

Sustainable Consumption in Emerging Markets: Factors Influencing Green Purchase Decisions Among Generation Z Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z has emerged as a demographically significant and ideologically distinctive consumer cohort whose environmental consciousness coincides with growing purchasing power in emerging-market economies, yet the translation of this environmental consciousness into actual green purchase behavior remains empirically inconsistent and theoretically contested. This paper reviews the consumer-behavior literature on Generation Z green purchase decisions in emerging markets, synthesizing Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) applications across China, India, and Vietnam with the value-belief-norm and value-attitude-behavior frameworks that extend TPB's explanatory power, and with the greenwashing-perception and attitude-behavior-gap literature that explains why favourable environmental attitudes so often fail to convert into purchase behavior. Particular attention is given to the specific psychological and contextual factors, perceived green quality, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, price sensitivity, and greenwashing scepticism, that the reviewed studies identify as significant, non-significant, or context-dependent predictors of green purchase intention among Gen Z consumers specifically. Comparative tables map TPB and extended-TPB constructs to their reported significance across studies and national contexts, cross-reference documented barriers to the attitude-behavior gap against the marketing and policy responses the literature proposes, and set Generation Z's distinctive green-consumption profile against that of preceding generational cohorts. The review finds that while attitude, perceived behavioral control, and green perceived quality function as consistently significant predictors across emerging-market contexts, subjective norm's influence is highly context-dependent, and greenwashing perception has emerged as an increasingly dominant negative moderator capable of substantially undermining otherwise favourable pro-environmental purchase intentions....

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption, Green Purchase Intention, Generation Z, Emerging Markets, Theory of Planned Behavior, Greenwashing, Attitude-Behavior Gap, Consumer Behavior...

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable consumption has moved from a niche ethical concern to a mainstream marketing and policy priority as concerns about environmental protection and sustainable consumption increased among Generation Z, a consequence of more perceived risks emerging in the *Advances in Consumer Research*

context of climate change and depletion of natural resources [1]. This generational shift carries particular significance for emerging-market economies, where rapid economic development is simultaneously expanding disposable income and environmental awareness among a demographic cohort research has characterized as digital natives with high ethical consumption patterns and

growing purchasing power [1]. Understanding what actually drives, and what impedes, green purchase decisions among this cohort has consequently become a central concern for both sustainability researchers and firms seeking to align product strategy with an increasingly consequential consumer segment.

The scale of this segment's market relevance is considerable. Research on Generation Z's green fashion purchase intentions in Vietnam noted that by 2025, Gen Z will include 2 billion individuals worldwide and will make up approximately 25% of Vietnam's labor force, significantly influencing household and market consumption decisions, while simultaneously observing the central paradox this paper addresses: despite their environmentally conscious attitudes, Gen Z remains the largest consumer group in the fast fashion industry, accounting for about 40% of global sales [2]. This tension, between Gen Z's professed environmental values and its continued participation in environmentally intensive consumption categories, motivates the attitude-behavior gap literature reviewed in Section 2.4 and frames the central empirical puzzle this paper's synthesis addresses.

The dominant theoretical framework organizing empirical research on green purchase intention is Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, which proposes that intention, and through it behavior, is predicted by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [3]. Applied specifically to Indian green-product consumers, an early foundational study found that consumer attitude and perceived behavioral control significantly predict purchase intention whereas subjective norm does not, and further found that environmental concern has equal and significant effect on attitude and perceived behavioral control, establishing TPB's mediating role between environmental concern and green purchase intention specifically within an emerging-market context [4]. This finding, that subjective norm's predictive power is not universal across TPB applications, recurs as a central point of contention across the reviewed literature and motivates much of the model-extension work reviewed in Section 2.2.

Emerging-market context matters specifically because, as research on Gen Z packaged-drink purchases in India observed, consumers in rich countries behave differently and have distinct worries and attitudes towards the environment than consumers in less developed countries, making it important to conduct research in emerging economies specifically rather than extrapolating from developed-market findings [5]. This paper reviews the TPB and extended-TPB literature on Generation Z green purchase decisions across major emerging markets, principally China, India, and Vietnam, alongside the greenwashing-perception and attitude-behavior-gap research that explains the persistent divergence between Gen Z's stated environmental values and observed purchasing behavior.

Research Objectives

To review Theory of Planned Behavior applications explaining green purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in emerging markets.

To synthesize extended TPB models incorporating value-belief-norm and value-attitude-behavior constructs specific to Gen Z green consumption.

To examine the greenwashing-perception literature and its documented effect on Generation Z green purchase intention.

To evaluate the attitude-behavior gap literature explaining why favorable environmental attitudes among Gen Z do not consistently translate into purchase behavior.

To identify the factors distinguishing Generation Z's green consumption profile from that of preceding generational cohorts in emerging-market contexts.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior Applications to Green Purchase Intention

The Theory of Planned Behavior remains the most widely applied framework for explaining green purchase intention, though its constituent constructs, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, show inconsistent predictive significance across the reviewed emerging-market studies. A study of Chinese consumers' intention to bring reusable bags for shopping found that attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm exert significant and positive influence on consumers' intention, with perceived behavioral control exerting the greatest influence, followed by attitude and subjective norm [6]. This finding of perceived-behavioral-control primacy recurs in a broader Chinese study examining green purchase behavior with an added moral-emotional variable, which found that environmental cognition, descriptive norm, and self-efficacy have a highly significant positive impact on green purchase intention, with self-efficacy identified as the best predictor of intention specifically [7].

Generation Z-specific TPB research in Vietnam has extended this evidence directly to the cohort this paper addresses. A study of Vietnamese Generation Z green purchasing intentions and behaviors applying TPB found positive and direct effects of green perceived behavioural control on green purchasing behaviours, and further identified an important cultural moderator: in collectivistic cultures that value communal goals and collective well-being, such norms strongly resonate with Generation Z's inherent values, which include high environmental awareness and community-oriented decision-making toward environmental harmonisation [8]. The same study concluded that this interplay of cultural, generational, and economic factors effectively cultivates a supportive environment for fostering strong environmental intentions among young consumers in emerging markets specifically, directly linking TPB's core constructs to the collectivist cultural context common across many emerging Asian markets [8].

Sector-specific applications have further refined which TPB pathways matter most for Gen Z consumers. A structural equation modeling study of Generation Z sustainable clothing purchase intentions in Vietnam, examining green perceived value, green perceived quality, perceived price, social influence, product design, environmental concern, and environmental knowledge,

found that all proposed hypotheses were supported, with all factors significantly impacting environmental attitude and product attitude, which in turn influence purchase intention, while specifically emphasizing the strong mediating role of environmental attitude and product attitude in this relationship [9]. This mediation finding is important because it clarifies that many of the contextual and product-level factors driving Gen Z green purchase intention operate indirectly, through attitude formation, rather than directly influencing intention.

2.2 Extended TPB Models: Value-Belief-Norm and Value-Attitude-Behavior Frameworks

Recognizing TPB's limitations in fully explaining green purchase intention, particularly given subjective norm's inconsistent significance, researchers have developed extended frameworks incorporating value-based antecedents. A comparative study of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value-Belief-Norm theory applied to young Chinese consumers' green hotel choice, surveying 406 university students, found that altruistic value, biospheric value, and collectivistic value positively influenced ecocentric attitude, which subsequently influenced awareness of consequence, ascription of responsibility, personal norm, and finally intention, while implicit attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control each positively influenced intention separately [10]. This value-belief-norm extension is significant because it traces green purchase intention back further into consumers' underlying value structures, rather than treating attitude and norms as unexplained starting points.

A related value-attitude-behavior study of Chinese Millennials' green car purchase intention found that altruistic value positively influenced subjective norm and perceived behavioral control but negatively influenced green purchase attitude, while biospheric value positively influenced both green purchase attitude and perceived behavioral control, and functional and emotional consumption values positively influenced green purchase attitude respectively, with emotional value fully mediating the relationship between functional value and attitude [11]. This finding of altruistic value's counterintuitive negative effect on attitude illustrates the complexity extended TPB models reveal: value antecedents do not uniformly reinforce green purchase attitude, and some value orientations may operate through competing psychological pathways.

Research on eco-product purchase intention among a broader Gen Z sample of 269 respondents identified a complementary set of significant predictors, finding that purchasing intention for eco-products is strongly influenced by the perceived quality of environmentally friendly products, consumer consciousness about eco-products, perceived value of green products, and consumer trust in ecological products, with lower, though still measurable, influence from perceived price and perceived availability of eco-products [12]. Notably, the same study attributed strong purchase-intention outcomes partly to environmental education, finding that students were highly aware of the characteristics of green products (95.2%) and the meaning of sustainable consumption

(92.9%), results that confirm the role of environmental education and training in individual purchasing and consumption behaviors [12].

2.3 Green Trust, Consumer Knowledge, and Social Marketing Influences

Beyond core TPB and value-based constructs, the reviewed literature identifies several additional factors specifically relevant to Generation Z's digitally mediated consumption environment. Research on Generation Z green purchase behavior in China's footwear sector examined green consumer knowledge, consumer social responsibility, green advertising, and green consumer trust, finding that green word-of-mouth and environmental advertising strengthen the relationship between green customer value, attitude, and green purchase intention, while noting the important caveat that green advertisements may have a positive impact on consumer purchase decision-making, however, customers are sometimes skeptical about green claims in adverts [13]. A companion study on green purchase intention specifically asked whether green trust still matters for Generation Z consumers of locally produced reusable goods within developing-country markets, contributing evidence that trust constructs retain explanatory relevance even as skepticism toward green marketing claims grows [14].

Social media has emerged as a particularly consequential channel for Gen Z green consumption specifically because of the cohort's digital-native status. A study of social media marketing activities' influence on Generation Z's organic cosmetics purchase intentions and electronic word-of-mouth in Vietnam situated this research within the global shift toward sustainable consumption and digital marketing innovation, while noting that the unique characteristics of Vietnam's market require a specialized understanding of how these global trends can be effectively localized [15]. This localization emphasis reinforces a recurring theme across the emerging-market literature reviewed here: global sustainability marketing trends do not transfer uniformly across national contexts, and effective green marketing strategy for Gen Z requires market-specific calibration.

2.4 The Attitude-Behavior Gap and Willingness to Pay

A substantial and increasingly central strand of the reviewed literature documents the persistent gap between Gen Z's stated environmental attitudes and actual purchase behavior. A comparative generational study examining green orientation and environmental concerns across age cohorts characterized this gap directly, finding that a major drawback impedes the bright outlook: the attitude-behavior discrepancy, whereby a large majority express positive attitudes towards green products and feel concerned about environmental issues, but these favorable attitudes hardly translate into consistent purchase behaviors [16]. The same study provided a specific generational contrast directly relevant to this paper's focus, finding that Gen Z shows a greater concern and willingness to pay premium prices for green products, while Gen X, on the other hand, tends to be a lot more cost-conscious and skeptical on these matters, establishing Generation Z as more willing, in principle, to

bridge the attitude-behavior gap through price-premium acceptance than preceding cohorts [16].

Willingness to pay a premium, however, does not track environmental concern as closely as TPB models might predict. A study extending TPB with ethical obligation and environmental concern to explain both green purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium found that ethical obligation and subjective norm significantly boost both outcomes, whereas environmental concern has a direct effect on green purchase intention but none on willingness to pay a premium, and further found that there seems to be an attitude-behavior gap between how environmentally concerned customers are and how much they are ready to pay for products, as the correlation between green purchase intention and willingness to pay premium is not very strong [17]. This dissociation between intention and willingness-to-pay is practically significant because it indicates that firms cannot assume strong green purchase intention will translate proportionally into premium-price acceptance, even among the relatively premium-tolerant Gen Z cohort.

2.5 Greenwashing Perception as a Negative Moderator

Perhaps the most consequential recent development in the reviewed literature is the emergence of greenwashing perception as a factor capable of substantially undermining otherwise favorable green purchase intention among Generation Z specifically. A study directly investigating whether greenwashing washes away Gen Z's green purchase intention found that TPB constructs positively drive green purchase intentions, while greenwashing perception has a negative impact, potentially counterbalancing the influence of pro-environmental drivers, and identified perceived greenwashing as the most influential factor in the model, with the potential to severely undermine sustainable purchase intentions [18]. The study grounded this finding in a precise definition of the phenomenon, characterizing greenwashing as the practice whereby companies exaggerate or falsely communicate the environmental benefits of their products or operations to appear more sustainable than they actually are, and noted that perceived greenwashing captures the erosion of trust, activation of skepticism, and broader consumer confusion surrounding sustainability claims [18].

This greenwashing effect has been replicated specifically within Gen Z fashion-sector research in an emerging-market context. A study of the antecedents of Gen Z's green purchase intention in Vietnam's fashion industry examined greenwash perception as a moderating variable, filling what the authors characterized as a critical gap by examining how greenwash perception influences the consumption of Generation Z individuals in Vietnam within the fashion industry specifically, an area previously underexplored despite fashion's status as one of the sectors where Gen Z's attitude-behavior gap is most pronounced [2]. The Indian packaged-drinks study similarly incorporated greenwashing directly into its explanatory framework, finding that green consumption attitude and perceived behavioral control significantly influence green purchase intention, while examining greenwashing alongside socio-demographic variables as a determinant

specifically relevant to emerging-economy Gen Z consumers, and notably finding that socio-demographic variables of age did not have any significant influence on green purchase intention within that sample [5].

2.6 Post-Purchase and Continuance Dynamics

A smaller but growing strand of research extends beyond initial purchase intention to examine continuance behavior specifically. A study investigating continuance behavior intention toward green products among Chinese consumers extended TPB with pre-adoption experience, environmental perception, habit, and pro-environmental self-identity, finding that pre-adoption experience positively influences attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, while habit is crucial for sustaining green consumption, and that pro-environmental self-identity moderates the relationships among environmental perception, attitude, habit, and continuance behavior intention [19]. This continuance-focused evidence highlighted the importance of aligning green products with consumer identities and promoting pro-environmental self-identity through education and incentives, providing practical insights for fostering sustained green consumption in emerging markets specifically, extending this paper's concern beyond the single-purchase decision to the repeat-purchase behavior more relevant to genuinely sustainable consumption patterns [19].

2.7 Research Gap

While the TPB and extended-TPB literature reviewed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 has established robust, though context-variable, evidence for the psychological determinants of Gen Z green purchase intention, and the greenwashing and attitude-behavior-gap literature reviewed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 has established comparably robust evidence for why intention often fails to convert into behavior, comparatively few studies directly integrate the value-based antecedent models (Section 2.2) with the greenwashing-moderation evidence (Section 2.5) to ask whether deeper value orientations, such as biospheric or altruistic value, confer resilience against greenwashing-induced skepticism, or whether even highly value-driven Gen Z consumers are equally susceptible to trust erosion from perceived greenwashing. This review addresses that gap by organizing the reviewed evidence within a comparative framework spanning theoretical construct, national context, and reported significance.

III. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design synthesizing peer-reviewed consumer-behavior, marketing, and sustainability literature on Generation Z green purchase decisions in emerging markets. Reviewed works were compared along four axes: theoretical framework (TPB, extended TPB/value-belief-norm, or greenwashing-moderated models); national/market context (China, India, Vietnam, Romania, or cross-national); product category examined (fashion/clothing, food/beverage, cosmetics, hospitality, or general eco-products); and reported significance of core constructs (attitude, subjective norm, perceived

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 TPB Constructs Mapped to Reported Significance Across Emerging-Market Studies

Table 1 maps the core Theory of Planned Behavior constructs onto their reported significance across the reviewed emerging-market studies, making the pattern of consistency and divergence explicit.

Table 1. TPB Constructs and Reported Significance Across Studies

Construct	Reported Significant	Reported Non-Significant / Context-Dependent	Key Reference
Attitude	India (general green products); Vietnam (Gen Z clothing, mediated)	—	Indian TPB study [4]; Vietnam clothing SEM [9]
Subjective norm	China (reusable bags); China (self-efficacy model, as descriptive norm)	India (general green products) — not significant	Reusable bags study [6]; Frontiers self-efficacy study [7]; Indian TPB study [4]
Perceived behavioral control	China (reusable bags, greatest influence); Vietnam Gen Z (direct effect)	—	Reusable bags study [6]; Vietnam TPB Gen Z study [8]
Self-efficacy	China (best predictor of intention)	—	Frontiers self-efficacy study [7]
Environmental concern	India (effect on attitude & PBC, not WPP directly)	— (mixed effect on WTP)	Indian TPB study [4]; WTP premium study [17]
Greenwashing perception	Vietnam, general (most influential negative factor)	—	Greenwashing study [18]; Vietnam fashion study [2]

4.2 Barriers to the Attitude-Behavior Gap Cross-Referenced Against Proposed Responses

Table 2 shifts from construct-level significance to the documented barriers driving the attitude-behavior gap, cross-referencing each against the response the literature proposes.

Table 2. Attitude-Behavior Gap Barriers and Proposed Responses

Barrier	Documented In	Proposed Response	Key Reference
Weak correlation between intention and willingness to pay premium	Cross-national TPB/WTP study	Emphasize ethical obligation and subjective norm in marketing	WTP premium study [17]
Greenwashing-induced trust erosion and skepticism	Vietnam, cross-market greenwashing studies	Transparent, credible sustainability communication	Greenwashing study [18]; Fashion antecedents study [2]
Skepticism toward green advertising claims	China footwear sector	Leverage green word-of-mouth over direct advertising	Footwear GPB study [13]
Gen Z's continued fast-fashion participation despite environmental attitudes	Vietnam fashion sector	Standardized, quantified sustainability claims; micro-influencer engagement	Fashion antecedents study [2]; eWOM cohort study [20]
Low habit formation for repeat green purchases	China continuance study	Promote pro-environmental self-identity via education/incentives	Continuance intention study [19]

Price sensitivity in cost-conscious segments (contrast with Gen Z)	Cross-generational comparison	Segment marketing by generational price tolerance	Generational orientation study [16]
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4.3 Generation Z's Distinctive Green-Consumption Profile Relative to Prior Cohorts

Table 3 consolidates the specific features distinguishing Generation Z's green consumption profile from that of preceding generational cohorts, as documented across the reviewed comparative literature.

Table 3. Generation Z Green-Consumption Profile vs. Prior Cohorts

Dimension	Generation Z Pattern	Contrast with Prior Cohorts	Key Reference
Willingness to pay premium	Greater concern and willingness to pay premium	Gen X more cost-conscious and skeptical	Generational orientation study [16]
Digital-native marketing responsiveness	High responsiveness to social media, eWOM	Less digitally mediated for older cohorts	Social media cosmetics study [15]
Environmental education/awareness	High self-reported awareness (95.2% product characteristics; 92.9% concept understanding)	Not directly compared, but higher engagement implied	Eco-products drivers study [12]
Community/collectivist orientation	Strong resonance with collectivist cultural norms	—	Vietnam TPB Gen Z study [8]
Market share in high-impact categories (e.g., fast fashion)	~40% of global fast-fashion sales despite green attitudes	Attitude-behavior gap most pronounced in this cohort	Vietnam fashion antecedents study [2]

The consolidated evidence across Tables 1–3 indicates that Generation Z's green purchase decisions in emerging markets are shaped by a reasonably consistent core of TPB-derived psychological factors, attitude, perceived behavioral control, and self-efficacy, augmented by value-based antecedents such as biospheric and collectivist values, but that this otherwise favorable psychological profile is increasingly undermined by greenwashing-induced skepticism and a persistent, well-documented gap between stated willingness to pay and actual premium-price acceptance. Subjective norm's inconsistent significance across national contexts, significant in Chinese studies, non-significant in the Indian general-population study, suggests that normative social pressure operates differently depending on cultural context even within the broadly collectivist emerging-market settings this literature examines [4], [6], [8].

V. Future Research Directions

Three priorities emerge from the reviewed literature. First,

research should directly integrate value-based antecedent models (Section 2.2) with greenwashing-moderation evidence (Section 2.5) to determine whether Gen Z consumers with stronger biospheric or altruistic value orientations show greater resilience to greenwashing-induced skepticism, or whether trust erosion operates uniformly regardless of underlying value strength. Second, given that most reviewed studies examine single national markets (predominantly China and Vietnam), cross-national comparative studies applying identical TPB and greenwashing-moderated models across multiple emerging markets simultaneously would help clarify which findings, such as subjective norm's inconsistent significance, reflect genuine cultural variation versus methodological or sample differences. Third, the continuance-behavior research reviewed in Section 2.6 remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to initial-purchase-intention research; given this paper's documented attitude-behavior and intention-to-premium gaps, further longitudinal research tracking Gen

Z consumers from stated intention through actual repeat purchase would substantially strengthen the field's causal evidence base beyond the cross-sectional, intention-focused designs that currently dominate.

VI. Conclusion

This review has examined the factors influencing green purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in emerging markets, synthesizing Theory of Planned Behavior applications, value-based extensions, and greenwashing-moderation research across China, India, and Vietnam. The reviewed evidence establishes that attitude, perceived behavioral control, and self-efficacy function as consistently significant predictors of green purchase intention among Gen Z, augmented by biospheric, altruistic, and collectivist value orientations particularly relevant to emerging-market cultural contexts, while subjective norm's predictive significance varies considerably by national setting. Generation Z's greater willingness, relative to prior generational cohorts, to pay a price premium for green products represents a genuine market opportunity, but this willingness does not correlate strongly with underlying environmental concern and is increasingly vulnerable to erosion through perceived greenwashing, now identified across multiple studies as among the single most influential factors undermining green purchase intention. Firms and policymakers seeking to convert Generation Z's substantial environmental consciousness into sustained green consumption in emerging markets should therefore prioritize transparent, verifiable sustainability communication and habit-forming, identity-aligned marketing strategies over reliance on environmental concern or attitude alone.

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How to cite : Avinash Kumar Vivekanand Mishra, Dr. Shobha Mishra, Dr. Ashok J, Dr. Nishant Kumar, Shivani Yadav, Dr. Biswo Ranjan Mishra , Sustainable Consumption in Emerging Markets: Factors Influencing Green Purchase Decisions Among Generation Z Consumers. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 2026;3(10): 1-8

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