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## ATTITUDES OF GEN Z ON GREEN CONSUMERISM - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### A. ABSTRACT

#### a. Overview of the study

This review explores Generation Z's attitudes towards green consumerism, with particular attention to the ongoing gap between their environmental values and their actual sustainable purchasing habits. Methodology: A systematic literature review was conducted, combining peer-reviewed articles from sources such as ScienceDirect and Google Scholar, along with industry reports from Circana and WWD, focusing on publications from 2020 to 2026. Key Findings: Although more than 75% of Gen Z consumers say sustainability is more important than brand names, and 81% are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, fast-fashion apps continue to grow rapidly, with over 54 million downloads in early 2025. Social media raises awareness about sustainability but also encourages overconsumption through popular trends. The gap between attitudes and actions is influenced by factors such as price sensitivity, the desire for convenience, doubts about the authenticity of sustainability claims, and digital activism that sometimes replaces real-world action. Research Gaps: Most studies treat Gen Z as a single group, ignore cultural differences outside of Western settings, and do not explain why this gap is especially noticeable in this generation. Recent data suggests that Gen Z's views on sustainability are not fixed and can change quickly over time. Practical Implications: Companies should focus on transparency, affordability, and options for reusing or reselling products, while governments should invest in green infrastructure, environmental education, and stronger rules against misleading sustainability claims. It is crucial to understand Gen Z's complex relationship with sustainability as they become the most powerful consumer group in the coming decade. This review brings together recent research from 2025 to 2026 to offer a detailed view of the paradox of green consumerism among Gen Z, highlighting important areas for future research that include long-term studies and cross-cultural comparisons.

**Key Words:** Generation Z, green consumerism, attitude-behavior gap, sustainable purchasing, sustainability generation, social media influence, fast fashion, overconsumption, digital green activism, value-action gap, pro-environmental behavior, re-commerce, green washing, consumer behavior, climate anxiety

## B. INTRODUCTION

### a. Background and context

Green consumerism isn't new; it's been building since the 1970s. But the conversation really heated up after the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh, which exposed the dark side of fast fashion. Then came COVID-19, which made people slow down and rethink their shopping habits. Today, sustainability has moved from a "nice-to-have" to a major factor in purchasing decisions. Enter Generation Z. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z thinks about sustainability differently. They're not just looking for recycled materials; they want to know how things are made, how stores operate, and what a brand's overall impact is. Issues like climate change and biodiversity loss matter more to them than older generations, who tend to focus on traditional concerns like pollution and waste.

### b. Purpose and scope of this study

This review aims to understand what shapes Gen Z's attitudes toward green consumerism and, crucially, why their actions often fall short of their good intentions. We'll focus specifically on research about their purchasing habits, the barriers they face, and what this means for businesses trying to reach them. The article is organized like this: first, the study looks at what existing theories say about consumer behavior. Then the study explores what past research has found about Gen Z specifically. After identifying gaps in current knowledge, the study suggests questions for future research and practical recommendations for businesses and policymakers.

## C. Literature Review

### a. Theoretical framework

Researchers typically use several established theories to understand green consumer behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that attitudes, social pressure, and perceived control over behavior all influence whether someone actually follows through on their intentions. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) adds that personal factors, environment, and behavior all interact with each other.

What makes Gen Z interesting is how these factors collide. Their personal environmental values are strong, but they're surrounded by a digital environment designed for instant gratification. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram both introduce them to sustainable brands and push relentless trend cycles that encourage overconsumption.

### b. Previous studies on green consumerism

Research consistently shows that sustainability has become mainstream. A 2025 report found that sustainability-marketed products are growing nearly five times faster than conventional ones, even though they represent only a quarter of the market. Since 2013, these products have driven nearly half of all growth in consumer packaged goods. However, there is a persistent problem: the "value-action gap." Many consumers express environmental concern but don't translate it into purchases. This gap is especially pronounced among younger consumers. Price remains the top barrier consumers say they're willing to pay about 9% more for sustainable features, but actual market premiums are often much higher.

### C. Generation Z's consumer behavior

So what do we know about Gen Z specifically? Quite a lot, actually: They are genuinely committed: Over 75% say sustainability matters more than brand names, and 81% are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. They research before buying: Gen Z is more likely than any other generation to investigate a brand's ethics and environmental impact. Social media is their guide: More than 70% discover sustainable products through Instagram and TikTok. They love second-hand: 40% of Gen Z shops resale the highest rate of any age group, and the second-hand market is expected to hit \$329 billion by 2029. But here is the tension: nearly half of Gen Z also prioritizes fast shipping, despite knowing its environmental cost. They are drawn to ultra-fast fashion apps where they can buy dozens of cheap outfits. This contradiction is the defining feature of Gen Z's relationship with green consumerism.

### D. Research Gap

Looking at existing research, several gaps stand out: First, while many studies confirm that Gen Z cares about sustainability, fewer have explored why the attitude-behavior gap persists for this specific generation. What makes their situation unique compared to Millennials or Gen X?

Secondly, most research treats Gen Z as a monolith, but a 2026 study using advanced segmentation analysis found that Gen Z is actually divided into distinct groups with different willingness to pay for sustainability. These segments also shifted significantly over just 20 months, suggesting that Gen Z's attitudes are more fluid than previously thought.

Third, there is limited research on how cultural context affects Gen Z's green behavior. Most of the studies come from Western countries, but a review focusing on West Java, Indonesia, found that local factors like product availability and cultural norms play a major role. Finally, the role of digital activism needs more attention. Gen Z shares environmental content online enthusiastically, but this digital behavior might actually substitute for real action rather than leading to it.

### E. Research Questions

Based on these gaps, future research should consider questions like:

1. What specific factors cause Gen Z's green attitudes to translate or not translate into actual purchases?
2. How do social media platforms simultaneously promote sustainable awareness and encourage overconsumption?
3. How does Gen Z's willingness to pay for sustainability vary by culture, income, and geographic context?
4. Does digital environmental activism lead to real behavior change, or does it serve as a substitute?
5. How stable are Gen Z's sustainability attitudes over time, given rapid socio-political changes?

### F. Statement of the Problem

Generation Z is widely regarded as the "sustainability generation" with strong pro-environmental attitudes, yet a persistent attitude-behavior gap prevents their green values from translating into consistent purchasing habits. Existing research fails to adequately explain why this gap is uniquely pronounced for Gen Z, given their immersion in social media, climate anxiety, and financial constraints. Most studies treat Gen Z as a monolith, overlooking the distinct subgroups and fluid priorities revealed by recent research, while the dual

role of social media in both promoting green awareness and fueling overconsumption remains underexamined. Additionally, the majority of findings are Western-centric, limiting understanding of how local cultural norms, product availability, and economic factors shape green behavior in other contexts. Therefore, this review identifies a critical need for nuanced, longitudinal, and context-specific research to understand what truly enables or inhibits Gen Z from closing the gap between their environmental ideals and actual purchasing behavior.

## G. Need for the Study

Understanding Gen Z is not just academically interesting; it is practically essential. By 2029, the second-hand market alone will be worth over \$300 billion, largely driven by this generation. Businesses that fail to understand Gen Z's complex relationship with sustainability will miss out on the most influential consumer cohort of the coming decade. Theoretically, studying Gen Z helps us refine existing models of consumer behavior. The classic "attitude-behavior" gap takes new forms in a generation raised on social media, fast fashion, and climate anxiety. Understanding how they navigate these competing pressures could transform how we think about green marketing.

## H. Objectives of the Study

This literature review aims to:

1. To synthesize existing academic literature on Gen Z's attitudes, beliefs, and values toward green consumerism.
2. To identify and categorize key drivers and barriers influencing Gen Z's sustainable purchasing behavior as documented in prior studies.
3. To examine the attitude-behavior gap in Gen Z's green consumption based on empirical findings from global studies.
4. To compare regional, cultural, and socio-economic variations in Gen Z's green consumer behavior reported across the literature.
5. To evaluate the role of digital media and activism in shaping Gen Z's sustainable consumption patterns.
6. To consolidate evidence-based recommendations for marketers and policymakers derived from existing research on Gen Z.

## I. Scope of the Study

This review focuses specifically on peer-reviewed and industry research about Generation Z (born 1997-2012) and green consumerism published roughly between 2020 and 2026. We emphasize studies from diverse geographic contexts but acknowledge that most research still comes from Western countries. The review excludes research focused primarily on Millennials or Gen X, except where generational comparisons are illuminating.

## J. Methodology (for a literature review)

### a. Research design and approach

This is a systematic literature review, synthesizing findings from academic journals, industry reports, and reputable media sources. The approach is qualitative and thematic, organizing findings around key themes like the attitude-behavior gap, the role of social media, and barriers to sustainable purchasing.

### b. Data collection and analysis

Sources were identified through databases like ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and industry sources (Circana, WWD). Search terms included "Generation Z sustainability," "green consumerism Gen Z," "attitude-behavior gap," and "sustainable fashion Gen Z." The review prioritizes peer-reviewed studies from 2020 onwards, supplemented by recent industry data (2025-2026) to capture current trends.

## K. Findings and Suggestions

### a. Key findings

1. Gen Z genuinely cares, but it is complicated. A 2026 study in the Journal of Consumer Marketing found that Gen Z's sustainability attitudes shifted significantly over just 20 months, influenced by socio-political changes. This means there is no single "Gen Z sustainability profile"; they are diverse, and their priorities change.
2. The attitude-behavior gap is real and large. While over 80% say sustainability matters, fast fashion continues to boom. A study on South African Gen Z found that even among environmentally concerned consumers, factors like materialism and lack of trust in sustainability claims prevented purchases.
3. Social media is a double-edged sword. It is where Gen Z discovers sustainable brands, but it is also where trend cycles accelerate, making them feel pressure to buy constantly. One study even found that Gen Z's online sharing about green topics often exceeds their actual sustainable behavior, creating a "digital green activism" gap.
4. Price and convenience are deal breakers. For all their idealism, Gen Z faces real financial constraints, especially younger members. Sustainability often costs more, and in a cost-of-living crisis, affordable options win.
5. Local vs. global matters: Research from South Africa found that different factors drive Gen Z to buy local versus global sustainable brands. Environmental concern drove both, but "cultural mindfulness" specifically influenced local brand purchases.

### b. Recommendations for stakeholders

**For businesses:** Be transparent, not perfect. Gen Z can spot greenwashing. Independent eco-labels build trust. Share your struggles and progress honestly.

Make sustainable options affordable. The premium for green products often exceeds what consumers say they will pay. Find ways to lower costs or bundle sustainability with other benefits like health and quality.

Invest in re-commerce. Resale is not a fad 16% of Gen Z says availability of resale options is the most important factor in sustainable shopping.

Meet them on social media responsibly. Use the same platforms where they discover products, but avoid fueling overconsumption.

**For policymakers:** Support green infrastructure. A review from Indonesia found that product availability and effective policies are crucial for bridging the attitude-behavior gap.

Fund environmental education. Research shows women in Gen Z exhibit stronger pro-environmental attitudes, suggesting that targeted education could amplify impact.

Crack down on greenwashing. Gen Z's trust in sustainability claims is fragile. Stronger regulations would help legitimate green brands compete.

## L. Conclusion

### a. Summary

So what's the takeaway? Generation Z wants to be the sustainability generation. They care more, research more, and talk more about environmental issues than any generation before them. But wanting to be green and actually being green are two different things. The research paints a picture of a generation caught between their values and a system designed for consumption. Fast fashion is cheap and exciting. Next-day delivery is convenient. Social media trends are hard to resist. These are not excuses they are real barriers that even the most committed young environmentalist faces. Understanding this tension is the first step. Businesses that acknowledge the difficulty of sustainable living and make it easier, cheaper, and more appealing will win Gen Z's loyalty. Policymakers who remove structural barriers will amplify their good intentions

### b. Future research directions

Several questions remain unanswered. We need more longitudinal research tracking whether Gen Z's sustainability attitudes hold as they age and gain more disposable income. Cross-cultural studies would help us understand how green consumerism looks different in emerging economies versus wealthy ones. And we desperately need research on interventions what actually closes the attitude-behavior gap? Is it better labeling? Price subsidies? Different social media algorithms?

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