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The Influence of Sustainable Fast Fashion on Generation Z's Purchasing Decisions

Khin Hnin Ko [1], Kyawt Nandar Soe [2], Aye Su Aung [3], Min Lu Maung [4]
[1, 2, 3, 4] International College, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

Srisongruk Prohmvitak [5]*
[5] International College, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

*Corresponding Author: srisongruk.p@rsu.ac.th

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of sustainable fast fashion on Generation Z's purchasing decisions and explores the gap between their positive attitudes toward sustainability and their actual buying behavior. Although Gen Z is widely recognized as environmentally and socially conscious, a large portion of individuals continue to purchase products from fast fashion brands. This research aims to identify the key factors influencing this contradiction. A mixed-methods approach was used, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. A total of 417 Gen Z respondents participated in an online survey, and 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into consumer perceptions and motivations. The results show that although most of the respondents' express awareness of environmental issues and support the concept of sustainable fashion, their purchasing behavior is strongly influenced by practical factors such as price, affordability, brand trust, and social media trends. Price sensitivity emerged as the most significant barrier, particularly among students with limited budgets. Additionally, concerns about greenwashing reduce consumer trust in sustainability claims made by fashion brands. Social media was discovered to both raise awareness of sustainability and promote the trends of fast fashion. The study summarizes that Gen Z's support for sustainable fast fashion is conditional and mostly depends on affordability, transparency, and trendiness. These results highlight the importance for fashion brands to improve pricing strategies, transparency, and authentic sustainability communication to reduce the attitude-behavior gap and encourage more responsible consumption among young consumers.

Keywords: Sustainable fast fashion, Generation Z, Purchasing behavior, Attitude-behavior gap, Price sensitivity

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INTRODUCTION

Fast fashion first emerged in Europe in the late 20th century as a new concept in the apparel retail industry. It became popular because retailers could quickly imitate designs from luxury fashion brands

and sell similar clothing at significantly lower prices. Unlike traditional fashion cycles, which usually last for several months, fast fashion shortens the entire process from design and production to distribution and sales into just a few weeks. This rapid production model allows brands to respond quickly to changing fashion trends and deliver new styles to consumers more frequently (Kelleher, 2026). By reducing production costs, often through outsourcing labor to other countries, companies can produce trendy clothing at very affordable prices, which has changed consumer expectations toward frequent and inexpensive fashion purchases (Harris et al., 2016). This fast fashion model fully became in shape, with companies such as Zara leading the industry by delivering new designs from concept to store shelves within weeks. These companies showed the world how to make clothing faster than anyone could imagine, encouraging consumers to view clothing as more disposable (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Problem Statement and Importance

Fast fashion production has created environmental and social concerns, including pollution, waste, and labor issues. In response, many global brands have introduced sustainability initiatives. For example, Zara's Join Life collection promotes the use of recycled fibers and environmentally responsible materials in garment production (Gheorghe & Matefi, 2021), while H&M's Conscious Collection focuses on organic cotton and recycled polyester to promote more sustainable fashion consumption (Lay, 2023). These efforts aim to combine the speed and affordability of fast fashion with environmental and social responsibility. These companies adopt green marketing campaigns in order to show that fashion can still be fast and trendy yet cause less damage to the planet. At the same time, Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Brunjes, 2026), represents a major group of fashion consumers. This generation is often considered environmentally aware and socially responsible due to their exposure to global sustainability issues through technology and social media (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Therefore, understanding their purchasing behavior is important for promoting sustainable consumption in the fashion industry.

Most of the studies have shown that Generation Z generally expresses strong support for sustainability and environmental protection. However, research highlights a clear discrepancy between their attitudes and actual behavior. Many consumers continue to purchase from fast fashion brands such as Shein, Zara, and H&M despite being aware of the negative environmental impacts (Diddi et al., 2019). This is explained by the attitude-behavior gap, where consumers' values do not align with their actions due to factors such as affordability, convenience, and style preferences (McNeill & Moore, 2015). In addition, some studies suggest that consumers are skeptical of sustainability claims made by fashion brands, as companies may exaggerate their environmental efforts, leading to concerns about greenwashing (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

This study addresses the environmental and social issues associated with fast fashion and examines the purchasing behavior of Generation Z in the context of sustainable fast fashion. While previous studies have mainly focused on sustainability awareness and attitudes, this research emphasizes the gap between attitudes and actual purchasing behavior. The study is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of how factors such as price sensitivity, brand trust, and social media influence affect consumer decisions. Furthermore, this research differs from most of the studies by combining both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview insights, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of Generation Z's purchasing behavior.

Research Objectives

1. To identify factors influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions toward sustainable fast fashion.
2. To analyze the relationship between Gen Z's sustainability awareness and their actual purchasing behavior.
3. To examine how social media and brand trust/credibility (including greenwashing) affect Gen Z's perception of sustainable fast fashion.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on clothing and apparel items provided by fast fashion companies that claim to incorporate sustainable practices yet still require rapid production cycles. Luxury and highend fashion brands are out of the scope since they run on another pricing system and consumption trends, which are not as applicable to the consumers of Gen Z.

Expected Outcomes

This research is expected to produce both academic and practical contributions to the field of marketing and sustainability and to understand Gen Z's motivations and barriers in purchasing sustainable fast fashion. The study will prevent young consumers from buying sustainable products. Understanding these factors can help identify ways to close the attitude-behavior gap and provide insights for fashion brands to design more effective sustainability communication strategies.

The findings will help companies develop marketing messages that truly connect with Gen Z values, focusing on authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility rather than superficial "green" claims. To promote sustainable consumer habits and raise environmental awareness among Gen Z.

By highlighting the consequences of fast fashion and showing how individual choices make a difference, this study hopes to inspire more conscious buying behaviors. In the long term, this can encourage a shift toward a more responsible and ethical fashion industry, where sustainability becomes a norm rather than a trend.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Fast Fashion Industry Overview

Fast fashion began in the late 1900s, and it completely changed how modern shoppers buy and use clothing (Joy et al., 2012). Companies like Zara and H&M broke the old rules of fashion. They fully redesigned their process to create a new style from the drawing board to the store shelf in a few weeks instead of many months (Cachon & Swinney, 2011). It allowed them to copy high-cost trendy styles quickly and sell them at sale prices, essentially making trendy clothes affordable for almost everyone. The whole business model encourages people to buy clothes constantly and treat them as temporary items, something they wear for a short time before throwing them away. However, this super-fast and efficient way of working comes at a huge and often unseen cost. Because the industry relies heavily on cheap labor and making massive amounts of product, it has created serious ethical and environmental problems, forcing us to question if this system can truly last (Joy et al., 2012).

Fast Fashion: Growth and Environmental Impact

The environmental damage caused by this fast, high-volume industry is enormous. The fashion industry is widely known as one of the world's biggest polluters, often ranking second only to the oil industry in its negative effects (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Making clothes uses a huge amount of our planet's resources. For example, producing just one simple cotton shirt uses an estimated 700 gallons of water. At the same time, the process of dying and finishing fabrics pollutes large amounts of clean water with chemical waste (Kant, 2012). The industry is also a huge cause of invisible pollution. Fake fibers like polyester and nylon shed tiny pieces of plastic, called microplastics, when clothes are washed, which contributes approximately 35 percent of all the microplastic pollution in our oceans (Bick et al., 2018).

In addition, the industry consumes a significant amount of fossil fuels for producing raw materials as well as transporting clothes globally, thus adding to its carbon footprint even further. Because of all these problems, experts strongly agree that the fashion world must urgently move away from the current "make-use-throw away" system, and it must adopt a circular economy, which means focusing on

using sustainable materials, making clothes last a long time, and using recycling systems that close the loop (Rathinamoorthy, 2019).

Fast Fashion's Impact on Workers' Lives

Looking beyond the planet, fast fashion also has a major human cost. This is mostly because brands are always trying to find the very cheapest way to make clothes. This pressure pushes factories in poorer countries to run like sweatshops (Nguyen, 2020). The workers, many of whom are young women and have very tough lives. They typically earn fairly small amounts of money, are forced to work long, dangerous hours, and labor in unhealthy and dangerous factories.

The most heartbreaking example was the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh, which tragically killed over 1,100 people (Pramanik et al., 2015). This event clearly showed everyone the true price of cheap clothes. To keep store prices low, the global system often completely ignores basic things like fair wages, decent work hours, and safe working conditions. Also, fast fashion is bad for society as it promotes a "throw-away" culture (Hassan et al., 2022). By constantly promoting new trends, the industry puts psychological pressure on consumers to keep buying and discarding. Even people's self-image and mental health are influenced by this (Hassan et al., 2022). In the end, this cycle keeps money and power in rich countries while factory workers are continuously used just to feed the desire for the newest fashion trend.

Negative Consequences on the Environment and Society

The high growth rate of the world textile market has made clothes not a durable commodity but a disposable commodity (Bick et al., 2018). In the last two decades, the demand for apparel has grown four times, with over 80 billion garments produced and sold annually, which leads to disastrous environmental effects (Kiviluoma, Kautto, & Levänen, 2023). The fashion industry is one of the largest consumers of freshwater, requiring thousands of liters of water to produce a single cotton shirt, and textile dyeing contributes significantly to global water pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In addition to the waste of water, fast fashion is based on nonrenewable materials and a huge consumption of energy. Synthetic fabrics like polyester and nylon release tiny plastic particles when they are washed, and these microplastics make up a significant portion of pollution in the oceans. The high volume of their production is also consuming millions of barrels of oil every year, worsening the climate crisis (Bick et al., 2018). The industry needs to reduce these effects by moving away from a linear take-make-dispose model to a circular economy based on sustainable materials such as organic cotton and lyocell and closed-loop production and recycling (Lisa Keßler et al., 2021).

The social implications are also threatening. Behind the cheaply produced clothes are millions of underpaid workers in Third World countries where labor laws are lax or absent. Many garment workers, most of whom are women, are forced to work in poor and unsafe environments, with long hours and wages that are far too low to support a basic standard of living. This reflects a serious issue of inequality and exploitation within the industry, where workers' well-being is often overlooked in favor of profit. Cases of child labor forced labor, and even human trafficking have been reported through the supply chains (Ekenga, 2018). Such insatiable ambitions to reduce costs undermine human dignity and increase poverty and gender inequality. For customers in more affluent countries, purchasing cheap and fashionable garments may appear harmless, but it often hides the suffering and exploitation experienced by the workers who produce them. To address these closely related environmental and social injustices, there must be a global commitment to ethical labor standards, sustainable production practices, and responsible consumer behavior (Bick et al., 2018).

Sustainable Fast Fashion Practices

Eco-Friendly Materials and Recycling Processes

These sustainability efforts often focus on using alternative materials and finding ways to recycle clothing. For example, Zara's Join Life collection increases the use of recycled materials such as recycled polyester and uses fewer synthetic fibers compared with the brand's regular product lines, demonstrating an effort to improve sustainability in fast fashion (Gheorghe & Matefi, 2021).

However, data analysis also reveals hidden trade-offs in sustainability initiatives within the fast fashion industry. Although brands promote environmentally friendly collections, their actual environmental impact may be limited. For example, initiatives such as H&M's Conscious Collection claim to use more sustainable materials, yet concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of these strategies in reducing environmental harm (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Additionally, synthetic fibers still dominate textile production globally, raising questions about the true sustainability of such collections (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). Furthermore, the use of recycled polyester often produced from plastic bottles does not fully solve environmental problems because synthetic textiles release microfibers during washing, contributing to microplastic pollution in aquatic environments (Napper & Thompson, 2016).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Transparency Initiatives

The most critical problem in sustainable fast fashion is greenwashing, or intentionally misleading consumers about one's own environmental performance. Researchers have explained how *"if a company's main plan is always focused on making huge amounts of products, then even if they fix a few small things honestly, those fixes just hide the real, big problems of the whole system"* (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Greenwashing involves things such as sustainably sourced products in relation to products offered in their green lines or unreasonably low standards. However, in order to promote CSR transparency, there must be verification. There exist organizations such as the Fashion Transparency Index, which audits large corporations with 258 factors (Fashion Revolution, 2023). Greenwashing involves practices such as promoting small "sustainable" product lines or setting unreasonably low environmental standards. However, to promote CSR transparency, such claims must be verified. Organizations such as the Fashion Transparency Index evaluate major brands using hundreds of indicators to assess disclosure and accountability (Fashion Revolution, 2023). Without transparency in their supply chains, brands cannot guarantee human rights and responsible practices. When misleading sustainability information becomes public, consumer trust declines and people begin to doubt the credibility of environmental initiatives (Lu et al., 2022). Authenticity and credibility in brand sustainability claims therefore play a crucial role in shaping consumption decisions.

Gen Z Consumer Behavior

Characteristics and Lifestyle of Gen Z

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Brunjes, 2026), is often called the digital generation because they grew up surrounded by technology and social media. Gen Z is highly up-to-date, knowledgeable, and socially aware, and they deeply care and are concerned about issues like environmental issues, fair working conditions, and sustainability. Many Gen Z consumers choose clothing fashion that matches their personal beliefs and values, and they are concerned about brands that use eco-friendly materials, pay fair wages, and help reduce waste. Sustainable fast fashion is not only clothing but also a way to show individuality and express what they believe in.

The Relationship between Gen Z and Sustainable Fast Fashion

Fast fashion has transformed the global clothing industry through its rapid production cycle, cheap-quality products, and short product lives. Whenever this makes fashion cheap and accessible, it produces incredible overconsumption; 80 billion items of clothing are bought annually (Bick et al., 2018). The environmental cost in the fashion sector is that it is the second-largest user of water, fabric use is now

the biggest water polluter, and man-made fibers produce the most ocean microplastics (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Gen Z is at the center of this issue. They are generally very aware of environmental problems, and many are willing to pay more for sustainable products while expecting brands to follow ethical practices. On the other hand, their strong interest in trendy and affordable clothing encourages them to buy from fast fashion brands like Shein, which has grown rapidly in popularity, especially through social media trends. Though they are deeply concerned with sustainability, the influence of affordability, trends, and social media often wins. This research explores how sustainable action and sustainable branding can influence Gen Z's shopping behavior to find solutions for the value-consumption gap.

Social Media Influence and Brand Engagement

Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are all social media platforms that have provided a crucial platform in shaping fashion consumption by Generation Z. The current generation is spending most of their time on the Internet and social sites, not only to have fun but also to learn about trends and communicate with brands. Influencers are instrumental in the formation of opinions and intentions to buy the product because their suggestions are seen as genuine and real-life relative to the standard advertising methods (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Brand engagement is also enhanced through social media since such interactive functions as likes, comments, and stories enable Gen Z to develop a continuing relationship with brands. Authenticity and transparency are crucial; brands that post sustainability information or share ethical manufacturing news of product production acquire more loyalty. It has been found that both brand-generated and user-generated content have a significant impact on the sustainable purchase intentions of Gen Z. Nevertheless, social media is an agent of overconsumption, which is supported by viral trends and fast fashion haul videos, making it a two-sided influence (Pourkabirian et al., 2021). Finally, the attitude-behavior gap can be reduced by supporting valuable online interactions based on authentic communication and the credibility of the influencer to promote sustainable consumption.

Attitudes toward Sustainability and Ethical Products

Gen Z is very conscious and caring about sustainability and ethical consumption. Their consumption is strongly affected by international issues such as climate change and pollution, as well as labor abuse, which they tend to hear about on social media. This has led to the trend where most Gen Z consumers are attracted to brands that show an actual interest in environmental preservation, decent wages, and transparent supply chains. They would like to relate to companies with values like their own, and sustainability is their personal identity and social responsibility.

However, awareness does not always result in consistent behavior. Although most Gen Z consumers are interested in the planet, a significant percentage continue to purchase the products of fast fashion brands on the grounds of affordability, convenience, and the endless exposure to the newest trends. This attitude-behavior gap reflects the contradiction between their moral inclinations and realities. Besides, Gen Z is wary of greenwashing when companies make false sustainability claims, and it lessens their trust in a brand (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Diddi et al., 2019).

Therefore, the idea of authenticity, affordability, and accessibility is the key to the formation of the attitude of Gen Z towards sustainable and ethical products. The transparent brands, providing eco-friendly options with fair prices and telling the truth, will have an increased chance of gaining their loyalty and making them switch to the sustainable fashion options.

Factors Influencing Purchasing Decisions

Environmental Concern

Environmental concern is one of the main factors influencing Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions toward sustainable fast fashion. It mentions how many individuals are aware of

environmental issues and are willing to make choices that save the planet. Gen Z is often described as a "green generation" because they have grown up with increasing awareness of environmental problems such as pollution, climate change, and overproduction (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). This growing awareness encourages Gen Z consumers to choose eco-friendly clothing brands that emphasize sustainability, ethical labor practice, and recycling initiatives.

This growing environmental awareness encourages many Gen Z consumers to choose ecofriendly clothing brands that emphasize sustainability, ethical labor practices, and recycling initiatives (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Research indicates that individuals with strong environmental concerns are more likely to avoid products that harm the environment and instead support brands that demonstrate social and environmental responsibility (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). This environmental concern often leads to more positive attitudes toward green consumption and sustainable purchasing behavior among consumers.

Price and Affordability

Price and affordability play an important role in influencing Generation Z's purchasing decisions toward sustainable fast fashion. The way consumers' perception reflects price influences how they evaluate whether a product is worth its cost, balancing quality, design, and value (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Consumers often tend to evaluate a product's price not just by the number on the tag but also by the level of benefits and satisfaction they look forward to receiving. For Generation Z, who are mostly students or young professionals with limited budgets, affordability plays a crucial role in deciding what and where they buy.

Although many Generation Z consumers are deeply concerned about sustainability, higher prices for eco-friendly clothing often prevent them from purchasing these products. Research shows that sustainable fashion tends to cost more due to fair labor practices, the use of organic materials, and responsible production methods (Harris et al., 2016; Diddi et al., 2019). As a result, affordable fast fashion brands like Shein and Zara continue to appeal to Generation Z consumers by offering trendy styles at lower prices, despite their negative environmental effects.

Consumers are more likely to purchase when they perceive prices as fair and appropriate. A fair price gives buyers the feeling that they are getting good quality at a reasonable cost, while a relative price compares value with other available options (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). For sustainable fashion brands, offering competitive and transparent pricing can help close the gap between Generation Z's environmental values and their actual purchasing behavior (Diddi et al., 2019).

Brand Trust and Perception of Authenticity

Most Gen Z consumers are more likely to be loyal to brands that use social media to engage with their CSR activities, including sharing sustainability reports, discussing ethical collaborators, or uploading behind-the-scenes insights about their supply chain. Most young consumers do not believe companies that make sustainability claims but do not substantiate these claims. (Niinimaki et al., 2020).

Perception of authenticity describes how real and honest a brand or influencer comes across to consumers. Authenticity plays an important role in building trust and loyalty toward sustainable fashion brands. The young generation prefers and values brands that are transparent about their production processes, materials, and environmental impact for Generation Z. They are quick to lose trust in companies that overstate or make wrong sustainability claims, also known as greenwashing.

Authenticity means being open and transparent. It shows real actions rather than just words. For instance, Patagonia has built strong trust by openly sharing supply chain details and encouraging customers to repair and reuse old clothes. Similarly, when Generation Z recognizes this sincerity, it strengthens their emotional connection to the brand and encourages both purchasing decisions and long-term loyalty (Guerreiro et al., 2023).

Influencer Marketing

The influencers also play a critical role in making sustainability an identity and a way of life. Popular personalities showcasing environmentally friendly brands or talking about sustainable consumption can shift sustainability from an exclusive issue to a desirable and mainstream value (Haastrup & Marshall, 2024; El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025). However, the very platforms that encourage the adoption of sustainable choices reinforce the fast fashion trends due to the use of viral challenges and short-lived trends in fashion, which creates the conflict between the values and actual behavior of Gen Z (Del Olmo Arriaga et al., 2025).

The Attitude-Behavior Gap

Although Generation Z often claims to support sustainability and environmental protection, their actual buying behavior does not always match these beliefs. Most people in the Gen Z generation care about the environment and social problems but still buy from fast fashion outlets. Such a paradox is conditional on the low cost, convenience, and availability of new trends in fast fashion that better suit their limited budgets and lifestyles led through social media (Niinimaki et al., 2020). Gen Z tends to put their desires in the short term and not in the long term, even though they are aware of the negative consequences of overproduction and labor exploitation.

This behavior is attributed to several psychological, economic, and cultural reasons. It is psychologically easier to be rewarded immediately with a purchase of fashionable yet cheap garments than to be rewarded later with morally correct decisions (McNeill & Moore, R., 2015).

All these obstacles generate an intricate conflict between values and acts. The mindset-action gap is not the most effective way to tackle it, and it will be necessary to change the structure of the process, for example, affordable sustainable products and openness in brand communications, to make the ideals of Gen Z fit their consumption trends.

Hypothesis

Table 1. Hypothesis Statement

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Expected Relationship
H1	Environmental concern positively influences purchasing decisions	Positive
H2	Perception of sustainability positively influences purchasing decisions	Positive
H3	Price sensitivity negatively influences purchasing decisions	Negative
H4	Brand transparency positively influences purchasing decisions	Positive
H5	Greenwashing concern negatively influences purchasing decisions	Negative
H6	Social media influence positively affects purchasing decisions	Positive

H1 suggests that environmental concern positively influences Generation Z's purchasing decisions, meaning that individuals who are more aware of environmental issues are more likely to support sustainable fashion. H2 proposes that a positive perception of sustainability increases the likelihood of purchasing sustainable fast fashion products. In contrast, H3 assumes that price sensitivity negatively affects purchasing decisions, as higher prices discourage consumers from buying sustainable products.

H4 indicates that brand transparency has a positive impact on purchasing decisions, as clear and honest communication builds consumer trust. Meanwhile, H5 states that concerns about greenwashing negatively influence purchasing behavior, reducing confidence in brands that provide misleading sustainability claims. Lastly, H6 suggests that social media plays a positive role in influencing purchasing decisions by shaping trends and increasing awareness among Generation Z consumers.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the influence of sustainable fast fashion on Gen Z's purchasing decisions. We selected a mixed methods design because there are numerous aspects regarding buying behavior, including but not limited to awareness of sustainable products, price sensitivity, desire for trends, level of trust in brands, and influence from social media. The use of quantitative and qualitative data will allow for greater comprehension of the attitude-behavior gap, which this research focuses on (Diddi et al., 2019).

The quantitative component consisted of an online survey with 417 Gen Z respondents, which enabled the researcher to gather measurable data regarding awareness levels, purchasing habits, and decision-making factors. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews with 10 Gen Z participants to explore deeper motivations, conflicts, and perceptions that cannot be captured through surveys alone. The integration of both methods provides stronger validity and richer interpretation of Gen Z's real behavior.

Data Collection

Quantitative Questionnaires

A structured questionnaire was developed and distributed through Google Forms to 417 Gen Z respondents aged 18-29 (Brunjes, 2026). We shared our survey link through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LINE groups, university networks, and student communities.

The survey contains 30 questions:

1. Demographic Information
   - Age, gender, occupation, and monthly spending.
2. General Shopping Habits
   - Frequency of clothing purchases, preferred brands, and shopping motivations.
3. Sustainability Awareness
   - Knowledge of sustainable fashion and familiarity with eco-friendly collections such as H&M Conscious, Zara Join Life, and Uniqlo's Recycling Program.
4. Influencing Factors
   - Price sensitivity, style preference, social media influence, brand trust, and perceptions of greenwashing.
5. Attitude-Behavior Gap
   - The difference between Gen Z's environmental beliefs and their actual buying behavior.
6. Consumer Suggestions
   - Open-ended items asking what improvements brands should make.

The survey design follows the structured questionnaire style used in the sample study, featuring clear thematic divisions and a combination of Likert-scale and multiple-choice items to facilitate detailed statistical analysis.

Qualitative Interviews

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Gen Z participants who had experience buying fast fashion and had some awareness of sustainability issues. Each interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes and was conducted online or face-to-face, depending on participant availability. Permission for recording was obtained, and participants were assured that their personal information would remain confidential. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that aligned directly with the research objectives. Key interview questions included the following:

General Shopping Habits & Awareness

1. "Can you describe your typical clothing shopping habits? Which brands do you purchase most frequently?"
2. "What comes to your mind when you hear 'sustainable fast fashion'?"
3. "Are you familiar with eco-friendly collections like H&M Conscious or Zara Join Life? What is your impression of them?"

Attitude-Behavior Gap

4. "GenZ is known to support sustainability but still buys fast fashion. Does this describe you? Why or why not?"
5. "What barriers prevent you from buying sustainable fashion exclusively?"
6. "Do you ever feel the conflict between being trendy and being environmentally responsible?"

Environmental & Ethical Concerns

7. "How do environmental issues influence your perception of the fashion industry?"
8. "Does learning about factory working conditions affect your choices?"

Price Sensitivity

9. "How much extra would you be willing to pay for a sustainable item?"
10. "Is affordability the main reason you choose brands like Shein or Zara?"

Brand Trust & Social Media

11. "Do you trust fast fashion sustainability claims?"
12. "How much do platforms like TikTok and Instagram influence what you buy?"

Outlook

13. "What changes do brands need to make for you to choose sustainable clothing?"
14. "Do you see yourself shifting away from fast fashion in the future?"

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Question 1: I am deeply concerned about the environmental pollution caused by the fashion industry (e.g., water pollution, waste)

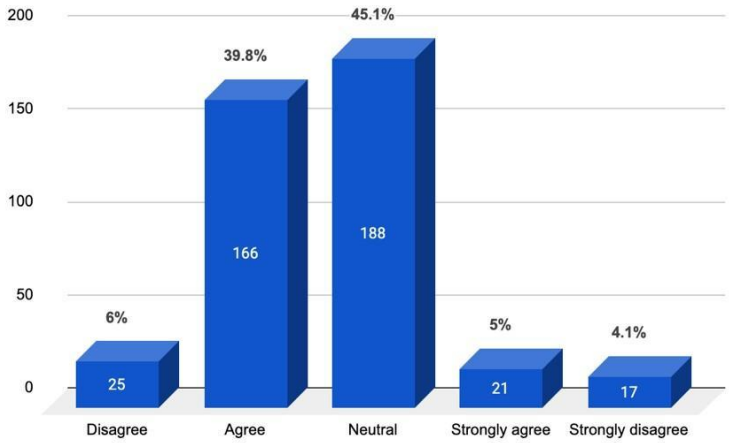


Figure 1. Level of Concern About Environmental Pollution Caused by the Fashion Industry

Many respondents recognized pollution from the fashion industry, but the strongest response was 188 Neutral (45.1%), 166 Agree (39.8%), 25 Disagree (6%), 21 Strongly agree (5%), and 17 Strongly disagree (4.1%). This pattern suggests that concern exists, but it is often not fully formed into a strong personal stance. (See figure 1).

Many responses given in the interview can be used to give an explanation as to why the survey outcome appears to be neutral-heavy. In general, the respondents talked about environmental damage in general and broad terms. They tended to take sustainability as a personal lifestyle preference/lifestyle choice and not as a morally compulsory thing to do. Indicatively, several respondents described sustainability fashion as primarily the one that is worn over a long period of time, whereas some expressed themselves simply by saying that they should check the tag rather than explaining the effects of pollution, waste, or production in detail. It indicates that Gen Z consumers are aware of the concept of sustainability, and it is an issue that, in fact, runs rather at an abstract level and does not always influence daily purchasing patterns.

The large neutral group is probably the result of a distance effect. The pollution is perceived as reality, but it seems too distant from everyday life and instant shopping choices such as budget, trends, social image, and so on. Conversely, Gen Z has heard about sustainability, but the awareness does not necessarily translate into a strong concern unless it is associated with something that matters personally, like health, financial savings, identity, or social values. This is significant since in cases where concern is weak or uncertain, there are more chances where it will be overridden by more practical intentions such as price and style when the actual purchase is being made.

Question 2: Do you believe sustainable fashion contributes positively to environmental protection?

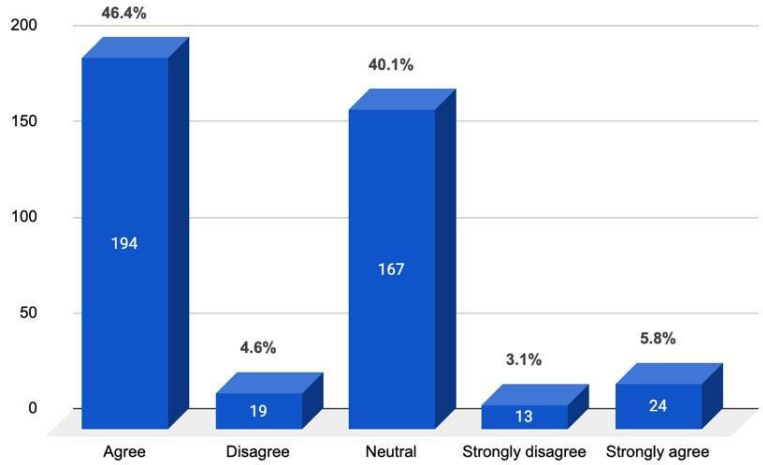


Figure 2. Perceived Positive Contribution of Sustainable Fashion to Environment Protection

Respondents generally believed sustainable fashion contributes positively to environmental protection: 194 Agree (46.4%), 167 Neutral (40.1%), 24 Strongly agree (5.8%), 19 Disagree (4.6%), and 13 Strongly disagree (3.1%). (See figure 2). This indicates a broad acceptance of the idea of sustainable fashion. The interviews indicate that sustainability belief is conditional and largely relies on such easy indicators as durability or material labels. Interviewees defined sustainable fashion as eco-friendly materials, thrift/secondhand, and long-lasting quality and stated things such as "If it lasts many years, it is sustainable to me," said Aye Pa Pa, and "I check the tag to see the material," said Aung Ko. This shows a key aspect of that Gen Z tends to rely on more visible, practical signs of sustainability-like quality, materials, and secondhand instead of the technical environmental effects.

That is why there is a high level of agreement and a large neutral group. Many the respondents feel that sustainable fashion is good, yet they might not be sure as to the extent of its assistance. This brings about a "yes, but" attitude: "Yes, it helps, but how do we know?" This is further reinforced by the fact that the brands purport to be sustainable but continue to manufacture at the fast-fashion level.

Question 3: I would like to buy sustainable fashion, but the higher prices discourage me

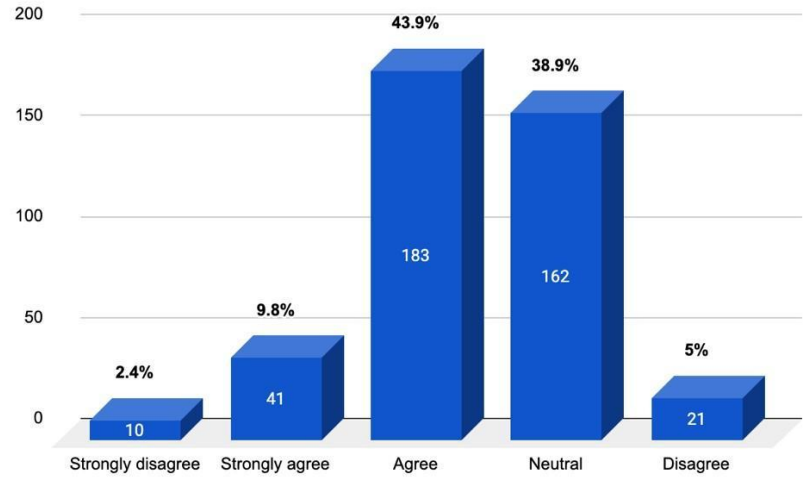


Figure 3. Impact of Higher Prices on Willingness to Buy Sustainable Fashion

Price is one of the strongest barriers: 183 Agree (43.9%), 162 Neutral (38.9%), 41 Strongly agree (9.8%), 21 Disagree (5%), 10 Strongly disagree (2.4%). This shows that even respondents who support sustainability feel pushed back by cost. (See figure 3).

This question is directly confirmed through interviews. The respondents repeatedly said that sustainable fashion is too costly to be bought by students, and they characterized shopping behaviors as being cost-oriented. Shwe Yi mentioned that "sustainable clothes are simply too expensive for students like us." Her friend, Nedd Min, made a conditional promise, saying, "Had it the same price, I would pick something sustainable that is comfortable to wear." Although a few have cited thrift shops as a cheaper alternative, the overall point remained the same: price is the gateway.

This is the best illustration of the attitude-behavior gap. Gen Z is fond of sustainability but exists within the realities of the budget, the cycles of trends, and the need to make purchases more frequently. Sustainable lines are viewed as a premium option, and therefore, sustainability becomes what people believe in in theory but postpone in practice. The huge group of neutrals means that they would like to have some sustainable options, but they do not feel that they can always afford the price.

Question 4: I trust fashion brands that openly share information about their supply chain and factory conditions.

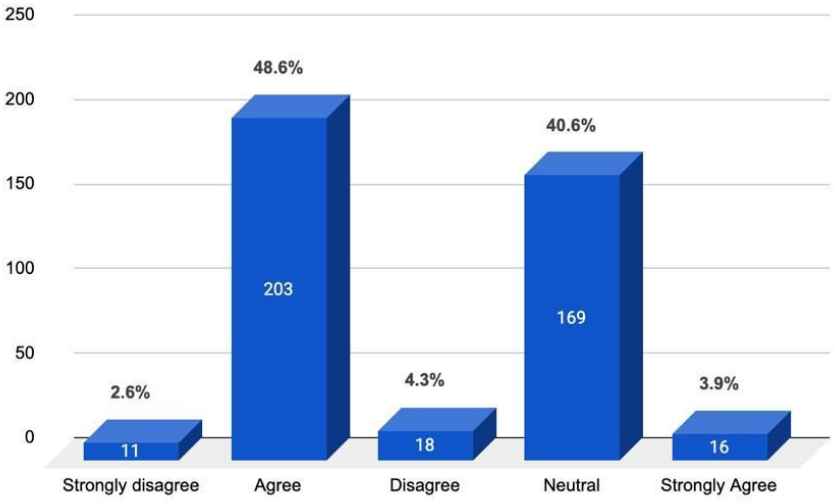


Figure 4. Trust in Fashion Brands That Transparently Share Supply Chain and Factory Information

Respondents showed stronger trust toward brands that openly share supply chain and factory conditions: 203 Agree (48.6%), 169 Neutral (40.6%), 18 Disagree (4.3%), 16 Strongly agree (3.9%), and 11 Strongly disagree (2.6%). (See figure 4). This suggests transparency is a key trust-builder, but many remain cautious. Interviewees clearly expressed low trust in fast-fashion sustainability claims. According to Fah Sai, her trust was 2 out of 5, and according to Kate, "fast fashion produces too much in production, and thus, it does not seem to be sustainable." This shows that Gen Z desires transparency, but they are also aware that transparency may be partial or employed as marketing.

Gen Z consumers seem to have access to open shared information with proof. It is not that they are not embracing sustainability but that they are rejecting unproven sustainability. The low neutral score shows that not all the consumers are willing to trust brands just by stating that they are sustainable; they must prove their evidence. The point has become a vital lesson to brands since transparency is not a nice bonus but a risk factor that is a discount. Without clear proof, consumers hesitate to purchase the clothing.

Question 5: If I discover a brand is involved in "greenwashing" (fake sustainability claims), I will stop buying from them.

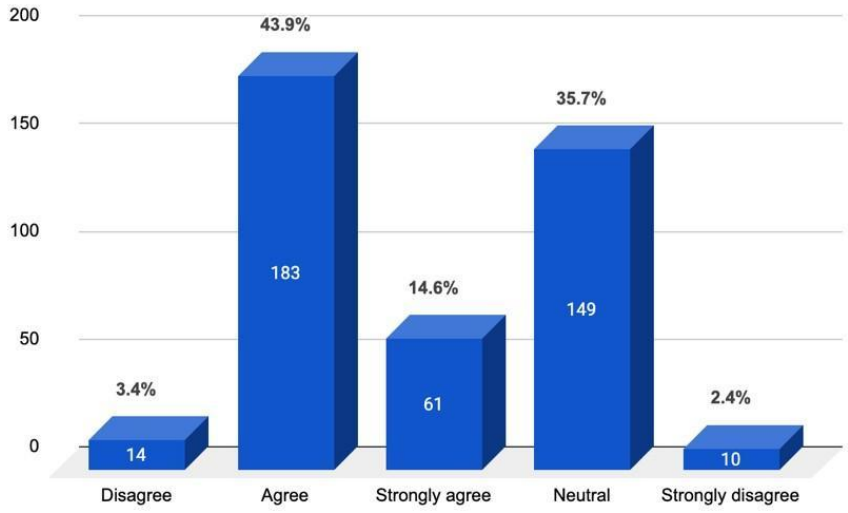


Figure 5. Intention to Stop Buying fom Brands Involved in Greenwashing

This is one of the strongest moral-behavioral statements: 183 Agree (43.9%), 149 Neutral (35.7%), 61 Strongly Agree (14.6%), 14 Disagree (3.4%), and 10 Strongly disagree (2.4%). (See figure 5). Many respondents claim they would stop buying from brands involved in greenwashing. Interviews give the emotional and logical explanation of why. According to the respondents, they find fake claims manipulative, and they view the large-scale production of fast fashion as being against sustainability. This skepticism is not just concerned about information but a perceived value conflict: the brands only want to make profits from sustainability marketing without changing their practices.

Greenwashing is a betrayer of trust since it targets the identity and morals of the consumer. Gen Z consumers might be able to accept trade-offs, such as affordability. However, they respond intensely when they believe they are being misled. The neutral group is also significant; not every consumer can say no to a brand when the products are still affordable and convenient. In this regard, greenwashing has two effects simultaneously, which are driving ethically driven consumers away and making the undecided more skeptical, which minimizes long-term loyalty.

Question 6: I intend to purchase clothing from sustainable fashion lines (e.g., Zara Join Life, H&M Conscious) in the near future.

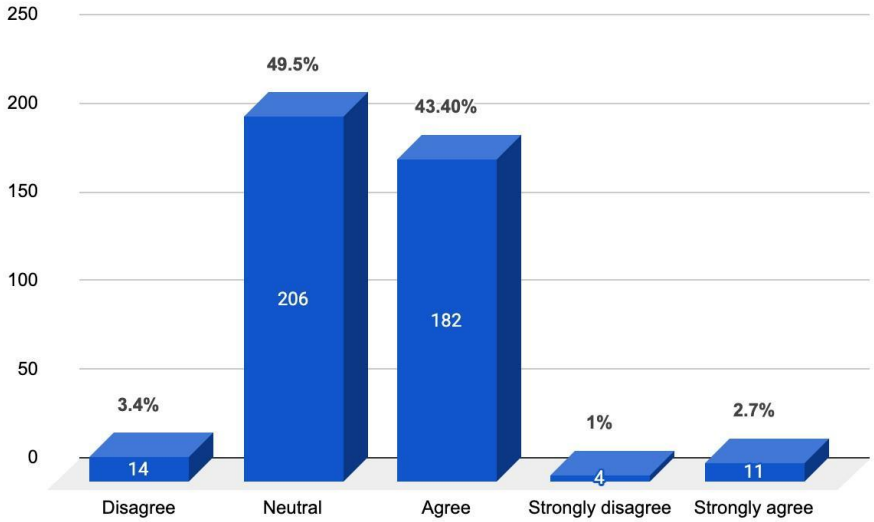


Figure 6. Intention to Purchase from Sustainable Fashion Lines in the Near Future

Purchase intention exists but is not strong: 206 Neutral (49.5%), 182 Agree (43.40%), 14 Disagree (3.4%), 11 Strongly agree (2.7%), and 4 Strongly disagree (1%). (See figure 6). This shows openness but also shows hesitation. One of the interviewees explained that intention is constantly competing with trends, social pressure, and fast fashion's convenience. Most people said trends change weekly because of influencers, and some admitted they want to be sustainable but also want to fit in. Hazel said that *"shopping frequency also increased during events, trips, and trend cycles,"* with the statement *"Sometimes I buy because my clothes feel out of date,"* while others buy only when their clothes are worn out. Most of the respondents are not refusing sustainable lines; they are postponing commitment until brands make sustainability feel affordable, believable, and stylish enough to compete with trend culture.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

This study included face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten students from Rangsit University International College to explore Generation Z's perceptions and purchasing behaviors regarding sustainable fast fashion. The interviews included structured and open-ended questions, and the responses were analyzed thematically with four dominant themes emerging: (1) Purchase Frequency and Affordability, (2) Understanding of Sustainability, (3) Social Media Influence and Digital Pressure, and (4) Brand Perception and the Attitude-Behavior Gap.

Purchase Frequency and Affordability

Participant A remarked that

> *"Most young people tend to buy clothes at least once a month. Because fast fashion items are affordable and thinking that buying one or two items doesn't feel like too much cost. So, we don't feel guilty buying those items frequently because they are cheap; we don't think too much before purchasing. So, it becomes something normal rather than something we carefully plan."*

This response indicates a normalization of frequent purchasing behavior driven by low prices, the high-volume trap of the current retail landscape, and the affordability of fast fashion, which has transformed clothing into a short-term commodity rather than a long-term investment.

The interview reveals a "low-cost, high-frequency" consumption pattern. Affordable pricing reduces perceived financial risk and encourages repetitive buying behavior. Even when individual

purchases are small, the cumulative environmental impact becomes significant. This finding suggests that economic accessibility, while beneficial for consumers, structurally supports overconsumption. As a result, affordability remains the strongest behavioral driver of Gen Z's fast fashion purchasing decisions.

Redefining Sustainability: Durability Over Labels

When asking about the meaning of sustainable fashion, participants did not primarily focus on ecolabels or organic materials. Instead, durability emerged as the central concept.

Participant B stated the following:

> *"To me, sustainable fashion means clothes that are made without harming the environment or treating workers unfairly. At the same time, they should be durable and wearable for many years. If I can wear something for years, that is more sustainable than buying something labeled 'eco' but throwing it away quickly."*

Similarly, **Participant C** added:

> *"Quality is more important than branding. If clothes last longer and can be worn many times without losing shape, then we don't need to keep replacing them. Sustainability is about buying less but choosing better."*

These responses demonstrate a multidimensional understanding of sustainability that integrates environmental responsibility, labor ethics, and product durability. Participants emphasize longevity as the most practical form of sustainability (eco-labels). Rather than relying on marketing claims, they view product lifespan as a measurable indicator of responsible consumption. This suggests that Gen Z's sustainability framework prioritizes functionality and durability over symbolic eco-certification. Accordingly, Gen Z defines sustainable fashion primarily through durability and ethical production, rather than brand marketing or eco-label claims.

Social Media as a Digital Accelerator of Trends

The influence of digital platforms emerged as a significant theme. While participants claimed independence in decision-making, they acknowledged exposure to constant trend cycles.

Participant D explained:

> *"Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram show new trends almost every week. Even if we don't intentionally follow influencers, we still see what trending is. It creates a feeling that you need to update your wardrobe to stay current."*

Another participant noted:

> *"Sometimes we do not realize that we are influenced. We just start liking certain styles because we are seeing them everywhere online."*

Social media functions as a digital accelerator, shortening trend lifecycles and intensifying the fear of missing out (FOMO). Even when individuals believe they are independent, algorithm-driven exposure shapes preferences. This creates a structural tension between sustainability, which requires slow consumption, and digital culture, which promotes constant novelty. Hence, social media indirectly reinforces fast fashion consumption by normalizing rapid trend turnover.

Brand Perception and the Information Gap

A notable finding was the perception of brands such as H&M and Shein as *"partially sustainable."*

Participant E commented:

> *"If a brand has a recycling program or a 'green' collection, I assume they are trying to improve. Also, because their products are affordable, more people can access them, which feels socially positive."*

This perception reflects a simplified understanding of corporate sustainability strategies. Participants tend to identify the visible sustainability campaigns with overall ethical responsibility. However, they may not fully evaluate the scale of production or the broader environmental footprint of fast fashion business models. This indicates a gap between marketing communication and critical consumer awareness. Therefore, green marketing influences sustainability perceptions, but deeper evaluation of production system remains limited among participants.

The Attitude-Behavior Gap

Despite strong environmental awareness, participants recognized inconsistencies between values and behavior. Several noted that peers often express concern about climate change and pollution but continue purchasing trend-driven items. Social pressure in digital spaces also plays a role, as wearing the same outfit repeatedly may be perceived negatively online.

One participant stated the following:

> *"Many people say they care about the planet, but when a new trend appears, they still buy it. There's pressure to always look new on social media."*

At the same time, some participants described practicing what can be termed quiet sustainability: purchasing new clothing only when existing items are worn out. The interviews confirm the existence of an attitude-behavior gap. Environmental concern exists at the cognitive level, yet economic constraints, digital pressures, and cultural norms often override ethical intentions. However, selective purchasing behavior suggests emerging forms of mindful consumption.

The qualitative interview results show that Generation Z generally understands environmental issues and cares about ethical production. However, several factors make it difficult for them to consistently practice sustainable consumption. Affordable prices encourage frequent purchases, fast-changing trends on social media create pressure to keep up, and fast fashion brands do not always clearly explain their real environmental impact.

For these participants, sustainability is not mainly about eco-labels or "green" marketing. Instead, they believe sustainable fashion means buying clothes that last longer and reducing how often they purchase new items. However, unless there are broader changes such as more affordable sustainable options, more responsible marketing, and better consumer education, the difference between what young consumers believe and how they shop will likely continue.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the survey and interview findings tell one clear story, which is that Generation Z is not rejecting sustainability; they actually support it, but their support is conditional, cautious, and highly dependent on real-life constraints. On the attitude level, the respondents tend to believe that the fashion industry is harmful to the surroundings, and they are willing to agree that sustainability is an issue. There are also other areas of their strong preference in the field of honesty, transparency, and accountability, particularly towards supply chain disclosure and greenwashing avoidance. However, the behavior shifts from “what the consumers believe” to “what they actually buy.” So, the evidence shows a noticeable gap. The interviews make this gap understandable; Gen Z does not make purchasing decisions in an ideal world. They make decisions under pressure, such as the financial pressure, social pressure, and information uncertainty.

Although Generation Z is widely recognized as environmentally and socially conscious, the results demonstrate that practical considerations strongly influence their buying behavior. Price sensitivity

emerged as a major factor, as many respondents perceive sustainable fast fashion as more expensive and less accessible, particularly for students and individuals with limited income. As a result, sustainability is often viewed as a desirable but non-essential option. This indicates that the attitude–behavior gap is not due to a lack of concern for sustainability, but rather to affordability constraints.

Trust also plays a critical role in shaping purchasing decisions. Many respondents expressed concerns about the authenticity of sustainability claims made by fast fashion brands. The fear of greenwashing reduces confidence and discourages commitment to sustainable product lines. When sustainability claims lack transparency or verifiable evidence, respondents tend to delay or avoid purchases, highlighting the importance of credibility and clear disclosure.

In addition, social media and trend culture significantly influence Gen Z's fashion consumption. Exposure to influencers and rapidly changing trends creates pressure to remain fashionable and socially relevant. Even when sustainable fashion is perceived as ethically superior, conventional fast fashion may still be preferred if it appears trendier, more stylish, or more convenient.

Overall, sustainable fast fashion adoption among Generation Z is characterized by conditional acceptance rather than strong commitment. Gen Z consumers are more likely to support sustainable fast fashion when it is affordable, credible, and aligned with current trends. Therefore, brands should focus on making sustainability accessible, transparent, and fashionable in order to encourage more consistent and responsible purchasing behavior among young consumers.

For future research, further studies could explore a larger and more diverse sample across different countries or cultural contexts to improve generalizability. In addition, future research may examine long-term behavioral changes and investigate how policy interventions, pricing strategies, or educational campaigns can reduce the attitude-behavior gap and promote more sustainable consumption among Generation Z.

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