “Shein prices” stem from supply chain processes, specifically intended to maximize efficiencies by minimizing landed costs through optimized shipping and robust customs procedures. Any disruption to the efficiency of logistical operations or movement, including changes in international trade regulations (e.g., adjustments to de minimis thresholds), could directly threaten Shein’s ability to maintain its low-price-positioning strategy with potentially deep and immediate repercussions on actual consumer demand as indicated by search trends. As quality is largely product-centric, so too is

the international delivery infrastructure that contributes to a user experience perception there (e.g., whether the item arrives intact or whether defective items are easy to return). Strategic investments in resilient packaging, reliable logistic partners, and clear returns procedures are no more than an expression of a brand promise for quality further up the delivery chain, where global e-commerce is concerned.

The low search volume in “Shein shipping and customs duty” could indicate an underlying consumer assumption that international delivery will happen reasonably smoothly without large hurdles. When those expectations are not met – through unreasonable lags, unanticipated surcharges hidden within the price of shipping, or vagaries in customs procedures – customers become indirectly dissatisfied with Shein’s offer as a whole, and that Interest may fade when it comes to buying on account of prices (or quality), where logistics is often the behind-the-scenes cause. This highlights the paradox that logistics is rarely searched for directly, but its seamless execution remains vital to the perception of value in price and quality, which keeps consumers interested and engaged.

6. Implications and Future Research

The current research provides a detailed portrayal of how consumers connect their Interest in Shein’s pricing and quality with questions around its international shipping and customs practices. They also suggest some potentially fruitful avenues for future research and have meaningful implications for theoretical development, managerial practice, and policy formulation.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The contribution of this research is to the literature on consumer behavior in e-commerce, especially in the ultra-fast fashion domain, by empirically validating the interdependence among product-centric attributes (price and quality) and logistical features (shipping and customs), as factors these consumers weigh during their information-seeking process. These outcomes are consistent with the previous literature on consumer decision-making and information search strategies (link goes here) (Bettman, 1979; Punj & Staelin, 1983), which indicates that purchase behavior comprises a direct function of both product evaluations and transaction-related factors. The lead-lag dynamic between “Shein prices” and logistical queries, therefore, suggests that the latter are indeed considered in a general risk assessment that influences the value perception process (Zeithaml, 1988; Grewal et al., 2004). The results based on Google Trends data and cross-correlation analysis support a novel behavioral interpretation of

how these specific concerns unfold in public search behavior in a sequential or synchronous manner. It also reinforces a broad view of the value proposition whereby even peripheral logistical attributes that may be comparatively unimportant in the final consumer's mind indirectly impact perceptions of primary features like price competitiveness and product availability (Grewal et al., 2004). Moreover, this research reveals, in multiple ways, that Google Trends serves as a highly useful and timely measure of collective public sentiment and shifting behaviors over time in rapidly changing markets (Jun & Park, 2016; Vosen & Frömmel, 2011), warranting use in future studies.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The findings presented can be extremely beneficial for Ultra-fast fashion retailers, such as Shein and its competitors, providing various insights into what they could do next. It is not by accident that the firm interaction between price and quality interest presented means low prices' offers are insufficient as they must be supported by maintaining or even increasing the perceived quality level of the brand (which indeed remains crucial, in consumer engagement considerations). A consistent focus on a value proposition embedded with the notions of affordability and acceptable Quality standards should be part of marketing campaigns. Second, the temporal lag between "Shein prices" and "Shein shipping and customs duty" interest indicates that in price-based sales periods, better management of shipping timelines (and transparent communication about them) with adequate information regarding tracking, parcel details when shipped (Christopher 2016). To avoid future friction, retailers could deploy innovative tools to calculate customs duty and delivery-time estimates as well as provide real-time logistics updates that prominently display transparent information on shipping costs and estimated times. Also, simultaneously guiding clients on aspects like easy international returns (and policies regarding damages, both of which are outcomes of the shipping process) would do plenty of good for "Shein quality" inquiries. Finally, it is important to understand the optimization of global logistics, even though the general consumer would not Google this explicitly and might view it as merely an operational imperative, but rather a strategic lever that indirectly increases brand equity/retention.

6.3. Policy Implications

This paper makes an indirect thrust into the discourse of ultra-fast fashion and global trade policies. Since Shein's low-price model is primarily reliant on de minimis thresholds, which strengthen cross-border logistics (Wang, 2022; U.S. CBP, n.d.), a potential adjustment in the current trade setting could largely disrupt public interests through its impact on consumers' access

to these goods. Given this, regulators considering amending de minimis regulations, for example, should be aware that these amendments may directly affect consumer prices and, more broadly, the entire e-commerce sector.

Over the past few years, different jurisdictions appear to have re-evaluated these frameworks, which reflects that policymakers are not simply debating reform in theoretical terms, but rather they are engaged in assessing and trialing actual changes to legislation, predominantly with a view to protecting domestic retailers and local enterprise from the competitive advantage, which unveils items sold by foreign sellers at present thresholds. As such, reductions in de minimis thresholds or more stringent customs procedures would inherently raise landed costs and delivery timelines, radically reshaping the core underpinning of cost advantage for Shein and other ultra-fast fashion retailers. For consumers, such changes may alter demand behavior in that they take some of the zing out of high shipping cost-driven purchases. Finally, and at a systemic level, these policy tweaks could lead companies to respond by avoiding behavior restrictions by developing regional distribution networks or adapting product strategies to meet tighter import controls.

This study provides empirical contributions to the debate on fair trade policies, environmental sustainability (regarding high shipping volumes), and labor standards in global value chains by examining the public attention regarding these interrelated factors and suggesting that economic and consumer welfare considerations should be symbiotically included in appropriate policy responses. It underlines that trade policy choices are not made in isolation, but linked to other areas: the consumer, brand, and ecosystem development in global e-commerce. Thus, subsequent regulators will have to re-evaluate their plans based on economic and competitive forces as well as social and consumer factors, which dictate how reforms should be processed in real life.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has various limitations that highlight areas for future research. First, Google Trends data do not reflect the absolute search volumes or information on the demographics of who is conducting those queries. Thus, future studies may combine additional sources of data, such as social media analytics, sentiment analysis of online reviews, or survey-derived data, to triangulate findings and offer a qualitatively richer understanding of consumer search motivations.

Second, although the term "Shein shipping and customs duty" gives you a wider perspective of logistical interest, it may fail to cover all the subtle queries related to it.

In future works, logistic-related behaviors could be collected from even more specific search terms on a per-individual basis for shipping carriers, customs duties, delivery times, or international returns. Furthermore, situating the mode of dynamics against other ultra-fast fashion brands (e.g., Temu) would reassort the competitive context and deepen the generalizability of observed behavioral elements.

However, cross-correlation analysis may point to lead-lag dynamics but does not really prove causality because there is a high probability of spurious signaling. Future studies may use experimental designs or other more sophisticated econometric methods, such as Granger causality tests or vector autoregression models, to determine whether consumer concerns directly influence their purchasing behavior (or vice versa). Examining how external events (e.g., bombshell news stories, policy announcements) influence these search trends using event study methodology could also lend critical insight into how public interest can suddenly spike or plummet.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided original empirical insight into the consumer behavior dynamics underpinning ultra-fast fashion, through a detailed analysis of global Google Trends data for “Shein prices,” “Shein quality,” and “Shein shipping and customs duty” over a 12-month period (August 2023 to August 2024). By applying time-series analysis, Pearson correlation, and cross-correlation methods, it has illuminated the previously underexplored relationship between consumers’ explicit interest in core product attributes and the logistical infrastructure that enables global direct-to-consumer delivery.

The results clearly demonstrate that public search interest is primarily driven by Shein’s pricing and quality propositions, with a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.94$) between these two dimensions confirming that consumers evaluate affordability and product standards as inseparable components of perceived value. Although direct search interest in “Shein shipping and customs duty” was comparatively lower, its positive correlations with both “Shein prices” ($r = 0.70$) and “Shein quality” ($r = 0.77$) reveal that logistical considerations, while less explicitly foregrounded, remain an integral part of the broader consumer value assessment.

The cross-correlation analysis contributes a key behavioral finding: price interest marginally precedes logistical interest, indicating that price functions as the primary trigger that draws consumers into further inquiry about delivery feasibility and customs implications. Concurrently, quality and shipping interest move largely in tandem, suggesting that consumers assess product condition, returns accessibility, and delivery reliability as part of a unified quality evaluation rather than as separate concerns.

The central contribution of this study is its empirical demonstration that international logistics, specifically shipping efficiency and customs frameworks, such as *de minimis* provisions, are not merely operational background conditions but form an intrinsic and codependent part of Shein’s consumer value proposition. Any disruption to these logistical frameworks, whether through regulatory reform or operational failure, risks undermining the price and quality perceptions that sustain consumer engagement.

For practitioners, these findings reinforce the strategic importance of integrating logistics transparency into marketing communications, particularly during price-driven promotional periods. For policymakers, they underscore that trade regulation reforms, especially adjustments to *de minimis* thresholds, carry direct implications for consumer behavior and demand patterns in the global e-commerce sector. For researchers, this study establishes cross-correlation of public search data as a valid and productive method for mapping sequential consumer decision-making in digital-first retail contexts.

Future research should extend this framework by incorporating longer time horizons; brand-specific search terms for competitors, such as Temu, Zara, and H&M; and supplementary data sources, such as social media sentiment and transaction records.

The application of Granger causality tests and vector autoregression models would further strengthen causal inference. As the global e-commerce landscape continues to evolve, shaped by tightening trade regulations, growing sustainability expectations, and shifting consumer priorities, a holistic understanding of how product and logistical attributes jointly determine perceived value will be essential for both competitive strategy and evidence-based policy formulation.

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