Overconsumption behaviour of Generation Z regarding fast fashion in Indonesia and its environmental impact

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Abstract. This study aims to understand Generation Z's consumption habits concerning fast fashion in Indonesia, specifically focusing on environmental consciousness and sustainability. A descriptive qualitative methodology was employed. The findings indicate that while Generation Z is intensely cognizant of the detrimental effects of fast fashion on the environment, a substantial disparity exists between their values and their actual consumption behaviours (attitude-behaviour gap). Due to the influence of social media and visual culture, most respondents continue to behave impulsively. Respondents expressed interest in sustainable alternatives, including thrifting and eco-friendly products, particularly when endorsed by credible influencers. These Gen Z habits will result in piles of clothing waste, which can disrupt the balance of ecosystems and the environment and lead the global climate change. Water and soil will be easily polluted by synthetic materials and chemicals that are difficult to decompose. The conclusion of this study is the importance of harmony between knowledge and the lifestyle of Gen Z so that they can create a lifestyle that is in harmony with the environment. It is necessary to formulate an identification of Gen Z's lifestyle to live in harmony with nature. Furthermore, a collaborative strategy among industry, government, and public personalities is essential to communicate sustainability messages pertinent to Generation Z's digital lifestyle.

1 Introduction

The fast fashion business has emerged as a global phenomenon in recent decades, marked by swift production cycles and low pricing that promote excessive consumption. This approach enables consumers to acquire fashionable apparel rapidly; nonetheless, it incurs detrimental environmental consequences, including heightened textile waste, elevated energy usage, and substantial carbon emissions [1]. This industry is projected to account for around 10% of total world carbon emissions, surpassing the combined emissions from international aviation

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and maritime shipping [2]. Fast fashion has altered consumer behaviour and intensified the worldwide environmental catastrophe.

The fast fashion phenomenon in Indonesia is becoming increasingly prominent, particularly among Generation Z born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s. This generation is characterised as digital natives engaged on social media, readily swayed by influencers and rapidly evolving visual trends. Their digital lifestyle promotes impulsive consumption behaviours focused on self-branding, resulting in overconsumption [3]. Nowadays, social and symbolic factors, like approval and recognition from the digital world, drive clothing consumption more than functional demands. The overconsumption phenomenon in fast fashion is intricately connected to the psychological and social dimensions of Generation Z. According to research by Joy et al.[4], even though many young consumers voice concerns about sustainability issues, social media's visual appeal and emotional pull continue to influence their shopping decisions. However, the gap between awareness and actual behaviour is made worse by inadequate sustainability literacy and a lack of knowledge about the environmental effects of the fashion sector [5]. This indicates a contradiction between their sustainability principles and their consumption behaviours.

It is important to obtain a thorough grasp of the elements influencing excessive consumption in the context of fast fashion, given the substantial influence that Generation Z has on market trends and the environment. This research seeks to investigate Generation Z's environmental perspectives and awareness in Indonesia, while identifying the disparity between their sustainability knowledge and real consumption behaviours. By comprehending these dynamics, it is anticipated that the research findings will serve as a basis for the development of educational strategies and social interventions that will encourage more responsible consumption habits.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overconsumption

Overconsumption simply refers to a behavioural pattern of excessively purchasing goods without any basis for need. This behaviour is often triggered by emotional, social, and psychological impulses. Overconsumption can be defined as excessive buying that prioritizes wants over needs. In the context of Gen Z's lives, this behaviour is associated with self-actualization, the search for identity, self-expression, and self-image on social media. Purchases of every fashion product are based on mass culture and current trends. Research conducted by Johnson and Lin demonstrated that environmental campaigns promoted by Gen Z regarding the use of eco-friendly clothing are often overshadowed by social pressure and peer pressure [6]. In other words, the primary motivation for overconsumption is lifestyle and peer influence. This phenomenon demonstrates a mismatch between what is campaigned for and what is realized in real life.

Gen Z is also called digital natives because they grew up and developed under the massive influence of digital technology. Digital media has a significant impact and determines their lives, including consumption. Therefore, they tend to interpret consumption as part of the formation of self-identity. Research by Park and Lin proves that the influence of social media is very strong in the lives of Gen Z [7]. Social media is a factor that shapes perceptions of the importance of appearance and lifestyle and determines social status. Furthermore, the attitude of "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) is an inseparable part of Gen Z behaviour, encouraging impulsive and repetitive purchases. Digital algorithms on social media displayed on Gen Z smartphones consistently display content that suits user preferences and creates the illusion of false needs that are not primary needs. Thus, overconsumption, especially in fashion, is triggered by social media and the fear of missing out on fashion/trends.

In many cases, fashion overconsumption is characterized by style obsolescence, the feeling that one's clothes are "outdated" within a short time. This triggers the urge to continually purchase new products in response to visual pressure and fast-paced trends. Research by Joy et al. suggests that updating one's digital identity and image on platforms like Instagram and TikTok is a dominant driver of overconsumption, especially among younger age groups susceptible to social validation [4]. On the other hand, despite increasing sustainability literacy, this has not been strong enough to change actual consumption patterns. White et al. revealed a significant gap between pro-environmental intentions and actual behaviour, known as the intention-behaviour gap [8]. Factors such as the price of eco-friendly products, limited information, and low personal urgency regarding environmental issues exacerbate this gap. Therefore, contextual communication and education strategies and an emotional approach are needed to make sustainability messages more accessible to Generation Z.

2.2 Fast Fashion

The term "fast fashion" originates from the clothing industry. It refers to a clothing production pattern based on current trends, with low and affordable prices and a fast and easy production process. This approach allows the clothing industry to introduce new collections to meet high market demand constantly. The fast fashion system generates substantial textile waste, heavily exploiting natural resources and labour [9]. Mass production utilising synthetic fibres like polyester presents significant environmental challenges due to their decomposition resistance and the pollution they contribute to aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Fast fashion considerably adds to global carbon emissions. Shirvanimoghaddam assert that the fashion industry accounts for roughly 10% of worldwide carbon emissions and utilises 79 trillion litres of water yearly for textile dyeing [2]. Following oil and gas, the industry is one of the most environmentally detrimental sectors. Nevertheless, insufficient consumer understanding regarding supply chains and environmental consequences has diminished the impetus for systemic transformation. Research by Zang indicates that, from a consumer behaviour standpoint. However, there is an increasing interest in sustainable products, and the allure of fast fashion—characterised by aesthetics, price, and immediate availability—continues to influence purchasing decisions significantly [10]. E-commerce and social media platforms expedite trend cycles and foster a culture of immediate consumption that is challenging to regulate. This underscores the phenomena of a throwaway society, characterized by the purchase, brief use, and subsequent disposal of clothing. Several solutions, including slow fashion, circular fashion, and recycled materials, have been proposed to mitigate the effects of fast fashion. Nonetheless, the uptake of these devices among young customers is still minimal. Henninger et al. research indicates that emotional and social involvement with fashion trends surpasses ethical or ecological considerations [11]. Consequently, behavioural modification must be bolstered by cultural initiatives, continuous education, and the engagement of prominent figures pertinent to the Generation Z ethos.

3 Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore Generation Z's perceptions and consumer behaviours toward fast fashion and related sustainability issues. This approach is suitable for exploring subjective views, personal reasons, and individual social experiences, especially when the phenomenon being studied is complex and related to social values and cultural norms. The data collection process was carried out through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire used a Lickert Scale (1-5) which aims to

explore aspects of clothing purchase frequency, consumption motivation, social media influence, and understanding of the environmental impact of fast fashion. The survey was conducted between February and June 2025 and recruited 73 Generation Z respondents (aged ±15–18 years). After data collection, analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, an approach that focuses on identifying, grouping, and interpreting themes that emerge from the respondent data. This process involves repeatedly reading responses, creating initial codes, organizing themes based on consistent patterns, and drawing conclusions based on dominant narratives. This technique is widely used in consumer behaviour and sustainability studies because it provides flexibility in understanding the psychological and social dynamics of a group of respondents, particularly when values and actions show inconsistencies.

4 Result and Discussion

This study utilised a sample of 73 participants (47 females and 26 males). The measurements concentrated on two primary aspects: Gen Z's overall awareness and perspectives about fashion and the environment and their comprehension of environmental issues and fast fashion, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Gen Z's Awareness and Perspectives

Issues	Average/Percentage
Fashion importance	4.19 / 84.93
Purchase Frequency	2.64 / 56.2
Impulsive Buying	3.68 / 75.6
Social Media Influence	4.01 / 76.7
Eco-friendly influencer Impact	3.45 / 46.58
Awareness of overconsumption (fast fashion)	3.95 / 74
Environmental concern	3.42 / 74
Awareness of Waste	3.95 / 71
Interest in alternatives (thrifting, rental, eco-friendly brands)	3.25 / 48
Preference for eco-friendly fashion products over regular ones	3.63 / 51

Survey findings indicate that fashion holds considerable importance in their lives. 84.93% of respondents regard fashion as an integral or significant aspect of their daily lives. This discovery illustrates the integration of fashion with Generation Z's identity and self-expression. Clothing is now seen as a need and a medium of visual expression and personal self-realisation. McNeill and Moore (2020) assert that Generation Z utilises fashion to express individuality and social connections, predominantly via digital media [12]. Nonetheless, the significance of fashion within Generation Z is coupled with a propensity for overconsumption. According to the survey, 56.2% of participants purchase new clothing monthly, while 75.6% engage in impulse buying prompted by discounts or appealing displays without prior planning. This research demonstrates the prevalence of impulsive behaviour in acquiring fast fashion items. This behaviour corresponds with the findings of Park & Lin, which indicated that readily available fashion trends and the emotional stimuli produced by social media imagery enhance impulsive purchasing, particularly among younger demographics.

Social media significantly influences fast fashion consumption behaviour. Approximately 76.7% of respondents indicated that material on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram affects their clothing shopping habits. This shows that visual algorithms and endorsements from influencers play a significant role in shaping the consumption patterns of Generation Z. The study by Ray asserts that visual exposure to trends and digital

recommendations accelerates the consumption cycle and strengthens the desire to follow fashion trends, even when consumers are aware of the environmental consequences of such actions [13]. Interestingly, although most respondents exhibited behaviours of overconsumption, they also demonstrated awareness of environmental impacts. Respondents reported frequently purchasing clothing from international e-commerce platforms like Shein whenever they see the "fashion haul" trend shared by influencers on TikTok. While they understand that using synthetic materials negatively impacts the environment, the visually appealing appearance and significant discounts make it challenging to resist. Another example of overconsumption comes from a student respondent in Surabaya who regularly buys new clothes for every campus event or social gathering. Her primary motivation is to avoid the impression of "repeating outfits" on social media, especially Instagram. She follows trend recommendations from popular fashion accounts and needs to always look up to date to stay on top of trends. Although she has tried sustainable alternatives like thrifting, the rapid pace of trend change in the fast fashion industry has led her to return to new products that are easily accessible and affordable. This suggests that FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and digital social pressure remain strong drivers of fast fashion consumption among Gen Z. These garments are often worn only once for social media photos before being kept or given away. This phenomenon highlights the attitude-behaviour gap among Gen Z, where awareness of environmental issues has not yet fully translated into sustainable consumption behavior. 74% of respondents indicated that they knew the dangers of excessive fast fashion consumption, and 71% recognized that clothing waste contributes to environmental pollution. This reflects a developing level of ecological awareness among Generation Z. However, the gap between awareness and action remains evident. This reflects what is known in the literature as the attitude-behaviour gap or value-action gap, where the values held by consumers are not reflected in actual consumption decisions [8]. The possibility for a transition to more sustainable consumption is evident. The potential for a shift towards more sustainable consumption is indeed open. As many as 48% of respondents stated that they have tried or are interested in sustainable fashion alternatives, such as thrifting or renting clothes, and 51% indicated that they tend to choose eco-friendly products over conventional ones when both are available. This fact demonstrates that Generation Z is open to more ethical alternatives, provided that these options are communicated appealingly and are widely available. Henninger et al. assert that values-based marketing techniques utilizing influencers and facilitating access to sustainable products can bridge the divide between values and actions. Gender-based analysis indicates women exhibit greater awareness, concern, and susceptibility to environmental issues and fashion-oriented social media. Concurrently, men generally exhibit more conservative attitudes and practices around fashion consumption. Women show greater social media impact, ecological concern, understanding of rapid fashion, and interest in sustainable fashion alternatives compared to men, suggesting a necessity for tailored strategies to enhance their awareness. Figure 2 illustrates the gender-based mapping.

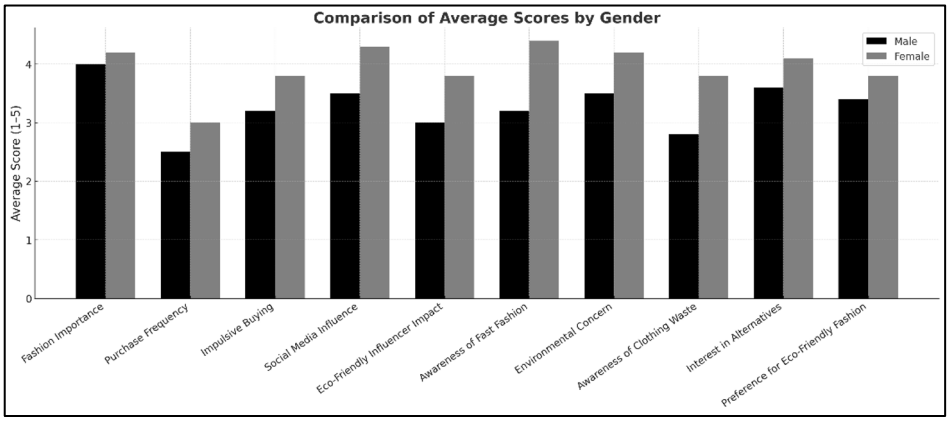

Fig 1. Gender-based analysis of gen Z awareness and perspective.

This study's findings suggest that Generation Z's shopping behaviour, albeit shaped by trends and social media, can be directed towards more responsible consuming practices. The essential factor is conveying sustainability themes

corresponding to their communication methods and incorporating digital role models. Collaboration is necessary among the fashion industry, legislators, and public figures to enhance access to sustainable products and to embed the seriousness of environmental issues into the consumer awareness of this generation.

5 Conclusion

This study indicates that Generation Z in Indonesia greatly understands sustainability concerns and the ecological consequences of the fast fashion sector. Nonetheless, a substantial disparity exists between this awareness and actual consumption patterns. Most respondents persist in demonstrating impulsive and consumptive behaviours, such as acquiring clothing driven by discounts or appealing visual trends, influenced by the prevalence of social media and digital lifestyles. This problem illustrates an attitude-behaviour discrepancy, wherein espoused sustainable goals are not consistently manifested in everyday purchase choices. The principal catalysts of overconsumption are the impact of social media and visual culture, which amplify the necessity for self-expression via fashion. Nonetheless, the data indicates that Generation Z is not resistant to change. Participants expressed a significant interest in more sustainable fashion products, particularly when recommended by trusted public personalities or influencers. Moreover, alternative behaviours like thrifting are gaining popularity as a consumption choice among them, although they have not yet fully established themselves as dominant habits. Consequently, the fashion industry, government, and public figures must adopt a more planned and coordinated methodology to promote the shift towards sustainable consumption patterns. Values-based education presented in a manner that corresponds with Generation Z's digital traits is essential for fostering more responsible conduct. This research advocates for additional studies with an expanded scope and a longitudinal methodology to examine long-term alterations in consumption patterns and the efficacy of sustainability initiatives among the youth.

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Mendeley Data at https://data.mendeley.com/drafts/wfn2rx8pz2, reference number 10.17632/wfn2rx8pz2.1,

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