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Exploring ethical consumption of Generation Z: Theory of Planned Behaviour

Abstract

Purpose

This study explores the factors that encourage Generation Z consumers to turn an ethical purchase intention into purchase behaviour. Theory of Planned Behaviour model is applied to understand the Generation Z ethical consumerism.

Design/Methodology

Qualitative method in the form of 18 semi-structured interviews was conducted on participants aged within the Generation Z cohort in the United Kingdom.

Findings

Research findings show that Generation Z has strong awareness and desire towards ethical and environmental issues. Driven in the main by the cohorts unlimited exposure to social media platforms and online resources where information is shared. Generation Z's frugality limits them to purchase truly ethically in their current life stage. Financial aspirations from this target market suggest a future desire to purchase high value ethical items. Further trends discovered highlighted sustainable lifestyle choices within the generation. Recycling, diet choices and reduced consumption on clothing were expressed. Highlighting that Generation Z are aware of ethical issues prevalent in society and are doing what they can at this life stage to make a positive impact.

Practical Implications

This research has valuable implications for both academics and marketers. It provides new insights for scholars into understanding Generation Z decision making in ethical consumption. It successfully applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to understand generational consumer behaviour. The findings can assist practitioners to determine effective marketing strategies to persuade Generation Z to act ethically. The research can also be considered when dealing with government legislation when tackling social change in younger population as this appeared important factor for the researched consumers. Marketers should also consider digital influencers as part of their communication campaigns targeting Generation Z users.

Originality

This search offers a valuable contribution to current academic findings towards Generation Z research as ethical consumers incorporating TPB framework.

Key words: Generation Z, consumer behaviour, ethical consumption, Theory of Planned Behaviour.

1. Introduction

This paper explores Generation Z behaviour as ethical consumers using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. This study considers the unique characteristics of Generation Z as a consumer group and their engagement with ethical consumerism. Theory of Planned Behaviour is used to investigate Generation Z's attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control purchase intention and purchase behaviour to understand ethical consumption within the cohort's lifestyle.

The media coverage of environmental and social issues has been continually growing momentum in the last few decades. Empirical evidence shows that higher number of consumers are attracted by the values of ethical consumerism (Han et al., 2019). With these issues prevalent, ethically minded consumers are now concerned about the environmental impacts and social ethics in mainstream society (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). However, the change in consumer behaviour and purchase decision is much less apparent (Park & Lin, 2018; Casais & Faria, 2021). Researchers have sought to understand this social change by developing models of ethical consumer behaviour. These models have generally been drawn on Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to suggest that the purchasing intentions of ethical consumers are driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Carrington et al., 2010). Current literature looks to understand this social change by developing models of ethical consumer behaviour and previously have employed TPB. However, this framework has yet to be investigated exclusively with Generation Z consumer cohort. This study investigates this research gap and examines what encourages Generation Z consumers to turn an ethical purchase intention into purchase behaviour.

Gen Z is now the largest generational group, constituting for 32% of the global population (New York post, 2020). Outnumbering Millennials, by more than one million, Generation Z buying power is five or six times that of Generations before them (Dabija et al., 2019), making them a segment of high interest to marketers (Naumovska, 2017). With this, marketers are increasingly interested in investigating Generation Z's perceptions, motivations, and opinions concerning ethical consumption activities (McColl et al., 2021). Dividing individuals by their generational cohort, marketers create a segment who share similar life experiences that shapes how they view the world, their values, and ideals (Chillakuri, 2020; Riley & Klein, 2021). In terms of practical implications, this information empowers marketers to craft a relevant message that draws a direct connection between individuals and how they relate to their brand (Villanova et al., 2021). The research enhances existing literature, extending the use of Theory of Planned Behavior to understand the generational consumer insights, with a particular attention to ethical intentions and decisions. Furthermore, this work can offer useful insights to help companies in developing effective marketing strategies to stimulate Generation Z's ethical consumption.

This research topic on what drives Generation Z to purchase or not purchase ethical products remains something of a puzzle for consumer behaviour researchers. There is still a gap in marketing research regarding generation Z true motivations behind ethical purchase consumption. Thus, this paper aims to meet the follow objectives:

- To understand generation Z consumer attitudes as a cohort towards ethical and environmental concerns today.
- To explore generation Z subject norms in relation to ethical consumption.

- To identify generation Z perceived behavioural controls, enabling, and limiting ethical purchase.
- To discover what encourages generation Z consumers to turn an ethical purchase intention into purchase into a behaviour.

2. Literature review

2.1 Generation Z and their characteristics

Generational marketing theory highlights a timeline of generations relevant to marketing today (Bevan-Dye, 2020). The concept understands that each generation has unique expectations, experiences, and generational history (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). These exposures contribute towards generations lifestyle and values that influence cohorts buying behaviours (Williams & Page, 2019). As not every generational cohort is alike, it is imperative marketers understand marketing factors to suit generational groups characteristics and behaviours (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Life stage is critical to understanding consumers attitudes, perceptions, and daily activities (Walker, 2003). Theorists expect generational cohorts to travel through life together, experiencing similar events at similar ages (Walker, 2003). This makes understanding what motivates generations much more complex for marketers. In today's world, a 30-year-old millennial is not in the same life stage as a 30-year-old baby boomer (Wagner & Luger, 2021). For companies to find success they must offer meaningful products that are relevant at each life stage specific to specific generational values (Chillakuri, 2020).

Generation Z is defined as persons born from 1995 to 2010, choosing this date for different formative experiences, such as new technological developments and socioeconomic trends (Dimock, 2019; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2010; Kotler et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2021). Emphasizing generational lifespan should have a maximum of 15 years due to the record rise in birth rates and technological advancements (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generation Z's characteristics are shaped by the surrounding external factors of their time (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Generation Z was exposed to an unprecedented amount of technology in their upbringing (Prakash-Yadav & Rai, 2017; Cheung et al., 2021). Never knowing a time before the internet, they are technology dependent and hyper aware of the latest news and global issues (Johnston, 2018). With their upbringing shaped around unlimited access to the internet, combined with developments in smartphone technology and social media, Generation Z are characterized as having a 'digital bond' (Turner, 2015).

They spend nearly 11 hours reading, liking, and sharing material across online devices daily (Adobe, 2018). Their need to be involved and informed with other people is the rationale behind the cohorts online socializing (Prakash-Yadav & Rai, 2017; Cheung & To, 2021). Generation Z has seen older millennials mistakes posting too openly across social media platforms, so they are aware of their personal brand online and want to make the best impression of themselves to others (Williams, 2015). Their identity online is a big influence on their purchasing habits as they care about how they are perceived by others (Autumn Fair, 2019). Their tech

savvy ways are learnt authentically through playing and discovering how to operate and use technology themselves from a young age (Tarab, 2020).

Drawing Generation Z' upbringing from a globalisation factor, the cohort has large exposure to global events (Vitelar, 2019; Naidu et al., 2020). Having no boundary on country or religious exposure has had an impact on the cohort's upbringing environment (Williams, 2015). Societal steps forward are combined with exposure to Black Lives Matter movements, increased terrorism, and LGBTQ+ hate crime (Bitterman & Hess, 2021). This has meant Gen Z is very aware of real-world realities from a young age (Witt & Baird, 2021).

External exposure to financial crashes resulting in multiple global recessions has built a strong sense of frugality within Generation Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). They are savings minded, savvy consumers who do not just expect more for their money but stronger meaning aligning with individual values (Schlossberg, 2016). The cohort is described as conscientious, hardworking, somewhat anxious, and mindful of the future (Williams, 2015). They are a growth generation open to new experiences and ideas due to exposure through a globalised world online (Fromm & Read, 2018). This environment has made Gen Z socially aware, and justice minded (Johnston, 2018). With these demographic trends eclipsing prior generations, Generation Z find themselves being multicultural vanguards for racism and change in society (Pacific standard, 2019).

Generation Z students are described as complete multitaskers, achievement orientated and have an openminded nature (Rickes, 2016). Educationally,

Generation Z has lower high school dropout rates and the largest number of students attending university (Pew Research Centre, 2018). These trends now place Generation Z on a trajectory to become the most educated generational group to date (Pew Research Centre, 2019). Their motivations for academic achievements have made them a cohort of focused and competitive individuals (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). This high level of education and competitive spirit has also given Gen Z an entrepreneurial spirit (Rickes, 2016).

Among the present consumer generations, Gen Z members are the most interested in incorporating sustainability into their lifestyles (Dabija & Bejan, 2017; Saarelainen, 2021). They seek green products and services which implement environmental protection, promote social responsibility, and adopt specific measures to protect employees and support local communities (Dabija & Bejan, 2017). Generation Zs express a very keen interest in social responsibility. They are aware that their decisions may affect other people, the environment or jeopardise future generations' access to resources (Dabija & Pop, 2013). They actively engage with content online, voicing their opinions on issues including the recent phenomenon of cancel culture (Cherian & Jacob, 2012).

While some literature suggests Generation Z seek brands they regard as having a positive effect on the environment (Schroth, 2019), other studies suggest that Generation Z is more attitudinally green than behaviourally green (Naderi & Steenburg, 2018). Gen Z like older counterparts' values accessibility, affordability, and quality, while green products are often associated with inconvenience, high costs and lower performance (Chen & Chai, 2010; Naderi & Steenburg, 2018).

Gen Z has adopted values such as respect for others, sincerity, honesty, responsibility, and hedonism (Williams et al., 2010; Azimi et al., 2021). They globally believe that an organisation should have a positive effect on or generate benefits for the environment (Reiners, 2020). Young consumers are likely to favour environmentally friendly policies such as green energy development and economic incentives for sustainability practices (Pew Research Centre, 2019).

2.2 Ethical consumerism

Ethical consumers have political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social, or other motives for choosing one product over another (Harrison et al., 2005). This includes products focused on animal welfare, the environment, human rights, and fair trade (Beck & Ladwig, 2021). This form of consumerism serves for ethical action based on subjective moral judgments applied to individual products/brands across the production, consumption, and disposition cycle (Brunk, 2010). Exercising choice in this way creates incentives for producers to make production practices conform to consumer values (Mak & Terryn, 2020). Describing the ethical consumer, depicts three strands to differentiate the group: positive ethical, negative ethical and consumer action (Foutty, 2019).

Positive ethical behaviour refers to purchasing products that are socially responsible (Khoiruman & Haryanto, 2017). The products have advertised positive attributes towards, ethical or environmental causes (Goo, 2020). Negative ethical purchase behaviour refers to consumers who engage in activities such as boycotting products that are not produced ethically (Kushwah et al., 2019). Most common in ethical

consumer literature is the role of boycott participation such as cancel culture (Tallontire et al., 2001). Consumers demonstrate negative opinions of a product by deliberately avoiding purchase (Bedi, 2019). The last type of ethical consumerism is consumer action. These consumers engage in activities such as lobbying in order to get brands to reform unethical production of goods and services (Uche, 2018).

Generation Z is said to be more likely to support positive ethical action. They are active when sharing government petitions online, encouraging direct action within society (Graj, 2020; Barkemeyer et al., 2020). The market entrance of high quality and ethical products and the increased publicity surrounding human rights campaigns, political movements, environmental demonstrations and animal welfare charities. Many consumers now have a keen interest in products ethics (Lo et al., 2020).

2.3 Theoretical framework: Theory of Planned Behaviour

The development of the TPB model states three core components that build intention, attitude, subject norm, and perceived behavioral control. This model improves introduces the concept of perceived behavioral control. When discussing ethical consumerism an individual may have strong attitudes and subjective norms towards an intention to purchase sustainably. If this is combined with no barriers of control such as financial position, accessibility or time inconvenience, the theory suggests the intention to purchase will take place (Hwang & Ok, 2013). Behavioural beliefs are theorized to produce a positive or negative attitude toward the behaviour. The positive or negative belief of each experience contributes to the consumers overall attitude (Ajzen, 2020).

Perceived behavioural control is defined as the perception of the difficulty of enacting a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (2002) states, perceived behavioural control is comprised of two highly related variables: perceived self-efficacy and perceived controllability. Taken together, both these variables make up perceived behavioural control which both directly predict behaviour (Madden et al., 1992). Intentions are indicators of how hard people are willing to try, or how much of an effort they are planning to exert (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions might lead directly to action straight away or after a gap in time (Bagozzi, 1992). Purchase behaviour defines the action consumers undertake to buy a product/service (Ajzen, 2011). The TPB model uses all prior steps to predict and understand consumers purchase behaviour (Ajzen, 2002). The TPB offers a clearly defined structure to explain an individual's behaviour through understanding their behavioural intention, which is jointly affected by attitude, subjective norms, perceived norms, and perceived behavioural control. Thus, this model is used to examine the Generation Z' intentions to purchase ethically.

3. Research Methods

To explore Generation Z's ethical consumer attitudes and behaviour, the study adopts qualitative research approach. This research approach has been selected to gain a more detailed perspective on attitudes and influences of Generation Z as ethical consumers. Qualitative research method focuses on obtaining data through open ended and conversational communication (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The qualitative method conducted in this study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to observe participant's reactions and hear their responses authentically, in their own words. It also provides the researchers with leeway to probe respondents' answers while maintaining an interview structure (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews attain more actively engaged participants (Roulston & Choi, 2018) which allows to gain deeper insight by encouraging participants to build upon their initial ideas and explore the reason why participants hold these views (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Set questions were used to explore Generation Z's influencing factors regarding ethical consumer behaviour. Interview questions were framed using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Researchers followed a semi-structured interview guide outlined by Silverman (2020) to develop research questions. This has enabled to follow a dependable guide which in turn aims to achieve credible data results.

Data collection began with a convenience sample of Generation Z. Generation Z are individuals aged between 26 and 11 when the research was conducted. Participants, in this study, were those aged 18-26. Individuals under the age of 18 require parental consent and would make data collecting high risk. Sample size of 18 participants,

both male (6 out of 18) and female aged 18-25 have been selected to take part in the interview process. The respondents were approached through the researchers' contacts. Majority of the participants (14 out of 18) were students from an institution in the United Kingdom at the time of the interview. Another 4 respondents were young professionals.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. Interviews were recorded so conversation could flow naturally without delays. Once the data was collected from all participants, interviews were then transcribed to aid thematic analysis of the research data findings. To adhere to the authors' institutional ethical procedures, respondents signed a consent form prior to taking part in the research and were briefed on the research topic.

Thematic analysis is the data analysis process chosen in this study as it is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis aids understanding participants views, opinions, knowledge, behaviours, or values (Terry et al., 2017). The researchers closely examined the data through writing up interview transcripts to identify common themes and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly from the interview participants. This data analysis process follows psychology researchers Braun and Clarke's six step process: Familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and then writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes derived in the study were assessed by two independent coders to evaluate the inter-coder reliability and to ensure the agreement on the coding

process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Inter-coder reliability is used to achieve transparency and clarity of the coding process.

4. Findings and Analysis

Using thematic analysis, key findings from the primary research are highlighted and any comparisons or similarities are discovered to create key themes. When analysing the responses, themes discussed in this section follow the Theory of Planned Behaviour: attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, ethical purchase intention and ethical purchase behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

4.1 Attitude

4.1.1 Theme 1: Strong ethical and environmental awareness

All participants identified they are ethically conscious.

'Yes, I am conscious with my outgoings. I recycle and do look for ways to be more conscious where I can.' (P8)

'I try to be ethical when I can.' (P12)

It became clear that ethical consciousness stem from individual action such as recycling, reduced plastic consumption and reduced clothes purchase.

Generation Z members express a very keen interest in social responsibility. They are aware that their decisions may affect other people and the environment or jeopardise future generations' access to resources like those available to current generations (Dabija & Pop, 2013). All participants said they were concerned about the environmental issues prevalent today.

'I am worried about our environment, all the problems that come with over consumption'. (P18)

When asked why this was the case, participants voiced that this was down to increased visibility on social media with more celebrities and influencers followed using their platforms share content. High awareness of ethical issues on social media is prominent in Generation Z participants. Demonstrating Generation Z to have aspects of ethical consumption habits. They are conscious of their consumption and holding strong personal and moral attitudes regarding environmental and ethical awareness.

Another cause of high awareness of ethical and environmental issues prevalent today was education and upbringing.

'There is a lot of information about environmental issues, for example global warming that we study about at uni as well'. (P15)

With the majority of Generation Z furthering their education they are aware of their consumption. Higher education reinforces students' values, principles, and moral development (Alkhayyal et al., 2019).

4.1.2 Theme 2: Attitude for future ethical consumerism

Although attitude towards ethical concerns from Generation Z participants was overall very strong, there was a topic disused regarding future ethical consumerism. While explaining why participant one was ethically conscious, they mentioned their desire to purchase green and ethical products in a later life stage.

“I am definitely aware of the issues today. I see and read a lot of articles online. I am especially interested in sustainable automotive industry with electric cars this is something I see taking off for our generation. As technology is advancing and my disposable income hopefully increases, I would be motivated to purchase ethically in big ways.”(P1)

Ultimate environmental concern is defined by a person’s identity (Archer, 2016). Morally, Generation Z are seen to be conscious and aware of environmental and ethical challenges (Manyukhina, 2018). Yet this morality is guided not only through generations outlook but also life course trajectory. The process of consumer moral conversion to ethical consumption may evolve throughout a consumer’s life stage (Manyukhina, 2018). Perhaps, the participants see themselves more self-sustained and financially independent to be able to make ethical decisions at later stages of their life.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Social image

When asked if participants ethical attitudes were ever based on social image, responses were split. Participant 2 and 9 discussed that it was not a factor towards product purchase for them.

‘No not particularly. I don’t do it to be seen in a certain way. I just do it because I think it is the right thing to do.’ (P2)

8 participants described how it was a factor in how they purchased.

‘I guess yes. I don’t like to admit it, but I do care what people think of me with what I buy or eat and where I socialise. I am more likely to buy something that someone has recommended to me or my friends and I enjoy the brand or style.’ (P10)

'Sometimes it could be the reason, I feel under pressure to be good consumer and not to waste.' (P15)

These findings allude to self-presentation concept and young people want to be seen positively in the eyes of peers. This will also relate to next theme of social media image.

4.2 Subjective norms

4.2.1 Themes 4 and 5: Social media image awareness and movements and boycotts

When discussing social media image with participants, the most frequent responses highlighted a strong consciousness and awareness for their individual online profile.

'I am aware that my profile reflects myself online, so I like it to reflect my personality and I'm aware of voicing opinions just for job protection in the future.' (P1)

The main driving force for this theme with participants was worry regarding employers seeing something online that could be damaging to career prospects. This is further highlighted by Participant 9.

'Yes, I would say a little I've learnt you have to be very aware of your presence on social media. I know some celebrities in the public eye have lost jobs due to mistakes made on social media.' (P9)

They are keen for social media image to be clean and positive and not detrimental to future career prospects (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2020). Social media image was a significant part of their online activities. Participants were not active social media posters when purchasing any products due to fear of negative peer opinions of

bragging. When asked would you be motivated to show an ethical product you have purchased on social media all respondents disagreed.

'I don't think so. I use social media for entertainment and information'. (P13)

This theme displays an important consciousness on Generation Z's control over their social media image portrayal. Having a concern for what peers' opinions are regarding their social media posts.

Social media is an important aspect of ethical consumerism with movements trending on social media and brand boycotts often encouraged surrounding unethical business practice. Generation Z participants were asked about engagement in social movements. Majority of participants stated that they experienced no pressure with social movements as they had strong beliefs in the movement in hand.

'I wouldn't say I feel pressure to engage. In fact, I found it helpful to learn about key topics in a safe environment where I could read reflections from people who are affected and grow my knowledge. This enabled me to generate my own opinion. Social media offers a platform to increase awareness about the many movements that have come to light over the last year especially.' (P7)

Generation Z has a need to be involved and informed with other people when socializing online (Prakash-Yadav & Rai, 2017). This theme highlights Generation Z's motivation to educate themselves through social media. The passion to learn and interact with movements online shows how much Generation Z relies on social media for information and education.

Negative ethical purchase behaviour refers to consumers who engage in activities such as boycotting products that are not produced ethically (Tallontire et al., 2001). Generation Z participants were asked if they have ever boycotted a brand due to a social movement or brands mistake. Most participants stated they have not done that *'No, I have never boycotted a brand. I would say I more follow trends so if something was popular, I would buy it and if it wasn't that popular, I probably wouldn't be motivated to buy it.'* (P1)

Brand boycotting culture is a form of anti-consumption. This could stem from a political, ethical, environmental or social motivation (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009). Generation Z participants were not active brand boycotters. Most felt if a brand did the wrong thing, addressed it and fixed the issues they were willing to forgive.

'Not really I honestly can't remember a brand I have actively boycotted. I remember with Pepsi they did a controversial campaign and social media did push brand boycotting then but I felt they resolved the situation with an apology statement and future action which is enough for me to know they are actively trying.' (P4)

Participant 4 highlights the ability to forgive brands over mistakes contributing to literature suggesting generation Z are not negative ethical consumers. This, however, could be argued due to the raising issues around the cancel culture phenomenon which has been brought up by Gen Z users to show their online disagreement with companies and celebrities. Perhaps, the respondents did not feel ethical concerns were high enough to boycott the company.

4.3 Perceived behavioural control

4.3.1 Themes 6 and 7: Generation Z frugality and influencer education

Having experienced a turbulent economic climate through upbringing, this has built a strong sense of frugality within Generation Z (Fromm & Read, 2018). When asked what participants perceive to be the biggest limitation to them purchasing ethically more frequently all of them mentioned cost.

'It is too expensive to buy green, or ethical products.' (P16)

Price is therefore the main perceived barrier for Generation Z with ethical purchase habits. Literature indicated that this is not just a singular price factor that limits ethical consumption. Higher relative price is the bottom line with ethical consumption.

Consumers find themselves being obligated to travel further distances to retrieve ethical product selections (Barbarossa & Pastore, 2015). They are not only be hit with higher product prices, but extra costs incurred with traveling. Further to this, negative environmental impact from extra traveling feels counterproductive to consumers (Barbarossa & Pastore, 2015). Therefore, consumers are more drawn towards convenience product purchase but having a stronger conscious on recycling and reduced consumption waste (Lin & Niu, 2018). When discussing perceived behavioural control participants were also asked about purchase enablers with ethical products. Thirteen respondents agreed that social media influencers are a great tool when purchasing ethically.

'One thing that makes it easier is that more influencers are promoting stuff to us now so we can be more educated to make switches that are easy to do and they try for us type thing.' (P3)

Having knowledge on a product makes you more likely to purchase. Influencers have up to 22.2 times more “buying conversations” that include product recommendations each week than an average consumer (Berger & Keller, 2016).

Influencers are a key part of Generation Z’s social media usage (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Literature depicts the cohort to commonly engage with social media channels, specifically YouTube (Reijonen, 2019). Channel engagement happens when there is something Generation Z wish to learn, may that be product knowledge or wider societal education (Reijonen, 2019). As Generation Z has grown up in a truly digital world, the understanding of what kind of marketing content worth creating for the cohort is vital. Combining this with Generation Z ethical consumer attitude, primary research has found influencer marketing to be a great tool to encourage ethical product purchase within Generation Z (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). In fact, digital influencers should be further used to tackle social behaviour challenges and bring forward the changes.

4.4 Purchase intention

4.4.1 Themes 8 and 9: Reducing consumption and sustainable lifestyles

Developing an intention to purchase is an important indication of future purchase behaviour. Participants were asked ‘when developing an intention to purchase, what are influencing factors that make you discard a product.’ Nine participants responded stating a desire to reduce consumption and shop within their means.

‘I am trying not to shop unnecessarily with the current climate both economically and environmentally. I often keep something in my online basket for a few weeks and if I still want it buy it if I don’t want to anymore, I will discard.’(P8)

There is a clear drive for more ethical consumption of clothes. Participants explained that they were reducing product consumption to pursue a more sustainable lifestyle. This trend can be built up from multiple factors. Environmental awareness through education and upbringing, frugality, and social media trends.

Building on from reduced consumption, Gen Z is the most interested generation in incorporating sustainability into their lifestyles (Dabija & Bejan, 2017). This can be backed up from the primary research conducted. When asked 'Have you ever made a conscious effort to be more ethical with consumption in your lifestyle' all responded affirmative, with recycling being the top lifestyle habit.

'I am an active recycler and I make sure when I am home, I get the whole family involved too.' (P10)

Generation Z participants responded with a positive recycling lifestyle habit. However, this is contrary to literature findings, Wrap (2020) reports top recyclers aged 55+ at 49% compared to 18-24s said to perceive it as less likely a strong norm to recycle captured at 37% (Wrap Reports, 2020). This depicts Gen Z as individuals who add multiple items into general waste and have mild locally collected recycling habits (Wrap Reports, 2020). However, the same report dated back to 2017 referred to 19% of younger users following to the recycling rules, which indicates the number of environmentally conscious consumers among the younger population is growing which is also reflected in our study.

4.5 Ethical purchase behaviour

4.5.1 Themes 10 and 11: Feel good feeling and product packaging

The theme of a feel-good feeling was prominent amongst participants when asked what motivates them to turn ethical purchase intention to ethical purchase.

'I think it's the feel-good feeling of purchasing something you are excited about but also proud of as it has been sourced ethically and sustainably.' (P8)

Feeling good by doing good is a common emotion experienced when purchasing ethically. Evidence so far has pointed in a clear direction: people who anticipate feeling pride, joy, or social acceptance, because of purchasing ethical products, are more likely to buy goods that satisfy green, fair trade, and other ethical criteria (Davies & Gutsche, 2016; Landhari & Tchegn, 2017; Oh & Yoon, 2014). This, in fact, could again allude to the self-presentation and self-actualisation concepts.

When discussing purchase behaviour with Generation Z many participants said to have a motivation to reduce plastic packaging.

'Packaging with reduced plastic motivates me. I am keen to recycle and do my bit for the environment where I can.' (P4)

'I would say that I would frequently look for more ethical solutions when doing my weekly shop like reduced plastic packaging.' (P7)

Consumers no longer only care about product price or quality they care about the environment and issue of society. Being conscious of plastic packaging is further discussed as an inherent factor in positive ethical consumerism. They are more likely

to purchasing goods with ethical characteristic due to their awareness of product information. As one of the fundamental reasons for unethical purchase is highly priced goods, reducing the plastic use is more manageable by the younger consumers and often does not lead to considerable sacrifice while still leaves them with satisfaction of ethical contribution.

4.6 Summary questions

4.6.1 Theme 12: Legislation

To conclude the semi-structured interviews participants were asked what was needed to make ethical purchase a priority. There were wide ranging discussions regarding price, convenience and accessibility but multiple participants mentioned legislation.

'I think for me maybe there needs to be more done just to make everything standard and ethical and friendly for the planet so laws from government so companies have to do the right thing and can't provide products that are not up to standard.' (P1)

'I think bringing the price more in line with non-ethical alternative's like government putting legislative pressure on retailers to rethink suppliers or maybe more taxation on non ethical products to bring price in line.' (P4)

Putting governmental pressure on standards agencies would make ethical consumption a priority for every participant. Generation Z has seen ethical legislation implemented and work.

'I also believe that the most dramatic change happens when the government implements it and it becomes the norm, for example, paying for plastic bags. If the

government made more ethical law changes, then I would have no choice but to make better ethical decisions when purchasing.’ (P6)

UK plastic bag act transformed the retail landscape and significantly reduce plastic bag waste (Nie et al., 2020). Generation Z has witnessed the effectiveness of environmental regulation here. Participants are accepting off government regulation for environmental action.

4.6.2 Theme 13: Acknowledged attitude behaviour gap

When asking Generation Z if there was a gap between how they hoped to purchase and how they purchased, sixteen participants acknowledged there was a gap.

‘Unfortunately, yes it’s just not available in every industry for me to access at this stage in my life but I do have high aspirations to live within my means and purchase ethical products in my lifetime.’ (P8)

This purchase intention drops off displays influencing factors in why Generation Z does not purchase exclusively ethically, price and access inconvenience. However, participants discussed a narrowing gap prediction for their future consumption.

‘Yes. I think there is a gap, however I would say the gap is narrowing as I get older and gain more knowledge and curiosity about sustainability.’ (P7)

These findings highlight a driving force of optimism for Generation Z as a consumer groups, for future ethical consumerism. As the awareness in ethical consumption need is growing among younger consumers due to online exposure and education,

their intention for this changing behaviour is also increasing and is determined by specific factors rather than their inner desire.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Objective one

To understand Generation Z consumer attitudes as a cohort towards ethical and environmental concerns today.

The research showed that Generation Z are concerned about the ethical and environmental issues prevalent today. Holding strong personal and moral attitudes regarding environmental and ethical matters. Generation Z are aware that their decisions may affect other people and the environment or jeopardise future generations' access to resources like those available to current generations (Dabija & Pop, 2013). Generation Z has strong awareness towards their consumption footprint, looking ahead, not wanting to degrade the planet for future generations. Generation Z's higher education has enabled them to develop stronger attitudes towards ethical and environmental issues. Cone & Novelli (2019) research does not only reinforce our primary research findings but indicates how companies can engage this generation. No further literature was found to contradict the findings that the majority of Generation Z has strong ethical and environmental concerns.

5.2 Objective two

To explore Generation Z subjective norms in relation to ethical consumption.

The research results found that peers perceptions of Gen Z social media image drive the cohorts concern for their online profile. This prevents Generation Z from actively posting ethical consumption and opinions online. The main concern was offending someone unintentionally. Gen Zs do not often share individual opinions regarding the environment (Fromm & Read, 2018). They are conscious of what other people think and instead more often share already curated content through time sensitive platforms like snapchat and Instagram (Rue, 2018). Generation Z wants peers and employees to perceive their social image as positive and unoffensive online. Generation Z are perceived to be justice minded and multicultural vanguards for racism and change in society (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016). Literature portrays Gen Z as active pioneers for societal change on social media (Vitelar, 2019). However, our study suggests Generation Z are timid to post and would likely think twice before voicing an opinion on social media. The research findings and literature showed a high degree of correlation regarding the subjective norms of Generation Z in relation to ethical consumption. However, literature did not fully align on how to characterise the cohort.

5.3 Objective three

To identify Generation Z perceived behavioural controls, enabling, and limiting ethical purchase.

Generation Z perceive social media influencers and friends' recommendations as ethical purchase enablers. Young users engage with social media influencers who have similar behaviours to themselves. Having similar behaviours favours product promotion by influencers as they are more likely to persuade their following to purchase promoted products (Wolf, 2020). This could mean a social media influencer may become an ethical purchase enabler in the future (Schouten et al.,

2020). Whereas perceived limitations of ethical purchasing for Generation Z are strongly price related, products usually result in a higher retail pricing strategy due to higher product costs (Guo et al., 2020) and this generation is not always prepared to pay this price.

5.4 Objective four

To discover what encourages Generation Z consumers to turn an ethical purchase intention into purchase into a behaviour.

In terms of what encourages Generation Z consumers to turn ethical intention into purchase it was linked more to the individual level of motivation rather than a wider generational theme. These findings echo prior research by demonstrating that for Generation Z, the foremost purchase considerations appear to be traditional factors, such as price and quality. Ethical consumerism requires the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices due to personal and moral beliefs (Auger & Devinney, 2007). With Generation Z, price, quality, and convenience drive the purchases of everyday products. Generation Z considers whether the product supports a charity or improves environmental footprint. However, this was never the main motivation to purchase. Findings show that when Generation Z makes an ethical purchase, a feel-good feeling was an encouraging factor that motivated the purchase (Bianchi et al., 2020).

With rising spending power and digitally enhanced information access, young consumers are translating awareness into conscientious and environment-friendly product choices (Choudhary, 2020). This primary research offers a valuable contribution to current academic literature towards Generation Z research as ethical consumers. Sustainable lifestyle habits were widely adopted by the cohort through

recycling, reduced fashion consumption or veganism. This research has valuable implications for both academics and marketers. It provides new insights for scholars into understanding Generation Z decision making in ethical consumption. It successfully applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour to understand generational consumer behaviour. The findings can assist practitioners to determine effective marketing strategies to persuade Generation Z to act ethically. The research can also be considered when dealing with government legislation when tackling social change in younger population as this appeared important factor for the researched consumers. Marketers should also consider digital influencers as part of their communication campaigns with ethical messages to the Generation Z users. To take this research further, comparative analysis can be conducted looking into how Generation Z ethical consumption habits compare to other generations. A cross cultural study could be conducted to explore differences and similarities between different cultural backgrounds and upbringings towards ethical consumption. Understanding Generation Z consumer behaviours towards ethical consumerism could be explored using the consumer decision making model. Generation Z are constantly evolving and developing through life stages. This makes continued academic research important to truly understand the cohort's consumer habits across their life path.

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Appendix. Interview Questions

1. Would you say you are ethically conscious? – What has given you these attitudes?
2. To what extent are you concerned about ethical and environmental issues prevalent today?
3. Is this attitude towards ethical products ever based on social image?
4. If you wanted to purchase an ethical product could you tell me what would make that hard or easy for you?
5. If this was price, are there any other barriers like accessibility, availability, product education, actual taste preventing you?
6. Have you ever felt an ethical obligation to think green and purchase ethically? If so, why was this and did you make the purchase?
7. Self-identity is how you identify and define yourself. Would you say your self-identity represents a motivation to purchase ethically? If yes – why is it part of your self-image?
8. Do you trust brands claims regarding a products ethics? And does trust in a brand ethics make you more or less likely to purchase and why?
9. What are influencing factors when you discard a product you once had a desire to purchase?
10. Are there any ethical products you have an intention to purchase? Or repurchase? If so, what is the product and what has prevented you from purchasing already?
11. have you ever made a conscious effort to be more ethical with consumption in your lifestyle? If yes, why did you make this decision? And would you say this a purchase you will be making frequently?
12. What prevents your ethical attitudes turning into purchase behaviour?
13. What are some of your priorities when making a purchase online or instore?
14. How frequently would you say you purchase products that are environmentally sustainable and socially ethical?
15. What motivated you to turn these ethical purchase intentions into ethical purchase?
16. Do you have any ethical obligations which made you feel like you must purchase for ethical and environmental reasons?

17. What do you think is needed to make ethical consumption the biggest priority for you?

18. Would you say there is a gap between how you hope to purchase, and you purchase? If so, what is a reason for the drop off in purchase intention?