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GEN Z CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND SUSTAINABILITY IDENTITY IN GREEN MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aims to analyze how Generation Z internalizes sustainability values as part of their self-identity and how this influences their perception of brands and purchase intentions in the context of green marketing.

Research Design & Methods: A qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design was used to understand the subjective experiences and personal meanings associated with Generation Z's concept of sustainability in shaping their self-identity.

Findings: The results of this study show that sustainability for Generation Z has become central to their self-identity, reflected through environmentally friendly consumption as an expression of social values and responsibility, reinforced by community and social interactions, and characterized by a critical and skeptical attitude towards brands' sustainability claims, demanding authenticity and consistency from corporations.

Implications & Recommendations: These findings have strategic implications for marketers to develop authentic, value-based approaches to sustainability communication. Companies need to focus on real practices and narratives that align with Gen Z's moral identity, rather than merely symbolic strategies.

Contribution & Value Added: This research expands the theoretical understanding of the relationship between self-identity, sustainability, and the consumption behavior of the younger generation. This study also provides a relevant empirical framework for the development of identity- and social value-based green marketing strategies.

Keywords: Generation Z, Sustainability, Green Marketing

JEL codes: M31, M37, Q56

Article type: research paper

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is now emerging as an influential consumer group with purchasing behaviors that differ from previous generations. Growing up in a digital age saturated with information about the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and the importance of sustainability, this generation has developed a strong ecological awareness from an early age. Exposure to sustainability issues has shaped their values and perspectives on consumption, where product choices are not only based on function and price, but also on their social and environmental impact. For Gen Z, sustainable consumption serves as a means of expressing their identity and moral values, making their purchasing decisions a form of representation of their social awareness and commitment to positive change (Lopes, Gomes, et al., 2024).

In the context of green marketing, companies need to adopt strategies that not only highlight the environmentally friendly aspects of their products, but also build strong brand awareness and create emotional connections with consumers. These efforts involve developing marketing messages that are consistent with consumers' planned behavior, thereby encouraging

their intention to purchase green products (Baltaci et al., 2024). Through an educational and persuasive approach, green marketing plays an important role in fostering sustainable consumption behavior by informing consumers about the ecological and social benefits of these products, reinforcing their perceived value and quality, and providing attractive incentives for consumers to switch to more environmentally friendly choices. In addition, authentic and transparent communication strategies are also key factors in building consumer trust and loyalty towards sustainability-oriented brands (Lopes, Silva, et al., 2024).

Generation Z's environmental awareness did not arise spontaneously, but was shaped by various interacting factors. Knowledge about sustainability, the social influence of their peer groups and digital media, and their level of trust in truly environmentally friendly business practices play an important role in shaping their consumption patterns. These factors make Gen Z more critical of green claims made by companies and more likely to choose brands that have a real commitment to social and environmental responsibility (Kara & Min, 2024). The integration of the Self-Concept and Consumer Identity Theory approaches into green marketing strategies is relevant in this context, as both can help companies understand how social identity values and perceived behavioral control influence green product purchasing decisions. By designing campaigns that align with Gen Z's sustainability values and expectations, companies can create stronger emotional connections and encourage the adoption of more environmentally responsible consumption behaviors (Elgammal et al., 2024).

This article focuses on how Generation Z shapes and expresses their identity through sustainability in the context of green marketing. This generation is known for its high awareness of environmental issues and strong tendency to engage in sustainable consumption. However, there is still a research gap that highlights in depth how this green identity influences consumer decisions in green marketing practices (Mahasuweerachai & Suttikun, 2022). Most previous studies have focused more on consumer behavior rather than the role of self-identity in shaping effective marketing strategies (Elgammal et al., 2024). The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to link Generation Z's self-identity with green marketing strategies, emphasizing that marketing effectiveness can be increased when it is tailored to the social values and identities of young consumers. Previous research has indeed shown that social identity and perceived norms have a significant influence on sustainable purchasing behavior, but the integration of these identity aspects into marketing strategies has rarely been explored (Dragolea et al., 2023).

This study aims to explore how Generation Z consumers integrate sustainability values into their self-identity and how this influences their perception of brands and purchase intent in the context of green marketing. A deep understanding of the relationship between self-identity and responses to green marketing is important for marketers and researchers in designing authentic, relevant, and effective communication strategies for this increasingly critical and environmentally conscious consumer segment. By bridging the existing knowledge gap, this research aims to show that when sustainability becomes part of Generation Z's self-identity, green marketing strategies can be more successful not only in promoting environmentally friendly products but also in building stronger emotional and social connections between brands and consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generation Z and Their Consumer Characteristics

Generation Z, which generally includes individuals born between 1995 and 2010, is a consumer group with characteristics that are very different from previous generations. They grew up in a fully digitally connected environment, where technology, the internet, and social media are an integral part of everyday life. Exposure to various digital platforms from an early age has made them critical, value-conscious consumers who are highly influenced by social issues and sustainability in their purchasing decisions. As a generation with increasing purchasing power, their preferences and consumption behaviors are now shaping a new direction in global marketing strategies, encouraging companies to adopt more authentic, transparent, and value-based approaches (Priporas et al., 2017).

According to [Eberhardt \(2017\)](#), Generation Z exhibits characteristics that are significantly different from millennials, especially in terms of outlook on life and consumption behavior. They are known to be more pragmatic in their decision-making, have a high level of social awareness, and are driven by a desire to create a positive impact on society and the environment. As a generation that grew up amid a flood of digital information, Gen Z is also more critical of traditional marketing messages and claims. They tend to be skeptical of manipulative promotional strategies and value brands that demonstrate honesty, transparency, and authenticity in their business practices.

[Francis and Hoefel \(2018\)](#) identified four key characteristics that distinguish Generation Z from previous generations, namely the search for truth, appreciation of individuality, belief in open dialogue, and rejection of stereotypes. These values not only shape their view of the world, but also influence their consumption patterns and relationships with brands. Gen Z tends to evaluate products and services based on their alignment with personal values and the ethical integrity of the company behind them. They prefer brands that demonstrate authenticity, consistency, and social commitment over those that simply offer a certain image or lifestyle.

Generation Z consumers demonstrate a high awareness of sustainability and environmental preservation issues, which is reflected in their preferences for products and brands that implement socially and ecologically responsible business practices. They not only pay attention to the functional benefits of a product, but also assess the extent to which a company demonstrates a genuine commitment to ethics and environmental responsibility. Their knowledge of environmental issues drives more selective and impact-conscious consumption behavior, where trust in advertising and communication focused on sustainability becomes an important factor in influencing purchasing decisions ([Borah et al., 2024](#); [Song et al., 2020](#)).

The behavior of Generation Z consumers is characterized by a strong attachment to the digital world, where they rely on technology and social media as their main sources of information and decision-making for purchases. This generation is heavily influenced by influencers whom they consider credible and relevant to their personal values. In addition, Gen Z shows a high level of concern for sustainability and corporate social responsibility issues, making them more likely to support brands that demonstrate a genuine commitment to the environment and business ethics. They also demand authentic, personal, and interactive forms of communication from the brands they consume. This situation requires companies to continuously innovate in their digital marketing strategies, emphasizing transparency, sustainability, and meaningful experiences for consumers in order to build long-term trust and loyalty ([Espejo et al., 2024](#); [Kara & Min, 2024](#)).

Green Marketing and Sustainable Consumption

Green marketing plays a strategic role in achieving sustainable development goals by instilling environmental values in consumer behavior. Through approaches such as sustainability-oriented product innovation, the use of transparent eco-friendly labeling, recyclable packaging design, and communication that emphasizes social and ecological responsibility, companies can build a sustainable brand image. This approach not only increases consumer interest and purchasing decisions for green products, but also strengthens brand loyalty and increases consumer willingness to pay a premium price to support environmentally responsible practices ([Das et al., 2024](#); [Kumari, 2023](#)).

Increased public awareness of environmental issues has encouraged consumers to prioritize sustainability-oriented products. The preference for environmentally friendly products is not only based on the desire to contribute to nature conservation, but also on the perception that these products offer higher quality, safety, and benefits compared to conventional products. Various psychological and social factors reinforce this trend, including the level of concern for the environment, the desire to build a positive self-image as an earth-conscious individual, and the influence of social norms and expectations in one's environment. In addition, communication strategies through advertising that emphasize sustainability values have been proven to strengthen the relationship between these factors and green purchasing behavior. Environmentally friendly advertising not only increases consumer knowledge and awareness, but

also fosters stronger beliefs and intentions to purchase products that support sustainability (Chen et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2020).

Recent studies show that the formation of environmentally oriented consumer behavior is not only influenced by key factors such as environmental awareness or product quality perceptions, but also by psychological and situational variables that act as mediators and moderators. Lopes et al., (2024) emphasize that price sensitivity is an important factor that strengthens the relationship between sustainability values and green product purchase decisions, where consumers with high price sensitivity tend to be more critical in assessing the balance between environmental benefits and costs incurred. Meanwhile, Jaiswal et al., (2022) found that a sense of moral obligation towards environmental preservation can strengthen an individual's intention to purchase environmentally friendly products, even when the price of these products is relatively higher.

Environmentally friendly advertising acts as a key catalyst in shaping sustainable consumption behavior, especially when combined with adequate environmental knowledge. However, according to Li (2025), messages that highlight ecological benefits and social responsibility in advertisements not only build a positive image for the brand, but also strengthen consumer confidence in the sustainability claims of the product. Environmental knowledge serves to deepen consumers' understanding of these messages, enabling them to assess the authenticity and credibility of the green practices being offered. When these two factors interact, consumers become more emotionally and cognitively engaged with environmentally friendly products, which ultimately increases their purchase intent and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the integration of educational elements in advertisements, such as explanations of the positive impacts of using green products or guidelines for sustainable behavior can expand public ecological awareness while strengthening the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented marketing messages.

To remain competitive in a modern era that is increasingly oriented towards social and environmental responsibility, businesses need to integrate sustainability principles into all aspects of their operations and marketing strategies. One approach that is becoming increasingly significant is the digitization of green marketing practices, which enables companies to reach consumers more effectively through digital platforms with messages that are aligned with sustainability values. The use of digital technologies such as social media, interactive content, and data-driven campaigns can strengthen communication of environmentally friendly values while building emotional connections with consumers who have an environmentally conscious lifestyle. This strategy not only increases consumer trust and engagement with the brand, but also plays a crucial role in shaping future purchasing intentions for environmentally friendly products (Štofejová et al., 2023).

Green marketing plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable consumption patterns through a strategic approach that combines social, psychological, and economic aspects of consumers. Various factors such as environmental awareness, value perception, trust in green brands, as well as mediating and moderating variables such as knowledge, social norms, and a sense of ecological responsibility also influence consumer purchasing behavior. When businesses are able to consistently implement green marketing strategies including sustainable product innovation, transparent labeling, and educational communication they can not only guide consumer purchasing decisions, but also strengthen long-term brand loyalty. Environmentally friendly marketing practices also directly contribute to inclusive economic development and environmental conservation, making them an important foundation for creating a competitive and sustainable business future (García-Salirrosas & Rondon-Eusebio, 2022).

Teori Self-Concept and Consumer Identity Theory

Individuals—including Generation Z—are not only seen as passive consumers but as agents who articulate their self-image through their choices, interpreting membership in certain social groups as part of their identity (García-Salirrosas & Rondon-Eusebio, 2022). Furthermore, through the Extended Self framework proposed by Belk (1988), consumption and ownership of goods do not merely fulfill functional needs, but also shape and project who we are as individuals. In the context of Generation Z, the choice to consume sustainably—choosing environmentally friendly

products, avoiding high waste production, or supporting brands that promote social responsibility—can be read as an expression of collective identity (“we who care about the environment”) as well as individual identity (“this is me, the responsible one”).

Young consumers, including Generation Z, do not only purchase sustainable products as a pragmatic act, but also use these choices as a symbol of self-identity and affiliation with pro-environmental values (Beccanulli & Biraghi, 2024). By choosing environmentally friendly goods, they affirm that “I am someone who cares about the earth” and at the same time declare that they are part of a community that has ecological concerns. Thus, green consumption becomes not just economic behavior, but a medium of socio-cultural communication that projects who they are, what they stand for, and to whom they feel connected.

Reed et al., (2012), argue that Consumer Identity Theory emphasizes that consumption behavior is rooted in the process of individual self-identification, where consumers use certain products, brands, and lifestyles to assert who they are and what values they stand for. Consumer identity is dynamic—it is shaped through social interaction and self-reflection. In the context of Gen Z, consuming sustainable products is a way to demonstrate their social identity as a generation that cares about environmental issues, social justice, and planetary sustainability. This type of consumption is not only personal but also a form of symbolic communication to assert their moral values and social affiliations.

The Self-Concept Theory was proposed Sirgy (1982), which explains that individuals tend to choose products and brands that are in line with their perception of themselves (actual self) or their ideal self. Products and brands serve as symbols that represent a person's personal and social identity. In the context of sustainability, Gen Z often views green consumption as a means to realize personal values such as caring, social responsibility, and moral authenticity. When a brand displays values that are consistent with consumers' self-concept, emotional attachment and loyalty to that brand tend to increase.

This phenomenon can be understood through the Social Identity Theory Tajfel and Turner (2004) and Symbolic Consumption Theory Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) approaches. Based on Social Identity Theory, an individual's identity is formed from their membership in certain social groups; in this context, Gen Z builds their self-image as part of a green community that upholds the value of sustainability. Meanwhile, Symbolic Consumption Theory emphasizes that products not only have functional value, but also serve as social symbols that represent the personal meaning and social identity of their owners. Thus, for Gen Z, consuming sustainable products becomes a means of asserting their identity while demonstrating their ethical commitment to an environmentally friendly lifestyle that reflects their ecological awareness.

METHODS

This study applies a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design to explore in depth the subjective experiences and meanings attached by Gen Z consumers to the concept of sustainability and how this is integrated into the formation of their self-identity (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This study applies a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design to explore in depth the subjective experiences and meanings attached by Gen Z consumers to the concept of sustainability and how this is integrated into the formation of their self-identity (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to deliberately choose participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria included: 1) being between 18 and 27 years old; 2) having a high level of ecological awareness and real experience in consuming or using green products; and 3) showing a willingness to share in-depth personal experiences about how sustainability values are integrated into their daily lives. This approach aims to gain a rich and contextual understanding of the meaning of sustainability as part of Generation Z's identity in the context of sustainable consumption and lifestyle. Using in-depth interviews and reflective interpretation, interpretive phenomenology enables researchers to capture the complexity of Gen Z's identity formation process, which is often influenced by personal values, social pressures, and exposure to green marketing practices.

RESULT

Research Informant Profile

This study involved twelve informants from Generation Z, individuals born between 1997 and 2012. To gain an in-depth understanding of how sustainability has become part of Gen Z consumers' identity, this study involved 12 informants from Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) selected using purposive sampling based on criteria of age, awareness of sustainability, and experience in consuming green products. Of the total participants, 58% were female (7 people) and 42% were male (5 people). Based on education level, most informants were undergraduate students (83%), while the rest consisted of diploma holders (8%) and graduate students (8%). In terms of profession, the composition of informants was quite diverse, consisting of students (33%), professionals (17%), content creators (8%), entrepreneurs (8%), freelancers (8%), teachers (8%), designers (8%), and marketing staff (8%). Their experience with green products varied between 2 and 6 years, with 50% of informants having 3–4 years of experience, 33% having 2 years of experience, and 17% having lived a green lifestyle for 5–6 years. This composition shows the diversity of backgrounds and levels of involvement that allow for an in-depth exploration of how sustainability values shape Gen Z's identity in the context of green consumption. The complete profile of the informants is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Research Informant Profile

code	Age (Year)	Gender	Education	Employment	Green Consumption Experience (Years)
INF-01	23	Female	S1	Student	3
INF-02	25	Male	S1	Private Employee	4
INF-03	22	Female	S1	Student	2
INF-04	26	Female	S1	Entrepreneur	5
INF-05	24	Male	S1	Content Creator	3
INF-06	21	Female	D3	Student	2
INF-07	27	Male	S2	Professional	6
INF-08	23	Female	S1	Freelancer	3
INF-09	22	Male	S1	Student	2
INF-10	25	Female	S1	Marketing Staff	4
INF-11	24	Female	S1	Teacher	3
INF-12	26	Male	S1	Designer	5

Ecological Awareness as the Starting Point for Identity Transformation

The results of the study show that the emergence of ecological awareness among Gen Z is an important turning point that marks a fundamental transformation in the way they interpret their identity and their position in the context of global sustainability. This awareness develops through a process that is not instantaneous, but rather through a journey of reflection and continuous learning that involves personal experiences, exposure to environmental information, and social and cultural influences that reinforce the values of sustainability in their daily lives.

Table 2. Sources of Informants' Ecological Awareness

Source of Awareness	Total Informants	Percentage
Social Media & Documentaries	9	75%
Formal Education	6	50%
Direct Experience (Natural Disasters)	4	33%
Influence of Family/Friends	7	58%
Community/Activism	5	42%

Note: Informants may have more than one source of awareness.

Informant INF-01 describes their moment of transformation:

"When I watched a documentary about plastic waste in the ocean, I cried. I felt responsible for the damage. From there, I started thinking, who am I really? Do I want to be someone who continues to cause damage, or be part of the solution? That was a turning point for my identity."

INF-07 adds a more reflective perspective:

"Ecological awareness isn't just about knowing the problem. It's about how you start to redefine who you are. I started to see myself not just as a consumer, but as a citizen who has a moral responsibility to this planet."

The findings of this study indicate that ecological awareness plays a major role as a catalyst in the formation and reconstruction of self-identity among Gen Z consumers. This awareness not only gives rise to environmentally friendly behavior, but also marks the occurrence of a profound process of self-redefinition, in which individuals actively re-examine the meaning of their existence and role in a world increasingly affected by environmental issues. In this context, sustainability values are no longer viewed as external aspects or mere social trends, but are internalized as the core of their personal identity. This reflects an ontological transformation that makes sustainability the basis for decision-making, lifestyle, and the way they express themselves and interact with their social and natural environments.

Green Consumption as an Expression of Identity and Self-Value

For Generation Z, green consumption is no longer merely a rational decision based on considerations of need or price, but rather an expressive means of communicating their values and identity to the world. Through their choice of environmentally friendly products, they demonstrate their concern for sustainability issues while building an image as individuals who are ethically conscious and socially responsible. Green products serve as symbols of identity that distinguish them from conventional consumers, becoming a medium for demonstrating membership in a community that values ecological awareness and sustainable lifestyles. In this way, green consumption not only reflects personal preferences but also becomes a powerful statement of social identity among Gen Z.

INF-04 explained:

"Every time I buy a sustainable product, I feel like I'm voting with my money. It's not just a purchase, but a statement about the values I hold. It's a reflection of who I am as a person."

Table 3. Categories of Green Products Consumed

Product Category	Frequency of Consumption	Main Motivation
Sustainable Fashion	8	Lifestyle expression
Organic Cosmetics & Care	10	Health and ethics
Organic/Local Food	9	Health and local economic support
Environmentally Friendly Household Products	7	Consistency of values
Sustainable Transportation	6	Carbon footprint

INF-08 reveals the symbolic dimension of green consumption:

“The bag from a sustainable brand that I carry is not just a bag. It is a statement. When people ask, ‘Nice bag,’ and I say it is made from recycled materials, I feel proud. It is part of my image and identity.”

However, this theme also reveals the tension between idealism and reality. INF-03 admits:

“Honestly, sometimes I struggle because green products are expensive. But I still try to be consistent because this is about who I want to be. Even though I sometimes have to compromise, I still choose brands that align with my values.”

This finding is in line with Self-Concept Theory and Consumer Identity Theory, which explain that individual consumption choices reflect and reinforce their self-concept. In this context, Generation Z views green consumption as an extension of the self-image they want to project, namely that of caring, responsible, and environmentally conscious individuals. Environmentally friendly products not only serve as a means of fulfilling needs, but also as a symbolic tool to affirm values, beliefs, and lifestyles that are in line with their personal and social identities. Through sustainable consumption, Gen Z actively shapes and articulates who they are in the eyes of society, while solidifying their position as a generation committed to the future of the earth and global sustainability.

Community and Social Validation in the Formation of Sustainable Identity

Another aspect that emerged prominently in this study was how community dynamics and the social environment play a significant role in shaping and strengthening sustainable identity among Gen Z. Green identity does not emerge individually, but develops through a process of social interaction involving influence, recognition, and validation from peers. Communities, both in physical and digital forms, serve as spaces for reflection and affirmation of sustainability values, where members share experiences, motivate each other, and reinforce their commitment to an environmentally friendly lifestyle. In this context, peer groups function as social mirrors that help Gen Z individuals internalize the meaning of sustainability as part of their identity, making green practices not just a personal choice, but a symbol of membership in a community that shares the same moral and social values

INF-05, a content creator, explains:

“In my circle of friends, sustainable living has become a kind of norm. If someone doesn't care about environmental issues, they are usually considered indifferent or unaware. So, this is no longer just a personal choice, but also part of a social identity that shows whether someone is accepted or feels part of a particular group.”

Table 4. Forms of Participation in Sustainable Communities

Form of Participation	Total Informants	Identity Function
Online Communities (Instagram, TikTok)	11	Validation & information
Offline Communities (NGOs, Volunteers)	6	Collective action & networking
Discussions with Friends/Family	10	Reinforcement of values
Sustainability Events/Workshops	7	Learning & belonging
Sharing Content on Social Media	9	Expression & education

INF-10 reveals the positive dimension of peer pressure:

“My friends often share zero waste tips or sustainable brands in our WhatsApp group. There is a kind of positive peer pressure. You become motivated to be more consistent because you feel that there are people who support and notice your efforts.”

However, not all informants experience positive social support. INF-06 shared a different experience:

“At college, sometimes I am considered over the top if I am too vocal about the environment. Some people say I am ‘pretending to be environmentally conscious’. That made me feel insecure

at first. But eventually I realized that this actually strengthens my identity. I don't need validation from everyone.”

The results of this study indicate that the process of forming a sustainable identity among Gen Z is not static, but rather a dialectical process that continues to evolve between self-identification and social recognition. In this context, communities serve as identity work spaces that enable individuals to express, negotiate, and validate the sustainability values they adhere to. Through interaction with their social environment, Gen Z receives feedback, support, and challenges, all of which contribute to the formation of personal meanings of what it means to be “sustainable.”

Authenticity vs. Greenwashing: Gen Z's Criticism of Green Marketing

The results of the study show that Gen Z has a high level of critical thinking and skepticism in assessing the sustainability claims made by various brands. They tend not to easily believe promotional messages that are manipulative or merely greenwashing strategies without real evidence. Instead, they demand transparency and consistency in corporate actions, and are able to distinguish between authentic commitments to sustainability and greenwashing practices that only aim to improve brand image. This critical attitude reflects Gen Z's value orientation, which focuses more on authenticity and social responsibility than mere aesthetic appeal or short-lived consumption trends.

INF-02 states emphatically:

“Gen Z is not easily fooled. We do our research before buying. If a brand only uses the label ‘eco-friendly’ but is not transparent about its supply chain, that’s a big red flag. We can detect which ones are genuine and which ones are just following the trend.”

Table 5. Criteria for Sustainable Brand Authenticity by Gen Z

Criteria	Level of Importance (Scale 1-5)	Total of Respondents Mentioning
Supply Chain Transparency	4,8	12
Credible Certification	4,6	11
Long-Term Consistency	4,9	12
Involvement in Social Issues	4,3	10
Honest Communication (including shortcomings)	4,7	11
Proven Track Record	4,8	12

INF-12, a designer, reveals his evaluation process:

“I always check their Instagram and website. I see if their messaging is consistent. I look for reviews from the community. I even email them to ask for production details. If they are evasive or not transparent, I immediately become suspicious. Authentic brands are definitely excited to share their journey.”

INF-11 adds an emotional perspective:

“If I find out that a brand I trust is actually greenwashing, I feel personally betrayed. Because my identity is tied to that brand. That’s why I’m very careful now and don’t easily believe marketing claims.”

These findings show that Gen Z has a highly sophisticated level of brand literacy, whereby they are able to deeply assess the extent to which a brand's values and actions are truly aligned with its sustainability claims. For this generation, sustainability is not merely a marketing narrative or symbolic positioning strategy, but must be consistently reflected in business practices, supply chains, and corporate communications. They reject surface-level sustainability and demand tangible evidence of a brand's ethical and ecological commitments. In this context, authenticity is a fundamental element that determines the extent to which there is resonance between the brand and consumers, because Gen Z will only connect emotionally and symbolically with brands that they perceive as having integrity and values that align with their own.

Sustainability as a Life Project: Holistic Integration in Self-Identity

Research shows that for Gen Z, sustainability has become a key foundation in shaping how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Sustainability values are no longer seen as merely an additional aspect of personal identity, but rather as an organizing principle that structures various life decisions—from consumption patterns and career choices to social relationships. In other words, sustainability functions as a framework of meaning that unifies ethical, aesthetic, and existential dimensions in Gen Z's daily lives, reflecting a shift from symbolic practices to a deep and authentic integration of values into their self-identity.

INF-07 explains his views in depth:

"Sustainability is not just an additional activity or hobby, but a way of life that guides every decision made—from choosing a job, how to invest, to choosing a life partner. He emphasizes that his identity as an "environmentalist" cannot be separated from other aspects of his life because everything is intertwined and interconnected."

Table 6. Aspects of Life Affected by Sustainable Identity

Aspect of Life	Total Informants	Examples of Implementation
Career & Work	10	Choosing a sustainable employer
Relationships & Friendships	9	Building a circle of like-minded people
Hobbies & Leisure	8	Outdoor activities, gardening
Financial Decisions	7	Green investments, saving for quality products
Family Values	6	Educating family members
Choice of Residence	5	Seeking a supportive environment
Future Plans	11	Vision of sustainable living

INF-09 explains that sustainable identity has become the main foundation in determining his career path:

"I rejected job offers from companies with poor environmental track records, even though the salaries were higher. I cannot compromise my identity, because working in a place that contradicts my values feels like living a lie." This statement shows that INF-09's commitment to sustainability is not just a moral preference, but has become an existential principle that guides every professional decision.

Meanwhile, INF-04, an entrepreneur, reveals how sustainability values are fully integrated into the business he runs:

"From the beginning, I designed my business with sustainability principles. This is not CSR or an add-on, but the core of my business model. For me, business is an extension of myself, so I cannot create something that does not reflect my values." This quote emphasizes that for INF-04, sustainability is not just a business strategy, but a representation of authentic self-identity that is manifested in entrepreneurial practice.

The results of this study show that for Gen Z, sustainability is no longer seen as an external value adopted due to social pressure or global trends, but has become an integral part of their identity. Sustainability values are now deeply internalized, shaping the way they view the world, understand their role, and determine the direction of their long-term lives. This change marks a shift from mere ecological awareness to the construction of an identity rooted in moral, emotional, and spiritual principles of sustainability.

DISCUSSION

Sustainability as Core Identity: A Theoretical Perspective

A comparison of the characteristics of sustainability identity between Gen Z and previous generations (Millennials and Gen X) shows a paradigmatic transformation in the way individuals internalize sustainability values. For Gen Z, sustainability has become part of their core identity, manifested consistently and holistically across all contexts of life, from consumption patterns to career decisions. Unlike previous generations, who tended to place sustainability as a peripheral

and contextual identity, Gen Z shows a much higher level of criticism towards brands' sustainability claims and demonstrates intolerance towards greenwashing practices. In addition, community plays a central role in shaping Gen Z's sustainability identity, serving as an arena for reflection and legitimization of ecological values. Sustainability values are also comprehensively integrated into various life decisions, not limited to specific domains as was the case with previous generations. A summary of these characteristic differences is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Comparison of Gen Z's Sustainable Identity Characteristics with Previous Generations

Aspect	Gen Z Description	Previous Generation Description (Millennials, Gen X)	Academic Interpretation
Level of Internalization	Sustainability is a core identity that is inherent to an individual's self-concept	Sustainability only functions as a peripheral or situational identity	Demonstrates a shift from situational engagement to identity-based sustainability orientation
Cross-Context Consistency	Consistent in a holistic manner across various aspects of life (lifestyle, consumption, career)	It tends to be contextual and dependent on social or economic situations	Reflects a deeper and more stable integration of values among the younger generation
Critical of Brands	High brand literacy and skepticism towards sustainability claims	It relatively accepts brand claims without in-depth evaluation	Indicates the emergence of critical consumer consciousness among Gen Z
Role of Community	Communities are the center of sustainability identity formation and validation	The community only functions as a supporting element	Emphasizes the importance of collective identity work in the formation of ecological identity
Tolerance of Greenwashing	High intolerance towards manipulative and inauthentic practices	It still shows a moderate level of tolerance	Reflects demands for transparency and authenticity in green marketing
Integration into Life Decisions	Sustainability values are comprehensively integrated into life decisions (education, career, consumption)	It is limited to certain domains, such as environmentally friendly lifestyles	Describes a shift towards broader and more sustainable value-driven decision making

The comparison results show a fundamental transformation in the orientation towards sustainability between generations. Gen Z perceives sustainability as an integral part of their identity that is embedded in various aspects of life, while previous generations still view it as contextual behavior. These findings confirm that Gen Z's orientation towards sustainability has shifted from situational involvement to identity-based sustainability orientation, where sustainability values are not only manifested in concrete actions but also represent an individual's identity and moral position. This shift reflects the emergence of a generation of consumers who are more critical, reflective, and consistent in making sustainability the basis for personal and social decision-making.

Synthesis of Findings: Gen Z's Integrative Model of Sustainable Identity

Gen Z tends to develop a sustainable identity reflected through four main elements: environmental awareness, personal values that prioritize social and environmental responsibility, behavioral actions in daily life that reflect a commitment to sustainability, and market trends influenced by young consumers' preferences for "green" or environmentally friendly products and services. These elements are interconnected: for example, environmental awareness fosters values that support sustainability; these values then encourage practical actions; when these actions become more widespread, they influence and are influenced by market directions (product trends,

branding, consumption), and ultimately, the market in turn raises awareness through visibility and social pressure. According to research by Dragolea et al., (2023), although this generation demonstrates a high level of environmental awareness, there is still a gap between their values and their actual actions, a condition known as the attitude–behavior gap.



Figure 1. Integrated Model of Gen Z's Sustainable Identity Formation

The Integrative Model of Gen Z's Sustainable Identity in Figure 1 illustrates that sustainable identity is formed through dynamic interactions between four main elements, namely environmental awareness, behavioral actions, values, and market trends. Environmental awareness is the foundation for Gen Z to understand the consequences of consumption on the ecosystem, which is then manifested in concrete behaviors such as supporting environmentally friendly products or reducing excessive use of resources. Through these actions, personal values that emphasize social responsibility and ecological ethics are strengthened, making sustainability an integral part of their identity and beliefs. These values and behaviors ultimately contribute to the formation of market trends, where Gen Z's increasing demands for authenticity and transparency encourage companies to adopt more sustainability-oriented strategies. Positive market responses further enrich Gen Z's awareness and commitment to sustainable living practices, creating a sustainable cycle that continuously strengthens the relationship between individuals, values, actions, and the market environment in the context of green marketing.

Implications for Green Marketing Strategies

The results of this study provide profound practical implications for marketers seeking to reach Gen Z consumers. Green marketing approaches can no longer stop at symbolic levels such as the use of eco-friendly labels or superficial green image campaigns. To create authentic engagement, marketing strategies need to be rooted in a deep understanding of Gen Z's personal identity and values. This generation views sustainability as part of self-expression and lifestyle, so brands must be able to build narratives that align with their ecological identity. This means that sustainability must be substantively embodied in brand values, production processes, and communications in order to truly resonate with the identity-based consumption patterns that characterize Gen Z.

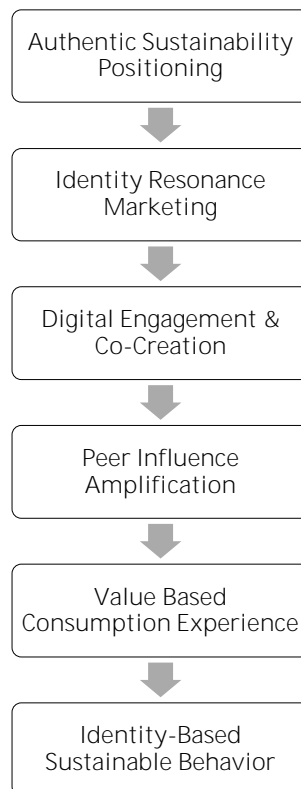


Figure 2. Green Marketing Strategy Process for Gen Z

The image illustrates an integrated green marketing strategy for Gen Z consumers, which focuses on shaping identity-based sustainable behavior. The process begins with Authentic Sustainability Positioning, where brands build trust through authenticity and transparency in sustainability practices. Next, the Identity Resonance Marketing stage emphasizes the importance of alignment between brand values and Gen Z's self-concept, so that sustainability becomes part of their self-expression. The process continues to Digital Engagement & Co-Creation, which utilizes digital space as a participatory arena for Gen Z to interact and co-create sustainability values. The next stage, Peer Influence Amplification, highlights the role of communities and social networks in strengthening the legitimacy of green behavior through social support and recognition. Finally, the Value-Based Consumption Experience stage concludes the process by creating meaningful consumption experiences that reinforce sustainability values, resulting in Identity-Based Sustainable Behavior, which is the transformation from situational awareness to a sustainability orientation that is inherent in Gen Z's personal identity.

Social media and digital technology play a crucial role in shaping consumption behavior and marketing preferences among Gen Z. This generation has grown up in a dynamic digital ecosystem, where platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have become the primary means of interacting with brands through short, visual, and authentic content. Effective marketing strategies for Gen Z focus not only on aesthetic appeal, but also on values of openness, authenticity, and honest storytelling, as they tend to be skeptical of promotional messages that are manipulative or non-transparent (Prasanna & Priyanka, 2024). Even in the concept of green marketing, environmental awareness and literacy are determining factors in encouraging sustainable purchasing behavior. Consumer knowledge about environmental issues has been shown to strengthen their tendency to choose environmentally friendly products, especially when influenced by credible green advertising and supported by a high level of trust in the brand (Borah et al., 2024).

Enterprises need to develop marketing approaches that align with the values, lifestyles, and expectations of Generation Z in an era of increasingly fierce market competition and digital disruption. This generation demands personalized, participatory, and authentic experiences, where brands not only offer products but also build narratives that reflect social and

environmental responsibility (Gutfreund, 2016). Marketing strategies that focus on interactive engagement, message personalization, and branding that emphasizes ethics and sustainability have proven to be more effective in attracting their attention (Ewe & Tjiptono, 2023). Informative and educational communication about the benefits of environmentally friendly products can increase awareness and strengthen purchase intent towards brands with a good reputation for green practices. Therefore, consistently integrating sustainability principles into all marketing activities is a strategic step for brands that want to build long-term trust and loyalty from Generation Z, who are increasingly aware of their ecological responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z shows how sustainability values have become a fundamental part of shaping their identity and influencing how they evaluate brands and make consumption decisions in the context of green marketing. The findings show that ecological awareness among this generation is no longer just a lifestyle trend, but marks a profound change in the way they interpret their existence and social responsibility towards the environment. For Gen Z, sustainable consumption choices serve not only as ethical actions, but also as a form of self-expression that reflects personal values and principles in the public sphere. Social communities and networks play an important role in the process of shaping and strengthening Gen Z's sustainability identity. Through interaction, support, and recognition from their peers, sustainability values are increasingly internalized and form a strong collective consciousness. Gen Z also displays a high level of literacy and skepticism towards sustainability claims made by brands, demanding concrete evidence and real consistency in corporate practices. Overall, sustainability for this generation has transformed into a moral and social pillar that underpins the way they understand themselves, the world, and the meaning of consumption, reflecting a shift from symbolism towards the integration of authentic and sustainable values.

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