

# A study on "Exploring Sustainable Consumption Practices Among Gen Z: Attitudes, Behaviours, and Impacts"

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## 1.1 Introduction:

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 12, is about responsible consumption and production. Sustainable consumption is based on the idea that reducing waste, increasing resource efficiency, and the adoption of ethical practices play a significant part in the realization. Sustainable consumption is the concept of using resources and services in a way that meets the needs of the present and future generations, while not harming the environment and leaving available resources for the next generations. This concept is in line with the worldwide requirements to decrease environmental pollution, to fight global warming, and to solve socio-economic problems.

In the 21st century world, sustainable consumption is more important because of the growing pressure to stop the negative influence of unsustainable consumerism. It leads to biodiversity loss, resource decline, and the emergence of inequitable economic systems. Political leaders, companies, and individuals are adopting environmentally friendly methods to make the ecosystem stable and the economy rich.

From an overall perspective, Gen Z, who are roughly born between 1995 and 2010, can be seen as the segment that is the most impactful on sustainable consumption. As the first natural digital lovers, Gen Z can access the information they need, thereby giving them the opportunity to fully participate in matters relating to environmental justice, ethical labour practices, and corporate transparency. According to data from Bloomberg and various market research reports, more than 40% of the world's consumers are currently members of Generation Z. This means that a sizeable percentage of consumers worldwide are Gen Z, which translates to a high level of spending power estimated at about \$360 billion in disposable income for this group. Some companies give misleading claims about their products, policies, or practices being environmentally friendly or sustainable to enhance their public image without making meaningful environmental improvements which is green washing. The easiest way to characterize Gen Z's buying habits is to say that they like eco-friendly companies, and have contempt for the practice of "greenwashing," and want to be fair and inclusive in their dealings.

Their influence, in this respect, demonstrates the pivotal position of young people in defining and shaping of the global sustainable development agenda.

## 1.2 Literature Review:

**Des Gasper, Amod Shah and Sunil Tankha (2019):** The article explores how business interests influenced SDG 12, focusing on technological solutions and production efficiency over transformative changes. Developing countries' efforts led to a standalone SDG, compelling developed nations to act, though goals often lack precision and rely on voluntary measures.

**Lewis Akenji and Magnus Bengtsson (2014):** The discussion paper by Lewis Akenji and Magnus Bengtsson emphasizes integrating Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address environmental degradation and enhance well-being. It outlines two approaches: SCP as a standalone goal or a cross-cutting objective, each with pros and cons.

**Serenella Sala, Valentina Castellani (2019):** evaluates the environmental impacts of household consumption in Europe, focusing on SDG 12. It examines five areas: food, housing, mobility, household goods, and appliances, using Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). Food is the most impactful due to agriculture, followed by housing and

mobility with significant emissions. Appliances and household goods have lesser but relevant effects, like resource depletion.

**Sandile Mkhize, Debbie Ellis (2024):** examines how consumption of organic foods assists SDG 2, SDG 12, and Agenda 2063 of Africa but is under consumed in South Africa due to its inappropriate high price tag and doubt of utility. Theory of Planned Behaviour notes affordability issues and superiority concern from consumers. Strategies, subsidy schemes, proper labelling, and public sensitisation campaigns are advised to incentivize organic production. Governments, farmers, and consumers must come together for enhancing food security and sustainability.

**Kristina Mensah, Christine Wieck, Bettina Rudloff (2023)** focusses on production over consumption in achieving SDG 12, highlighting gaps in addressing sustainable food chains holistically. It finds existing indicators inadequate for monitoring Sustainable Food Consumption (SFC), neglecting sustainable diets, consumer behaviour, and public health. While the EU's Farm-to-Fork strategy emphasizes sustainable systems, it prioritizes production over consumption patterns and sociocultural diversity. The authors call for new indicators and a holistic monitoring framework that integrates health, environment, and social dimensions for better policy alignment with SDG 12.

### 1.3 Objectives of Study:

- i. To examine the consumption patterns of Generation Z in the context of sustainability.
- ii. To analyse the challenges faced by Gen Z in adopting sustainable consumption
- iii. To assess the role of digital platforms and influencers in shaping sustainable consumption among Gen Z.

### 1.4 Research Methodology:

The method used is descriptive evaluative method and is exploratory.

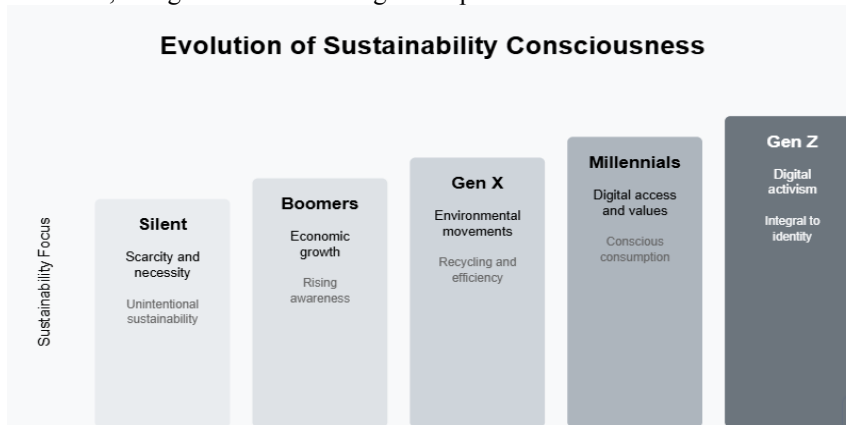
**Primary data:** The data sources for this project are mainly primary data collected through a questionnaire sent to various respondents.

**Secondary Data :** The study is review based and basically from secondary sources of data, books, journals, articles and internet.

**Sample selection :** The survey targets a sample size of 100 respondents selected through a convenient sampling technique (random sampling). By collecting responses, the study aims to enable meaningful insights into Gen Z consumer perceptions and preferences towards sustainable consumption .

### 1.5 The Evolution of Sustainable Consumption Across Generations:

Sustainable consumption is not the same as it used to be a couple of centuries ago, because of the difference in the type of societal values, along with the technological improvements made.



The above table represents how the sustainable consumption has developed from one generation to the next, starting with the silent generation's practical resourcefulness. Baby Boomers wanted to make the most of the new opportunities and became more environmentally aware. The generation of Gen X promoted recycling and balancing energy while the Millennials put ethical, eco-friendly consumption in the spotlight. Gen Z is a blend of digital activism and sustainability, who are asking for systemic solutions for a greener future.

### 1.6 Meaning of Sustainable Consumption:

Sustainable consumption represents a paradigm shift in the way individuals and societies interact with goods and services, emphasizing the judicious use of resources to meet present needs while safeguarding the ecological and socio-economic foundations necessary for future generations (United Nations, 2015). It encompasses a holistic approach to minimizing environmental degradation, promoting equity, and fostering

ethical production and consumption practices. By advocating for resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the adoption of circular economic principles, sustainable consumption aligns itself with the broader ethos of sustainability, integrating environmental stewardship with economic and social considerations.

Understanding the different types of consumers helps businesses and policymakers, create better strategies for promoting sustainable products, design environmental programs that appeal to different groups including Gen Z and make eco-friendly options more accessible to everyone. GEN Z consumers, have the digital first approach to sustainable shopping, strong emphasis on brand transparency and authenticity, preference for brands with strong social and environmental commitments, and willingness to pay premium for sustainable products. According to research, a bar chart visualizing the relative importance of different factors in Gen Z purchasing decisions is given below where Digital Shopping (35%) Brand Values (30%) Sustainability (25%) Social Impact (10%) are influencing their decisions. Table of Factors influencing GEN Z decisions.



### 1.7 Key Findings on Gen Z Consumption Patterns

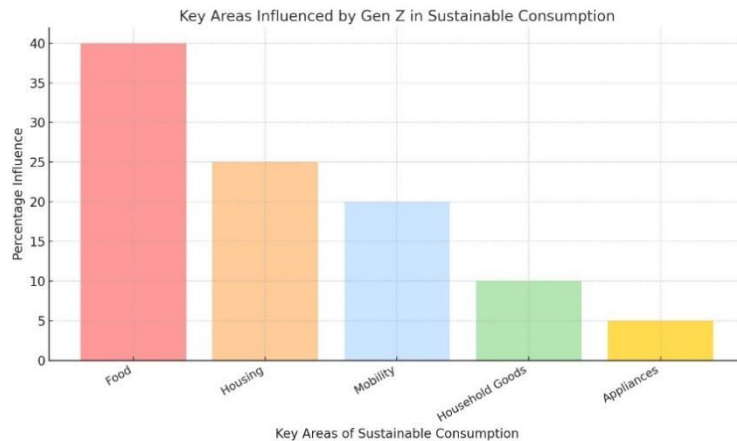
Generation Z (Gen Z), encompassing individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a distinctive cohort reshaping market dynamics. According to McKinsey & Company (2018), Gen Z's consumption patterns are deeply influenced by their pursuit of authenticity and truth, making them highly selective in their engagement with brands. A study published in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* (2021) notes that Gen Z consumers are more inclined toward digital platforms for product research and purchasing, emphasizing the importance of seamless online experiences. Gen Z's behaviour is also defined by a strong commitment to sustainability and ethical considerations. Additionally, Gen Z demonstrates a pragmatic approach to consumption, prioritizing value, quality, and unique shopping experiences. Insights from the international council of shopping centres (2023) emphasize that this generation values inclusivity, diversity, and personalized brand interactions. Understanding Gen Z's consumer attributes shaped by digital fluency, sustainability, authenticity, and pragmatism is critical for businesses aiming to engage effectively with this influential group.

#### 1.7.1 Digital and Social Media Influence:

Approximately 40% of Gen Z consumers prefer online shopping due to the ease of discovering new brands and products. This preference underscores the importance of a robust online presence for businesses aiming to capture Gen Z's attention and loyalty. Research indicates that Gen Z's digital-first shopping habits are reshaping retail strategies, emphasizing the need for brands to adapt to this generation's expectations (NielsenIQ, 2024). Influencers play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable consumption among Gen Z. By integrating eco-friendly products and sustainable practices into their content, influencers inspire their audience to adopt greener behaviours. A study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* highlights that influencers have a positive impact on followers' sustainable consumption, suggesting that consumers are more likely to view eco-friendly products favourably when endorsed by trusted figures (Khan et al.,

#### 1.7.2 Ethical and Value-Based Decision Making:

This generation has strong brand affinities for those reflecting its values, like inclusiveness and environmentalism. In fact, research says one in three Gen Z consumers have already dropped a brand due to its unsustainable practices. More than any prior generation, Gen Z consumers take into consideration whether the things they buy align with what is right and will often favour a purchase that promotes positive actions on both societal and environmental fronts.



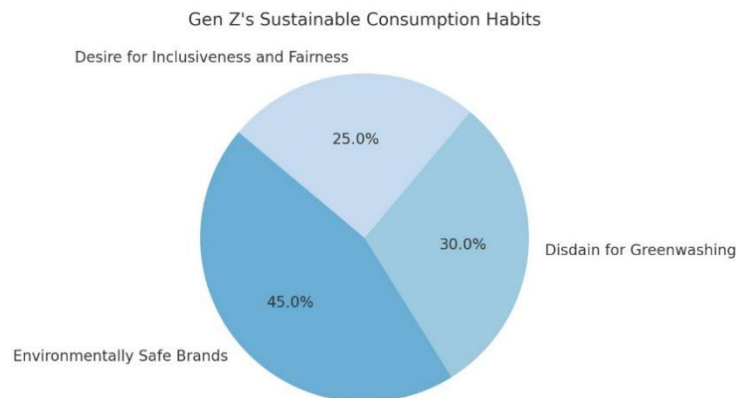
The above bar chart displays the Key Areas of Sustainable Consumption influenced by Gen Z: Food (40%), Housing (25%), Mobility (20%), Household goods (10%), Appliances (5%).

### 1.7.3 Tech-Savvy and Innovative Consumers:

Gen Z's ease with technology extends to their support for new consumption models, including subscription services and shared consumption. They are drawn to brands that are transparent about their sourcing and production practices, which aligns with their clamor for ethical consumption.

### 1.8 Sustainability issues and Gen Z's Consumption:

Generation Z (Gen Z), individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as a pivotal force in addressing sustainability issues, demonstrating a profound commitment to environmental and social causes. Research indicates that Gen Z consumers exhibit a strong preference for sustainable brands, with many willing to spend more on products that align with their environmental values (Forbes, 2021). Their buying behaviour is influenced by a desire to drive systemic change, and they often hold companies accountable for their environmental and ethical practices. In summary, Gen Z plays a significant role in promoting sustainability through their consumer behaviours and advocacy. Their emphasis on environmental accountability and ethical responsibility influences market trends and compels organizations to prioritize sustainable practices. However, addressing the gap between their intentions and behaviours remains a critical area for further exploration.



The above pie chart as per research represents Gen Z's Sustainable Consumption Habits, highlighting their preference.

### 1.9 Key Stakeholders Encouraging Sustainable Consumption among Gen Z:

#### 1.9.1 Business Organizations and Brands:

Business organizations and brands play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable consumption among Generation Z (Gen Z). By adopting ethical sourcing, sustainable packaging, and transparency, companies can align with Gen Z's values, fostering brand loyalty and expanding market share. Research indicates that Gen Z consumers are more inclined towards brands that demonstrate genuine commitment to sustainability. Brands like Patagonia and ThredUp exemplify this approach by integrating sustainability into their core business models, thereby resonating with Gen Z consumers.

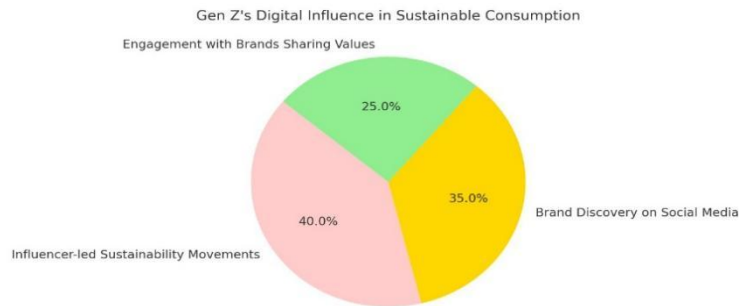
**1.9.2 Government and Policy Makers:**

Governments and policymakers are instrumental in encouraging sustainable consumption among Gen Z through the implementation of supportive policies and educational initiatives. Eco-labelling schemes and public awareness campaigns can effectively increase the visibility of sustainable options, guiding young consumers towards environmentally friendly choices. A study in *Frontiers in Environmental Science* emphasizes the importance of governmental strategies in shaping the sustainable behaviour of Gen Z, suggesting that targeted policies can significantly influence their consumption patterns (Pop et al., 2023). By creating an enabling environment, governments can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices among the younger population.

**1.9.3 Social Media Platforms and Influencers:**

Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become pivotal in promoting sustainable consumption among Generation Z (Gen Z). These platforms not only facilitate product discovery but also enable direct engagement between brands and consumers who share similar values.

Research indicates that exposure to sustainability-focused content on social media significantly impacts Gen Z's sustainable habits and consumption behaviours. Influencers play a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's sustainable purchasing behaviours. Despite the positive influence of social media and influencers, Gen Z faces challenges in distinguishing genuinely sustainable products from those that are not.



The above pie chart exhibits Gen Z's Digital Influence in Sustainable Consumption,

**1.13. Summary of Data Interpretation:** The responses from the surveys reflect demographics and awareness about the issue of sustainable consumption.

**Table 1.13.1- Table of Age category of respondents**

Age Group	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
10-15	2%	2
16-20	55%	55
21-25	43%	43

Response to age: Most respondents are aged 16-20 followed by 21-25 years (55% and 43%, respectively).

**Table 1.13.2- Table of gender category of respondents**

Gender	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Male	48%	48
Female	52%	52
Prefer not to say	0%	0

Gender distribution is approximately equal, with 52% female and 48% male.

**Table 1.13.3- Table of current education level of the respondents**

Education level	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Middle School	2%	2
High School	20%	20
Undergraduate	40%	40
Graduate	24%	24
Postgraduate	14%	14
Other	0%	0

**Table 1.13.4- Table of Occupation of the respondents**

Occupation	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Student	54%	54

Sales	3%	3
Tele sales executive	3%	3
Software	3%	3
Service Engineer	2%	2
Account Manger	1%	1
Bipc	1%	1
Businesses	2%	2
Corporate Employee	2%	2
In school	2%	2
Msc Computer	1%	1
RTO	1%	1

Educational distribution: 40% are undergraduates and 24% are graduates. Well over half (53%) are students with an array of other professions.

**Table 1.13.5- Table of familiarity with the concept of sustainable consumption**

Response	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Yes	83%	83
No	4%	4
Unsure	13%	13

In terms of awareness about sustainability, 83% said they know what the sustainable concept referred to, while 13% said they did not.

**Table 1.13.6- Table of environmental and social concern of the products purchased**

Concern Level	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Very concerned	44%	44
Somewhat concerned	48%	48
Not very concerned	6%	6
Not at all concerned	2%	2

Environmental and social impact concerns are elevated with 44% very concerned and 48% somewhat concerned. 6% not very concerned and 2% not at all concerned.

**Table 1.13.7- Table of influence of social media towards sustainable consumption**

Influence Level	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Very influential	34%	34
Somewhat influential	49%	49
Not very influential	13%	13
Not at all influential	4%	4

Social media is the common one, with 49% finding it somewhat influential and 34% very influential. 13% not very influential and 4% not at all influential.

**Table 1.13.8- Table of Gen Z significant role in promoting global sustainability**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Yes, a very significant role	56%	56
Yes, a moderate role	29%	29
No significant role	7%	7
Unsure	8%	8

Gen Z playing a significant role in promoting global sustainability 56% are yes, very significant, 29% are yes, a moderate role, 7% are no significant role and 8% are unsure.

**Table 1.13.9- Table of influencers influencing Gen Z on sustainable consumption**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Yes	72%	72
No	28%	28

The data interprets that 72% think that influencers influence Gen Z and 28% think that influencers do not influence Gen Z.

**Table 1.13.10- Table of engaging in sustainable consumption**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Very often	34%	34
Often	38%	38
Sometimes	26%	26
Rarely	1%	1
Never	1%	1

The above data interprets the 34% engage very often, 38% often, 26% sometimes, 1% rarely and another 1% never.

**Table 1.13.11- Table of responses towards environmentally friendly cosmetic products**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Not important	10%	10
Somewhat important	48%	48
Very important	42%	42

The data unfolds that for 42% of them the product from a socially responsible company is very important, for 48% it is somewhat important and for 10% it is not important.

**Table 1.13.12- Table of responses towards environmentally friendly clothing and textile**

Importance Level	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Not important	7%	7
Somewhat important	32%	32
Important	39%	39
Very important	22%	22

For 22% of them clothing and textiles for a socially responsible company is very important, for 39% it is somewhat important, for 32% it is important and for 7% not important.

**Table 1.13.13- Table of responses towards environmentally friendly food and beverages**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Not important	6%	6
Somewhat important	25%	25
Important	34%	34
Very important	35%	35

For 35% them food and beverages from a socially responsible company is very important, for 34% it is important, for 25% it is somewhat important and for 6% it is not important.

**Table 1.13.14- Table of analysis of sustainable product affordability**

Response Option	Percentage	Count (out of 100)
Very challenging	44%	44
Somewhat challenging	40%	40
Not very challenging	14%	14
Not at all challenging	2%	2

For 44% of them affording sustainable products is very challenging, for 40% it is somewhat challenging, for 14% it is not very challenging and for 2% it is not at all challenging.

**Summary of the findings:** A poll of 100 Gen Z participants (16-25 years old) indicates high levels of awareness of sustainable consumption, with 83% having heard of the term. Environmental and social responsibility are a concern (92%), and social media has a significant impact on their opinions (83%). Most feel they have an important part to play in global sustainability (56%), and influencers also affect their decisions (72%). Affordability is an issue, with 84% of them considering sustainable products to be expensive. Ethical concerns are important, particularly for cosmetics (42%), food and drink (35%), and clothing (32%).

**1.14 Conclusion:** Thus, Generation Z has emerged as a transformative force in redefining global consumption patterns, prioritizing sustainability, ethical responsibility, and inclusiveness. Their digital fluency and eco-conscious values not only influence corporate strategies but also inspire systemic shifts towards sustainability. However, challenges such as financial constraints, misinformation, and the tension between practicality and ideals

highlight the complexities of sustainable behaviour adoption. To fully harness Gen Z's potential in advancing sustainability, a collaborative effort involving businesses, policymakers, and society is imperative. Transparent communication, supportive policies, and innovative business models must align with Gen Z's expectations to drive meaningful change. Ultimately, Generation Z's advocacy and consumption choices pave the way for a sustainable future, bridging the gap between aspirations and actions for a resilient, equitable world.

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