

The Impact of Marketing Strategies on the Sustainable Purchasing Behavior of the Young Generation: A Generational and Communication Perspective

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Abstract: Sustainable consumption is currently one of the key topics in social and economics discourse, especially in the context of growing environmental awareness among consumers. Young generations, particularly Generation Z, represent a significant consumer group whose purchasing behavior is influenced by environmental values, digital communication, and an emphasis on authenticity. This work focuses on the role of green marketing, transparency, brand credibility, emotional appeals, and digital media – including influencer marketing – which significantly support the shift from environmental attitudes to actual behavior. The influence of environmental knowledge and social factors on purchasing intentions is also important. The analysis further highlights the growing importance of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, which enhances the effectiveness of green marketing tools. The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach that combines education, authentic communication, and technological innovation to promote sustainable consumption among the younger generation.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, marketing strategies, consumer behavior, ecological marketing, green marketing, young generation, purchasing decisions, environmental awareness, marketing communication, brand credibility

JEL Classification: M31, M37

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing societal interest in sustainability and environmentally responsible behavior, which are becoming increasingly important topics in both social and economic contexts. Consumer decision-making is gradually shifting under the influence of rising awareness about climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and the negative consequences of excessive consumption. This shift is particularly pronounced among the younger generation, especially Generation Z, which has grown up in a digital environment and is exposed to a wide range of environmental information.

Social responsibility—which includes emotional engagement, personal involvement, and societal expectations—along with external stimuli such as material or social rewards, significantly shapes Generation Z's interest in sustainability. This interest is subsequently reflected in specific behaviors, particularly in the purchase of eco-friendly products. In contrast, cultural factors such as collectivist values, according to research by Carla (2024), do not have a significant impact, similarly to learned helplessness or perceived barriers.

Green marketing plays a crucial role in shaping Generation Z's consumer behavior. Dragolea et al. (2023) emphasize that key factors in converting environmental intentions into actual purchases are sustainability knowledge and positive attitudes toward ecological products. However, financial constraints remain a major barrier that marketing strategies must effectively address to strengthen the environmental awareness of young consumers.

According to Song and Qin (2020), green marketing is most effective when it is authentic and transparent, thereby increasing consumer trust and engagement. Social media and influencers play an important role in spreading ecological values and significantly influencing Generation Z's decision-making.¹

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Similarly, El-Shihy and Awaad (2025) point out that both brand-generated content (BGC) and user-generated content (UGC) on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok increase interest in sustainable fashion, with audience engagement playing a mediating role in campaign effectiveness. Influencer marketing thus represents a key tool in shaping sustainable purchasing behavior among young people.

Generation Z is particularly receptive to influencer communication, especially when influencers appear authentic, trustworthy, and focus on environmental topics. Emotional appeal further enhances their engagement and encourages a positive shift in attitudes. Influencers convey ecological values in a way that enables young people to identify with the brand and prefer sustainable products (Munaro, 2024).

Personality traits and knowledge-related characteristics of young consumers are also essential. Research by Vishnoi et al. (2025) shows that environmental knowledge, altruistic attitudes, and perceptions of innovativeness significantly influence Generation Z's interest in ecological products. Similarly, László and Wahlen (2024) emphasize that in evaluating local food, consumers value freshness, quality, health safety, and credibility. "Local" does not only refer to geographical proximity but also to social ties and transparency.

Cyfert et al. (2024) highlight the importance of environmental competencies, where a higher level of knowledge and skills related to sustainable development correlates with more positive attitudes toward eco-friendly behavior. The sources of this knowledge include schools, media, and civic initiatives, which significantly influence how young people adopt and apply sustainability principles in their daily decisions.

Liu (2022) points out that environmental awareness, combined with effective CSR communication through social media, helps close the gap between ecological attitudes and actual behavior. Social networks are therefore an essential tool for spreading clear and trustworthy information that increases consumer engagement and interest.

Finally, according to Song Y. et al. (2024), price is not the main barrier to sustainable consumption—young people are willing to invest in high-quality and environmentally beneficial products. However, education, transparent communication, and brand credibility are key factors that strongly influence their purchasing decisions. Green marketing is particularly effective for Generation Z due to its authentic and transparent messaging. Social media and digital platforms play a crucial role in spreading ecological values and supporting environmentally responsible purchases. A combination of education and emotional engagement helps translate interest in sustainability into concrete purchasing decisions (Eandhizhai P.G. et al., 2025).

Aldaihani et al. (2024) emphasize that eco-friendly packaging is the only green marketing element that has a direct impact on Generation Z's purchase intentions. Other marketing tools, such as green advertising and labeling, act more indirectly through attitude change. The effectiveness of these strategies is significantly enhanced by modern technologies, particularly generative artificial intelligence. The combination of traditional marketing elements with technological innovations is a key factor in promoting sustainable consumption among the younger generation.

2 Methodics

This paper explores the impact of marketing strategies on the sustainable purchasing behavior of the young generation, emphasizing generational and communication aspects. The research investigates how modern marketing communication tools and digital platforms influence the attitudes and decisions of young consumers toward sustainable consumption. By analyzing both rational and emotional factors that shape purchasing behavior, the study aims to identify ways in which businesses can effectively design marketing activities that promote sustainability while engaging young consumers. The findings of this study may serve as a foundation for developing strategies that integrate social responsibility with engagement and the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in the digital environment.

Research assumptions

For the processing and evaluation of data obtained from the questionnaire survey, specific research assumptions were formulated and subsequently evaluated.

Data Collection and Respondent Characteristics

Primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey created using Google Forms, which was distributed via social media platforms (primarily Facebook and Instagram) to effectively reach the young generation. The research sample consisted of 300 respondents, with an equal gender distribution of 50% female and 50% male.

The questionnaire method was employed as the main data collection tool to assess the impact of marketing strategies on sustainable purchasing behavior. The survey sample of 300 respondents was considered relevant and sufficient for this study. Data collection took place between November 1, 2024, and January 15, 2025. Respondents were contacted electronically and informed about the voluntary and anonymkous nature of the research. The questionnaire included items aimed at assessing respondents' awareness of sustainability, their attitudes toward marketing communications promoting sustainable products, and the influence of these campaigns on their actual purchasing behavior.

Data Processing and Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire survey were processed, organized into tables and graphs, and subsequently interpreted. The first step involved verifying the representativeness of the sample, including gender distribution, using appropriate statistical methods.

To determine potential relationships between variables, the Chi-square test of independence was applied at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The test statistic was calculated using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \frac{(E_i - T_i)^2}{T_i} \quad (1)$$

Where:

- χ^2 – test statistic
- E_i – observed frequencies
- T_i – expected frequencies

In Microsoft Excel, the CHINV function was used to determine the critical value at $\alpha = 0.05$. If the calculated test statistic exceeded the critical value, the null hypothesis was rejected; otherwise, it was accepted.

Additionally, the Friedman test was employed as a nonparametric method suitable for comparing several dependent samples. It serves as a nonparametric alternative to two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The test statistic was calculated as follows:

$$F = \left(\frac{12}{n \cdot k \cdot (k + 1)} \right) \cdot \sum_{j=1}^k R_j^2 - 3 \cdot n \cdot (k + 1) \quad (2)$$

Where:

- n – sample size
- k – number of variants
- R_j – sum of ranks within each column

The null hypothesis H_0 was rejected if $F \geq \chi^2(\alpha, k - 1)$.

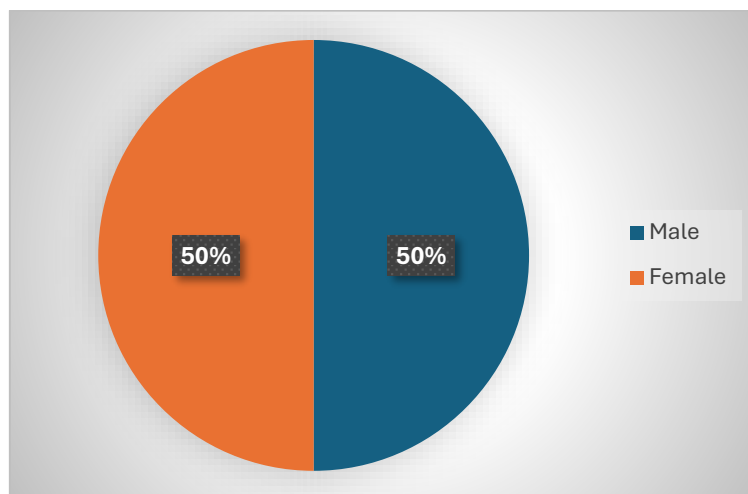
To further identify statistically significant differences between groups, Nemenyi's post-hoc test was applied as a complement to the Friedman test. This allowed for a detailed evaluation of relationships between variables and provided deeper insights into the impact of marketing strategies on the sustainable purchasing behavior of the young generation.

3 Research results

In today's rapidly evolving market environment, understanding how marketing strategies influence the sustainable purchasing behaviour of the young generation has become increasingly important. Young consumers represent

a key segment whose values, digital engagement, and social awareness shape the future of sustainable consumption.

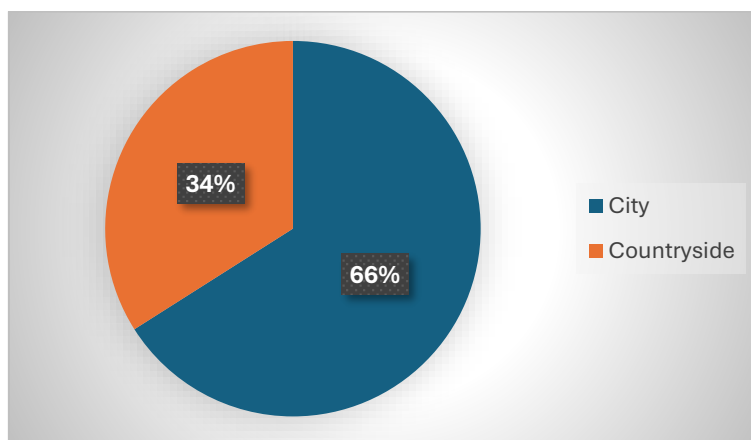
Figure 1 Gender of respondents



Source : own processing

The research sample consisted of an equal number of male and female respondents, with 150 males (50%) and 150 females (50%) participating in the survey. This balanced gender distribution ensures representativeness and eliminates potential bias related to gender differences in attitudes or purchasing behavior. Such equality in the sample composition allows for a more objective comparison of responses and supports the validity of subsequent statistical analyses.

Figure 2 Where do the respondents come from?



Source : own processing

Regarding the place of residence, the majority of respondents reported living in the city (198 respondents; 66%), while 102 respondents (34%) indicated that they live in the countryside. This distribution suggests that the research sample is more urban-oriented, which may reflect the lifestyle and consumption patterns typical of younger city residents. Urban respondents are often more exposed to digital marketing and have greater access to healthy and sustainable products compared to those living in rural areas. Consequently, their purchasing behavior may be more strongly influenced by online communication and marketing strategies.

In response to the question “*What does a healthy diet mean to you?*”, the most frequently mentioned answers were as follows:

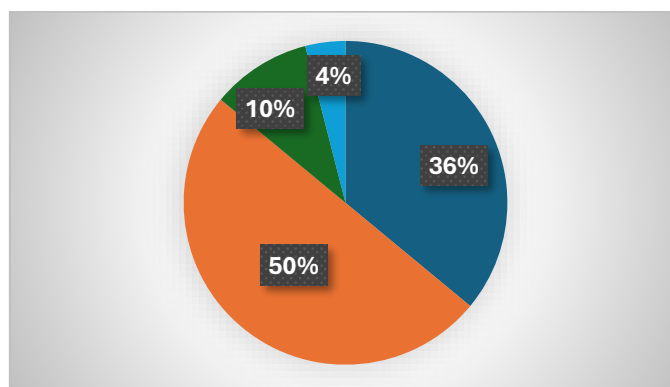
Respondents most commonly associate the concept of a healthy diet with the consumption of fresh and natural foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, which are important sources of biologically active compounds such as vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber.²

They also emphasize the importance of a nutritionally balanced diet that ensures an adequate ratio of macronutrients (proteins, fats, and carbohydrates) as well as a sufficient intake of micronutrients.

Furthermore, respondents define a healthy diet as one free from artificial additives, preservatives, and chemical substances, reflecting a preference for minimally processed foods.

Some participants also perceive a healthy diet as one that involves the reduction of risk nutrients, particularly fats, sugars, and salt, while others associate it with a plant-based approach to eating, including vegetarian or vegan options.

Figure 3 What does a healthy diet mean to respondents?



Source: Own construction

The respondents in the survey defined the concept of healthy foods through several key characteristics that were repeatedly mentioned across different answers. Their opinions can be categorized into several thematic areas, with certain motives dominating from a quantitative perspective.

The largest group of respondents (150 individuals) perceive healthy foods as those with a higher content of proteins, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, while also emphasizing the importance of a balanced diet and the absence of artificial additives and chemicals. This perspective indicates an awareness of the nutritional value of foods and a preference for natural, minimally processed ingredients.

Another 108 respondents associate healthy foods primarily with fresh fruits and vegetables, highlighting their focus on the natural origin and freshness of food, as well as the perception of plant-based products as the foundation of a healthy lifestyle. Within this group, the emphasis on dietary balance and the absence of artificial substances was also common, confirming a trend toward natural and clean nutrition.

A smaller group of respondents (30 individuals) defined healthy foods as those with a lower content of fats, sugars, or salt. This group also emphasized the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and the importance of a balanced nutrient composition. Such a viewpoint suggests a focus on the prevention of lifestyle diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, or diabetes mellitus.

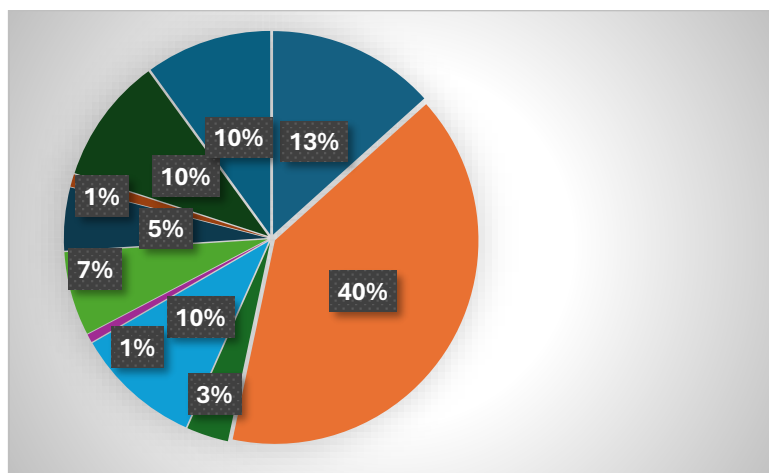
The smallest group (12 respondents) associates healthy foods with specific dietary patterns, such as vegetarian and vegan products, considering them part of a balanced and ethically sustainable diet. This opinion reflects the growing interest in plant-based eating and related environmental and ethical aspects of nutrition.

Overall, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents consider healthy foods to be those that are natural, fresh, nutritionally valuable, and free from artificial additives. The emphasis on balance, ingredient quality, and nutritional composition confirms that consumers approach healthy eating in a comprehensive way – not only in terms of calories or macronutrients, but also regarding its overall impact on health and lifestyle.

³ Data collected through the questionnaire applied to prepare this text.

For our study, we decided to focus on the question of which marketing elements most influence the young generation when making purchasing decisions regarding sustainable food products. We chose this focus because young consumers represent a growing segment that is sensitive to the environmental and ethical aspects of products, and at the same time, they are very active on social media, where they encounter various forms of marketing communication. By analyzing the preferences for different marketing tools, we aimed to determine which strategies are most persuasive for them and how they influence their purchasing decisions, which is crucial for the effective planning of marketing campaigns targeting sustainable products.

Figure 4 What marketing elements influence you the most when deciding to buy sustainable food?



Source: own construction

The collected data indicate that influencers have the greatest impact on the young generation's decision-making when purchasing sustainable food products, receiving 120 votes. This result suggests that young consumers trust the recommendations of people they follow on social media more than traditional marketing tools. In second place were social media ads, with 40 votes. This result suggests that young consumers trust the recommendations of people they follow on social media more than traditional marketing tools. In second place were social media ads, with 40 votes, which confirms that the online presence of a product is important for young consumers, although advertising alone is not as persuasive as influencers. Factors such as eco-friendly packaging (30 votes), product tastings (30 votes), and traditional advertising (30 votes) play a moderate role. This indicates that young consumers value the visual presentation of sustainability and the opportunity to try the product, while traditional advertising still contributes to brand awareness, even though it is not a decisive factor. On the other hand, elements such as certifications (20 votes), special offers (15 votes), and product branding (10 votes) have a smaller influence. The young generation therefore does not primarily purchase sustainable products based on brand logos, certifications, or discounts, but rather focuses on recommendations and actual experience with the product. An interesting finding is the very low number of votes for storytelling (3 votes) and product or packaging design (2 votes). Although the literature often emphasizes the importance of storytelling in sustainable products, these data show that young consumers prefer the concrete value of the product and authentic communication over abstract brand narratives or aesthetic design. Overall, these results support the assumption that when developing marketing strategies aimed at the young generation, it is crucial to utilize influencer marketing and maintain an³ active social media presence, while traditional forms of communication and aesthetic elements play only a supplementary role.

Assumption1: It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences among the factors that discourage young consumers from purchasing healthy products. To verify this assumption, we applied the Friedman test, which is suitable for comparing several related samples based on ordinal data.

⁴Data collected through the questionnaire applied to prepare this text.

Table 1 Friedman test

Q	404,259
p-value (one-tailed)	<0,0001
alpha	0,05

Source: Own processing

The results of the Friedman test ($p < 0,0001$) confirmed that there are statistically significant differences among the factors that discourage young consumers from purchasing healthy products. This indicates that not all barriers are perceived equally and that some factors play a much stronger role in shaping sustainable purchasing behaviour than others. Consequently, a non-parametric post-hoc comparison using Nemenyi's procedure was conducted to determine which factors differed significantly from one another. After confirming the overall significance with Friedman's test, a detailed pairwise comparison was carried out using Nemenyi's method to determine which factors differed significantly.

Table 2 Nemenyi's method

Sample	Frequency	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks	Groups			
Family traditions	300	1219,500	4,065	A			
Lack of time	300	1274,000	4,247	A			
Lack of interest	300	1321,500	4,405	A			
Lack of information	300	1565,000	5,217		B		
Eating Habits	300	1705,500	5,685		B	C	
Taste	300	1755,000	5,850		B	C	
Less availability	300	1758,500	5,862		B	C	
Quality	300	1821,000	6,070			C	
Durability	300	1858,500	6,195			C	
Higher price	300	2221,500	7,405				D

Source: own processing

The Nemenyi test divided the examined factors into four statistically distinct groups (A–D) according to their mean ranks and relative importance perceived by respondents.

- **Group D** – “Higher price” was identified as the most significant barrier, showing the highest mean rank (7.405). This confirms that price sensitivity remains a crucial factor discouraging the young generation from choosing healthy or sustainable products, despite their environmental and social awareness.
- **Groups B and C**, including factors such as availability, taste, quality, and durability, represent moderately important barriers. These aspects indicate that while young consumers appreciate the benefits of healthy products, they may still encounter practical limitations (e.g., limited accessibility or perceived lower convenience).
- **Group A**, comprising family traditions, lack of interest, and lack of time, showed the lowest mean ranks, meaning these factors are least discouraging. This suggests that external cultural or time-related barriers play a smaller role in influencing purchasing decisions among younger consumers.

Overall, the findings confirm that economic considerations outweigh social or personal factors when it comes to purchasing healthy and sustainable products. This insight can be valuable for marketers and policymakers in designing communication and pricing strategies that make sustainable choices more affordable and appealing to younger generations.

Assumption2: Marketing stimuli and activities have a statistically significant influence on consumer decision-making when choosing healthy and sustainable food products. To verify this assumption, we applied the Friedman test, which is suitable for comparing several related samples based on ordinal data.

Table 3: Friedman's test

Q	245,788
p-value (one-tailed)	<0,0001
alpha	0,05

Source: Own construction

Since the p-value (< 0.0001) is lower than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This means that the test results demonstrate a statistically significant influence of marketing stimuli and activities on consumer decision-making when choosing healthy and sustainable food products.

The findings suggest that marketing tools—such as product labeling, the origin of food, eco-certifications, social media advertising, and promotional campaigns—significantly influence consumer behavior. Consumers, therefore, perceive marketing communication as an important factor in their decision-making process when purchasing healthy and sustainable products.

Based on these results, it can be recommended that companies and farms focus more on targeted, trustworthy, and transparent communication that emphasizes the quality, origin, and sustainability of their products.

To further examine the differences between individual marketing stimuli influencing consumer decisions when purchasing healthy and sustainable food products, a Nemenyi post-hoc test was conducted following the Kruskal–Wallis analysis. This non-parametric multiple comparison method allows for the identification of which specific pairs of factors differ significantly in their mean ranks.

The results presented in Table 4 show the ranking of marketing activities based on their impact on consumer behavior. Each activity was assigned to one or more homogeneous groups (A–E), where activities within the same group do not differ significantly from each other, while those in different groups demonstrate statistically significant differences.

Table 4: Nemenyi's method

Sample	Frequency	Sum of ranks	Mean of ranks	Groups				
Social media Ads	300	1386,500	4,622	A				
Influencers	300	1434,000	4,780	A	B			
Product Branding	300	1438,000	4,793	A	B			
Eco-Friendly Packaging	300	1575,500	5,252	A	B	C		
Product and/or Packaging Design	300	1607,500	5,358	A	B	C	D	
Certificates (e.g. organic, fair trade)	300	1669,500	5,565		B	C	D	
Special Offers	300	1676,500	5,588			C	D	
Storytelling	300	1682,500	5,608			C	D	
Product Tastings	300	1815,500	6,052				D	
Advertising	300	2214,500	7,382					E

Source: Own construction

Based on the results of the Nemenyi post-hoc test, statistically significant differences were observed among the examined marketing stimuli in terms of their influence on consumer decision-making when choosing healthy and sustainable foods.

The lowest mean ranks were recorded for social media advertisements and influencers, indicating that these forms of marketing have a weaker impact on consumer decisions compared to other stimuli. Conversely, product tastings and traditional advertising achieved the highest mean ranks, suggesting a stronger influence on consumers.

The grouping (A–E) according to the Nemenyi test shows that some marketing activities do not differ significantly from each other (e.g., influencers and product branding – both in groups A/B), while others (e.g., social media ads – group A vs. advertising – group E) show statistically significant differences.

These findings indicate that consumers tend to respond more positively to direct product experiences (such as tastings) and traditional, credibility-based communication forms (advertising, certificates, design) rather than to digital or influencer-driven marketing stimuli.

4 Discussion

Gomes (2023) highlights that a major challenge in sustainable marketing lies in Generation Z's limited willingness to pay a premium for green products, despite their strong environmental values. The study reveals an evident attitude–behavior gap, where ethical awareness does not always translate into actual purchases. To address this, companies should create value-oriented marketing strategies that emphasize not only sustainability but also quality, transparency, and authenticity, helping justify higher prices and build consumer trust.

Kim (2025) explores how influencer characteristics affect Generation Z's engagement in pro-environmental behavior. The study shows that authenticity and self-disclosure—when influencers share personal values and experiences—significantly enhance followers' trust and motivation to act sustainably. Influencers who are perceived as genuine and value-driven, rather than purely promotional, are more effective in shaping eco-friendly attitudes and purchase intentions. These findings underline the importance of transparent and emotionally resonant communication in digital marketing strategies targeting Generation Z.

Prasana et al (2024) states that, recent reviews and conceptual studies (2024–2025) provide a comprehensive overview of Gen Z consumer behavior, highlighting key characteristics such as digital identity, demand for authenticity, and preference for value-focused brands. These studies suggest that Gen Z does not respond well to traditional marketing tactics; instead, they prefer transparent, purposeful, and interactive communications. Incorporating this insight into marketing strategies can increase engagement, foster trust, and encourage sustainable purchasing decisions. Such findings provide a theoretical basis for designing campaigns that align brand values with the ethical and social expectations of this generation.

5 Conclusion

This paper highlights the significant influence of marketing strategies on the sustainable purchasing behavior of Generation Z, providing insights into the ways in which brands can effectively engage this environmentally and socially conscious demographic. Generation Z distinguishes itself through a strong awareness of environmental, social, and ethical issues, which heavily shape their consumption patterns. Unlike previous generations, for whom decisions were often guided primarily by price, quality, or brand recognition, Generation Z increasingly prioritizes products and services that reflect their personal values, ethical beliefs, and lifestyle preferences. Transparency, authenticity, and ethical communication therefore emerge as essential determinants of trust, loyalty, and positive brand perception.

The study further underscores the critical role of digital media and social networks as instruments for shaping environmental consciousness and sustainable behavior among young consumers. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as powerful channels for information dissemination, social influence, and behavioral motivation. Through carefully designed influencer collaborations, interactive storytelling, and engaging campaigns, companies can effectively educate and inspire Generation Z to adopt sustainable consumption practices. Integrating educational content with emotional appeals proves especially effective in establishing meaningful connections between consumers and brands, fostering long-term commitment to sustainability.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that superficial or symbolic environmental claims, such as labeling a product merely as “eco-friendly” or “sustainable,” are insufficient to gain the attention and trust of this generation. Generation Z expects alignment between corporate values, marketing messages, and actual business practices. Therefore, effective marketing strategies must adopt a holistic approach that combines authentic storytelling, transparency in production and supply chain processes, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and active consumer participation. By implementing such a strategy, brands can enhance credibility, strengthen emotional engagement, and contribute to a more ethically aware and sustainable marketplace.

This paper also offers practical guidance for companies and marketing professionals seeking to design strategic and value-driven marketing approaches. Aligning commercial objectives with social and environmental responsibility enables organizations to not only drive sales but also build lasting trust and loyalty among young consumers. Moreover, the findings suggest that businesses have the potential to play a transformative role in

shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability, thereby contributing to a broader societal shift toward responsible consumption.

In conclusion, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between marketing, sustainability, and Generation Z consumer behavior. It emphasizes that effective marketing for this demographic is no longer solely transactional but must incorporate ethical and environmental considerations into the core brand narrative. By fostering transparency, authenticity, and engagement, brands can position themselves as credible, responsible, and forward-thinking, while simultaneously promoting a sustainable market transformation. These insights lay a foundation for future research in sustainable marketing, digital communication strategies, and Generation Z consumer behavior, offering valuable implications for academics, marketers, and policymakers alike.

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