

# The Impact of Sustainability, Brand Engagement, and Digital Platforms on Generation Z's Purchasing Decisions

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of sustainability, brand engagement, and digital platforms on the purchasing decisions of Generation Z (Gen Z), a demographic cohort known for its social consciousness and technological fluency. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with 30 Gen Z participants aged 18–25. The research explores the extent to which sustainability influences brand loyalty, identifies the key factors driving brand engagement, and assesses the role of digital platforms particularly social media and online reviews in shaping brand perception. The findings reveal that sustainability and social impact are crucial factors in influencing Gen Z's purchasing behaviour, with a strong correlation between ethical practices and brand loyalty. Brand engagement is closely tied to reputation, product quality, and authenticity, while digital platforms, although influential, rank lower in importance compared to sustainability and brand reputation. These insights provide valuable implications for marketers aiming to align their brand strategies with the values and expectations of Gen Z consumers. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on value-driven consumption and highlights the need for brands to prioritize ethical practices and transparent communication to secure long-term consumer trust and engagement among Gen Z.

**Keywords:** Gen Z – Sustainability - Brand Loyalty - Social Impact - Digital Influence

## Introduction

Generation Z, comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is rapidly emerging as a dominant force in the global consumer market. With their deep integration into digital environments and heightened awareness of social and environmental issues, Gen Z represents a unique consumer group whose values and behaviours are reshaping traditional marketing paradigms. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z prioritizes ethical consumption, transparency, and social impact, often aligning their purchasing choices with brands that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and inclusivity. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers rely heavily on technology and online platforms to interact with brands, seek information, and share opinions. Their consumption patterns are increasingly driven by values, with sustainability, brand ethics, and corporate social responsibility playing a central role in shaping their perceptions and decisions. At the same time, digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and online review sites serve as crucial tools for brand discovery and evaluation. This paper seeks to explore the influence of three key factors—sustainability, brand engagement, and digital platforms—on the purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers.

While numerous studies have acknowledged the growing importance of ethical branding and digital engagement, there remains a need to understand how these elements interact, and which factors ultimately hold the greatest influence. By using a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to provide nuanced insights into the values, motivations, and decision-making processes of Gen Z consumers, offering strategic recommendations for brands seeking to effectively engage this emerging demographic.

### Literature Review

Generation Z, often characterized as a tech-savvy and socially conscious cohort, has been the focus of numerous studies exploring their unique consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions. Several studies highlight that Gen Z values sustainability and social responsibility, prioritizing brands that align with their ethical and environmental concerns (Cagnin & Nicolas, 2022; Kusuma et al., 2024). Research also shows that this generation demonstrates a strong preference for brands that engage in practices promoting social impact, such as supporting environmental causes and ensuring fair labour practices (Hodžić, 2024). Digital platforms and online reviews are increasingly influential in shaping their purchasing decisions, with Gen Z relying heavily on social media and online feedback to form perceptions of brands (Ayuni, 2019; McKee, 2021). This demographic also exhibits brand loyalty when a brand's reputation is in line with their values, particularly regarding sustainability and social responsibility (Dobre et al., 2021; Thangavel et al., 2019). Furthermore, Gen Z consumers tend to avoid brands that they perceive as insincere or misaligned with their values, further emphasizing the importance of authenticity and transparency in marketing (Redjeki, 2025). Understanding how these factors—sustainability, brand reputation, and digital engagement—interact is crucial for marketers targeting Gen Z, as they represent a significant portion of future consumer markets (Sumantyo, 2024; Wahyu & Kusuma, 2024). Therefore, insights into their decision-making process highlight a shift towards value-based consumption, where social responsibility and online presence play pivotal roles in shaping their brand choices (Cagnin & Nicolas, 2022; Ayuni, 2019).

### Research Gap

While existing literature has extensively explored Generation Z's consumer behaviour, much of it tends to focus on isolated factors such as sustainability or digital engagement in silos. There is a lack of comprehensive research that examines the interrelationship between sustainability, brand engagement, and the influence of digital platforms on Gen Z's purchasing decisions in an integrated manner. Furthermore, most studies are quantitative and do not incorporate qualitative insights that capture the nuanced attitudes and motivations behind Gen Z's preferences. Additionally, there is limited research focused on smaller, localized sample groups, which could provide deeper contextual insights into this demographic's decision-making processes. This study addresses these gaps by using a mixed-methods approach to explore how these factors collectively influence Gen Z, providing a more holistic and in-depth understanding of their consumer behaviour.

### Objectives

1. To examine the influence of sustainability and social impact on Gen Z's purchasing decisions.
2. To identify the key factors that lead to brand engagement and loyalty among Gen Z consumers.
3. To analyze the role of digital platforms and online reviews in shaping brand perception among Gen Z.

### Hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: Sustainability and social impact have a significant positive influence on Gen Z's purchasing decisions.
- Hypothesis 2: Brand engagement and reputation are key drivers of brand loyalty among Gen Z.
- Hypothesis 3: Digital platforms and online reviews have a moderate impact on Gen Z's brand perception.

### Significance of the Study

This study holds practical and academic significance. From an academic standpoint, it contributes to the growing body of research on value-driven consumption by offering a multifaceted analysis of the drivers behind Gen Z's purchasing behaviour. The integration of sustainability, brand engagement, and digital platform influence fills a critical gap in consumer behaviour literature by linking these interdependent variables within the same framework. From a practical perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for marketers, brand managers, and business strategists who aim to engage Gen Z consumers more effectively. By understanding what truly influences this generation's loyalty and decision-making—particularly their emphasis on sustainability and brand authenticity—companies can craft marketing strategies that resonate more deeply with their values. Additionally, the study highlights the growing importance of ethical branding and the need for transparent communication on digital platforms, enabling brands to build long-term trust and customer relationships with this emerging consumer base.

### Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. A survey was distributed to 30 Gen Z participants aged 18-25, using a Google Form, to measure their attitudes toward sustainability, brand engagement, and online reviews. Convenience sampling was used to select participants. Statistical tools, including factor analysis, correlation analysis, and t-tests, were employed to analyse the data. Factor analysis helped identify key factors influencing consumer behaviour, while correlation analysis explored relationships between sustainability, brand reputation, and purchasing decisions. T-tests were used to examine differences across demographic variables, such as gender and income levels.

### Results and Discussion

The analysis of survey and interview data provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions. The results confirmed the significance of sustainability and ethical practices, with 45% of respondents indicating a willingness to pay more for products that are environmentally friendly or ethically sourced. This supports Hypothesis 1 (H1), emphasizing that sustainability and social responsibility have a strong positive impact on purchasing decisions. Factor analysis identified sustainability and ethical concerns as distinct components influencing consumer behaviour. These factors encompassed environmental initiatives, cruelty-free products, fair labour practices, and corporate transparency. The high correlation between sustainability and brand loyalty ( $r = 0.65$ ) illustrates the importance of long-term value alignment between brands and consumers. Additionally, qualitative responses revealed that participants often researched a company's ethical practices before making a purchase, further highlighting the depth of concern Gen Z has for social impact.

Gender differences also emerged as statistically significant. T-test results showed that female participants placed more emphasis on sustainability when making purchasing decisions ( $p = 0.02$ ), aligning with broader research suggesting higher environmental and ethical consciousness among women. When analysing brand engagement, factor analysis grouped product quality, brand reputation, and customer service under a broader “Brand Loyalty” factor. The correlation between brand reputation and purchasing decisions was notably high ( $r = 0.72$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2). This underscores the idea that Gen Z is deeply influenced by how a brand is perceived, particularly regarding authenticity, quality, and ethical consistency. Participants noted that once they identified a brand as trustworthy and aligned with their values, they tended to remain loyal, even if alternatives were available. Conversely, the role of digital platforms, while still influential, was found to be less dominant compared to sustainability and brand reputation. A moderate correlation ( $r = 0.55$ ) between online reviews and purchasing decisions supports Hypothesis 3 (H3). Social media and digital word-of-mouth are crucial during the initial discovery phase and for verifying brand credibility. However, they were not the decisive factors in final purchasing decisions. Many respondents emphasized that while online reviews can reinforce their interest, they are not sufficient alone to secure a purchase unless the brand also demonstrates ethical practices and a positive reputation. Interestingly, participants expressed scepticism toward influencer endorsements and branded content, with some viewing them as inauthentic or commercially driven. This finding reinforces the need for brands to maintain transparency and foster genuine engagement across digital platforms.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the growing importance of sustainability, brand engagement, and digital platforms in influencing the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers. The research provides compelling evidence that Gen Z places a high value on ethical practices, environmental consciousness, and corporate social responsibility when evaluating brands. Sustainability emerged as a major determinant of brand loyalty, with consumers actively seeking out and rewarding brands that align with their personal values. Brand reputation and engagement also play a central role in securing long-term loyalty, particularly when brands demonstrate authenticity, transparency, and high-quality offerings. Digital platforms, while important for information gathering and initial engagement, function more as facilitators than primary decision drivers. This indicates that although Gen Z uses digital media extensively, they remain critical and discerning, prioritizing ethical values over digital hype. For marketers, the implications are clear: brands must go beyond superficial sustainability claims and instead demonstrate tangible, authentic commitments to social and environmental causes. Building a strong, value-aligned brand reputation will not only enhance customer engagement but also foster loyalty in a generation that is both highly informed and socially conscious. By integrating sustainable practices, delivering quality experiences, and maintaining transparent digital communication, brands can effectively resonate with Gen Z and secure a competitive edge in the evolving consumer landscape.

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