



## Review Article

## A Thematic Literature Review: Generation Z's Willingness to Spend on Sustainable Consumption of Apparel in India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20265781>

### Abstract

Generation Z is frequently described as a generation that deeply cares about the environment. Yet in practice, this concern often fails to translate into actual willingness to spend extra on sustainable clothing. In India, fast fashion continues to thrive because of its low prices and rapidly changing trends, even as the apparel sector causes significant ecological damage through heavy water use, chemical pollution, and enormous textile waste. This highlights a clear disconnect between young people's stated values and their real purchasing decisions. This thematic literature review brings together findings from 33 empirical studies published between 2017 and 2025. It examines Generation Z's attitudes, purchase intentions, and actual buying behaviour towards sustainable apparel, with special emphasis on the Indian context. The studies consistently reveal that while young consumers show strong environmental awareness and favourable attitudes toward green clothing, most still choose cheaper fast-fashion items when it comes to spending their own money. Price emerges as the biggest obstacle by far. Although a growing body of research exists from countries such as China and Vietnam, very few studies focus specifically on India — despite its huge Gen Z population and important position in the global apparel industry. The review identifies recurring patterns around the Theory of Planned Behaviour and its extensions, economic barriers, the mixed role of social media, greenwashing, and interest in circular options like second-hand clothing and rentals. It underlines the pressing need for more India-centred research to better understand and address this intention-behaviour gap.

### Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 08-04-2026
- Accepted: 15-05-2026
- Published: 18-05-2026
- IJCRM:5(3); 2026: 240-246
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

### How to Cite this Article

Rana N, Rajani H. A Thematic Literature Review: Generation Z's Willingness to Spend on Sustainable Consumption of Apparel in India. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(3):240-246.

### Access this Article Online



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**KEYWORDS:** Generation Z, Sustainable Apparel, Willingness to Pay, Price Sensitivity, Purchase Intention, Environmental Awareness, India.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, with unlimited access to information about environmental degradation and climate change. Constant exposure through social media and digital platforms has made this generation more aware of ecological issues. In fashion, many young consumers express a preference for clothing that reduces environmental harm across its entire lifecycle (Filip *et al.*, 2025) [8].

India is one of the world's largest producers and consumers of apparel. Over the past decade, fast fashion has experienced explosive growth in the country, fuelled by rising middle-class incomes, affordable pricing, and rapidly evolving trends. While this expansion has expanded consumer choice and supported economic development, it has also intensified environmental pressures. The apparel industry is associated with high water consumption, discharge of hazardous chemicals into water bodies, and generation of substantial textile waste, problems that are increasingly evident in urban centres where polluted rivers and degraded air quality have become commonplace (Pandey & Yadav, 2023) [22].

Although surveys and studies reveal relatively high levels of environmental awareness among Gen Z, such concern that transforms into actual purchase of sustainable apparel. The primary obstacle appears to be price. Sustainable garments typically carry a significant premium price compared to conventional fast-fashion items, making them less appealing to budget-conscious young generation. Other factors include limited availability of credible sustainable brands and skepticism regarding corporate environmental claims (Bajar *et al.*, 2024) [3]. Researchers have frequently drawn upon the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) [2] to explain this intention-behaviour gap. The framework posits that behavioural intention is shaped by three core constructs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. While this theory has offered valuable insights, most empirical applications

in sustainable fashion have been conducted in East Asian contexts such as China and Vietnam. Indian studies remain scarce. Those that do exist tend to concentrate on general awareness or stated purchase intentions rather than examining actual willingness to pay a premium for sustainable clothing (Pandey & Yadav, 2023) [22].

The present thematic literature review seeks to partially address this gap by synthesising existing empirical evidence on Generation Z's attitudes, purchase intentions, and real-world buying behaviour with respect to sustainable apparel, placing particular emphasis on the Indian setting.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this literature review is to systematically synthesise the existing body of empirical research examining Generation Z's attitudes, purchase intentions, and actual buying behaviour in relation to sustainable apparel. This review has two specific objectives:

- To identify the main theoretical frameworks with special focus on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and its extensions.
- It seeks to uncover and highlight recurring themes and patterns across literature.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as a systematic thematic literature review, using PRISMA (Moher *et al.*, 2009) [18]. A comprehensive search was carried out using two leading academic databases Scopus and Web of Science. The search strategy relied on a carefully constructed Boolean string to capture relevant literature: ("Gen Z" OR "Generation Z" OR "Post-Millennial" OR "iGeneration") AND ("sustainable consumption" OR "green consumption" OR "eco-friendly buying") AND ("willingness to pay" OR "purchase intention" OR "buying behaviour").

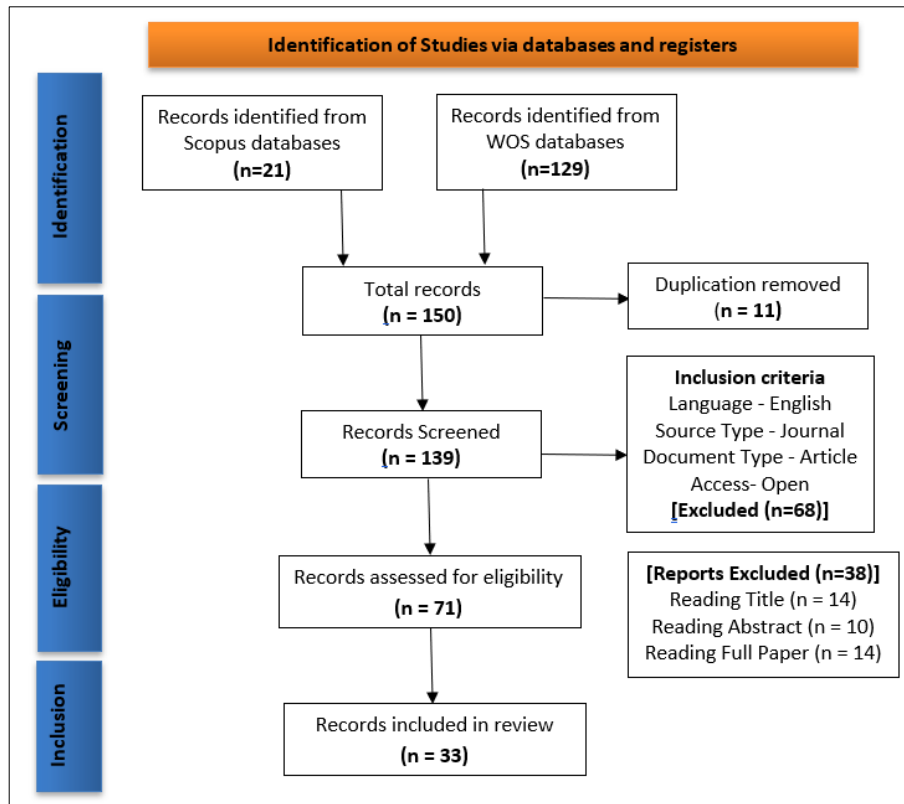


Fig 1: PRISMA flow diagram (Moher *et al.*, 2009)<sup>[18]</sup>.

To ensure quality and relevance, only empirical peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2017 and 2025 were considered for inclusion. Eligible studies were required to focus on Generation Z’s attitudes, purchase intentions, or actual consumption behaviour concerning sustainable apparel and to be based on primary data collection. Purely theoretical papers, reviewing articles, and studies outside the domain of apparel consumer behaviour were excluded during the screening process. After removing duplicates and carefully reviewing titles, abstracts, and full texts, a total of 33 studies were selected for in-depth analysis.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This literature review covered 33 empirical studies published between 2017 and 2025. I organised the findings around the main themes that appeared repeatedly in the existing research.

**3.1 Chronological Development of Literature**

Research in this area has grown gradually over the years. Early papers (2017–2020) mostly examined how environmental concern, eco-labels, and basic attitudes affect green purchase decisions. From 2021 onwards, scholars started extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour by bringing in additional factors such as green brand awareness, social media influence, consumption values, and health consciousness. The latest studies (2024–2025) have given more attention to contextual barriers, the damaging effects of greenwashing, and interest in circular fashion options like second-hand clothing and rental models. A summary of the 33 studies is presented below with key aspects covered by each paper:

**Table 1:** Chronological Development of Literature (2017 to 2025)

Year	Author	Key Findings	Year	Author	Key Findings
2017	Nam <i>et al.</i>	Environmental concern, product features	2024	Baltaci <i>et al.</i>	TPB extension, green brand awareness
2019	Song <i>et al.</i>	Eco-labels, consumer awareness	2024	Jørgensen <i>et al.</i>	Product category role
2020	Jung <i>et al.</i>	Attitude-behaviour gap, sustainable apparel	2024	Saputri <i>et al.</i>	Functional and green values
2020	Liao <i>et al.</i>	Green marketing, psychological benefits	2025	Ngo <i>et al.</i>	Gen Z green purchase factors, Vietnam
2021	Zhuang <i>et al.</i>	Meta-analysis, attitude, norms, value	2025	Acosta Aguinaga & Barcellos de Paula	Health consciousness, hedonic & eudaimonic motivations
2022	Kaur <i>et al.</i>	Green marketing strategies, attitude	2025	Del Olmo Arriaga <i>et al.</i>	Digital communication, policy
2022	Liang <i>et al.</i>	Environmental values, mediation	2025	Di Pillo <i>et al.</i>	Greenwashing impact on young consumers
2022	Nekmahmud <i>et al.</i>	Social media content, purchase intention	2025	Filip <i>et al.</i>	Drivers of eco-product purchase intentions
2022	Sun & Xing <i>et al.</i>	Social media sharing, attitude, norms	2025	Hayat <i>et al.</i>	Green attitude, impulse buying
2022	Tan <i>et al.</i>	Green marketing, brand image, trust	2025	Hoang <i>et al.</i>	Role of status in green purchase intention.

2022	Panopoulos <i>et al.</i>	Eco-labels, user-generated content	2025	Prisco <i>et al.</i>	Second-hand clothing intentions
2023	Kabaja <i>et al.</i>	Environmental labels, young buyers	2025	Rakuša & Mifelner	Cultural moderators in TPB
2023	Lin <i>et al.</i>	Personal norms, shopping values	2025	Sattharattanagul <i>et al.</i>	Mindful consumption, sustainability values
2023	Pandey & Yadav	Attitude, perceived value	2025	Tran <i>et al.</i>	Sustainable fashion factors, Vietnam
2023	Vlastelica <i>et al.</i>	Extended TPB model, clothing intention	2025	Wu & Lee	Consumption values, willingness to pay
2024	Bajar <i>et al.</i>	Perceived control, price sensitivity, barriers.			

### 3.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour and Its Extensions

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) [2] is the main theoretical foundation in most of the reviewed studies. Many studies began with its three core elements attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control and then extending it with additional constructs to better understand sustainable apparel consumption among Gen Z.

Attitude toward sustainable clothing consistently emerged as a strong predictor of purchase intention. Young consumers who believed green apparel offered environmental, health, or social benefits were more inclined to consider buying it. Yet this positive attitude rarely translates directly into actual purchases. Subjective norms also mattered, but their nature appears to be shifting. Traditional family influence seems to be declining, while peer opinions and content shared on social media are becoming more powerful drivers (Sun & Xing, 2022; Nekmahmud *et al.*, 2022) [29, 20]. Perceived behavioural control, on the other hand, often acted as a major obstacle. In developing countries, limited income and poor availability of sustainable options frequently prevented young people from acting on their intentions (Bajar *et al.*, 2024; Wu & Lee, 2025) [3, 34].

Many researchers strengthened the original TPB model by adding new variables. Some incorporated green brand awareness and marketing efforts, finding that knowledge of trustworthy green brands reinforced the link between attitude and intention (Baltaci *et al.*, 2024; Jørgensen *et al.*, 2024) [5, 11]. Others focused on consumption values, separating functional aspects such as quality and durability from green values related to environmental protection. Both types of values were shown to shape Gen Z's purchase decisions (Saputri *et al.*, 2024; Wu & Lee, 2025) [27, 34]. More recent work has also examined personal motivations. Health consciousness, along with hedonic motives (pleasure and self-expression) and eudaimonic motives (moral satisfaction and sense of purpose), were found to work together with environmental concern in forming buying intentions (Acosta Aguinaga & Barcellos de Paula, 2025) [1]. In price-sensitive markets like India, economic factors and perceived control often outweighed attitude, underlining the need to consider local conditions when applying the theory.

#### 3.2.1 Economic Barriers and Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity repeatedly stood out as one of the strongest barriers in literature. Even when young consumers held favourable attitudes toward sustainable clothing, the significantly higher cost pushed them toward cheaper fast-fashion alternatives. When money is limited, factors such as current style, durability, and immediate need usually override environmental considerations (Saputri *et al.*, 2024; Bajar *et al.*, 2024) [27, 3]. This economic reality largely explains the widespread intention-behaviour gap observed among Gen Z. Some authors proposed that more affordable circular solutions,

including second-hand clothing and rental models, could make sustainable choices more realistic for budget-conscious young buyers (Prisco *et al.*, 2025; Lin *et al.*, 2023) [25, 17].

#### 3.2.2 The Dual Role of Social Media

Social media plays a powerful but contradictory part in shaping Gen Z's fashion behaviour. It can increase environmental awareness, promote sustainable brands, and build positive attitudes. At the same time, it constantly shows fast-fashion trends and encourages impulsive buying through visually appealing, low-priced content. Young consumers often find posts by peers and influencers more credible than direct brand communication (Nekmahmud *et al.*, 2022; Sun & Xing, 2022; Kabaja *et al.*, 2023) [20, 29, 20]. This mixed influence makes social media both a potential enabler and a notable challenge for sustainable apparel adoption.

#### 3.2.3 Trust, Brand Image, and Greenwashing

Brand trust significantly affects final purchase decisions. Gen Z consumers prefer to support brands they see as genuinely committed to sustainability. However, when they detect greenwashing false or exaggerated environmental claims their purchase intention drops sharply and trust is difficult to rebuild (Di Pillo *et al.*, 2025; Tan *et al.*, 2022) [7, 31].

#### 3.2.4 Circular Consumption Practices

Interest in circular fashion options such as second-hand clothing and rentals has been rising in recent studies. These models attract Gen Z by delivering environmental benefits at lower prices. Still, practical concerns related to quality, hygiene, and fear of social stigma continue to restrict their broader uptake (Prisco *et al.*, 2025; Lin *et al.*, 2023) [25, 17].

### 3.3 Extraction of Variables

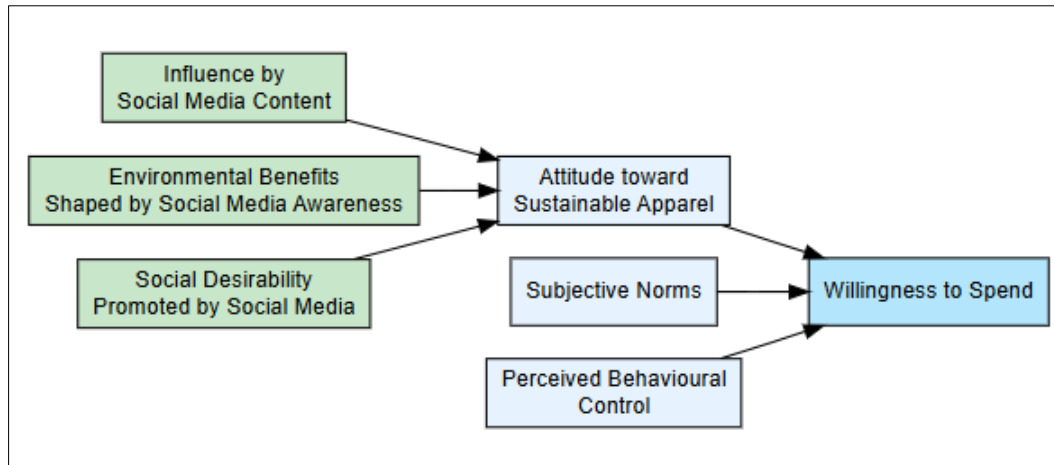
The core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were applied in nearly all the studies examined. Attitude towards sustainable apparel consistently emerged as the strongest direct predictor of purchase intention. Most researchers measured attitude through beliefs about environmental benefits, health advantages, and social image associated with green clothing. Subjective norms, however, showed more variation. While earlier studies emphasised family influence, later research highlighted the growing importance of peers and social media in shaping what young consumers consider socially acceptable (Sun & Xing, 2022; Nekmahmud *et al.*, 2022; Kabaja *et al.*, 2023) [29, 20].

Perceived behavioural control frequently functioned as a limiting factor rather than a facilitator. Young consumers often reported feeling unable to purchase sustainable apparel due to high prices, limited availability in local markets, and uncertainty about

product quality. Beyond the original TPB variables, three social media-related factors repeatedly contributed to the attitude component. These included exposure to sustainability-related content, increased environmental awareness gained through digital platforms, and the social desirability linked to being seen as environmentally responsible online (Nekmahmud *et al.*, 2022; Sun & Xing, 2022; Pandey & Yadav, 2023) [20, 22, 29].

Additional variables that appeared across multiple studies included green brand awareness, consumption values, health consciousness, and personal norms. Greenwashing perceptions and trust in brands were also frequently examined as moderating factors that could weaken the relationship between positive attitudes and actual buying behaviour.

### 3.4 Conceptual Model



### 3.5 Research Gaps

Despite the steady growth in research on this topic, several important gaps remain. Most studies have focused heavily on purchase intention rather than actual purchase behaviour or willingness to pay a premium. This over-reliance on intention measures limits understanding of the real factors that drive or prevent actual spending, especially in price-sensitive emerging markets such as India.

Another limitation is the way social media influence is treated. Most papers discuss its role without clearly distinguishing between different mechanisms simple content exposure, creation of environmental awareness, or building social image and desirability. There is also a serious shortage of India-specific research. While countries like China and Vietnam are well represented, findings from those contexts may not fully apply to India due to differences in many factors. Furthermore, many studies treat Generation Z as a single homogeneous group. This approach overlooks important variations within the Indian Gen Z population across income levels, urban versus rural settings, and different geographic regions.

#### 3.5.1 Implications

The findings of this review carry several practical and theoretical implications. For businesses operating in the Indian sustainable fashion space, simply raising environmental awareness is not sufficient. Companies need to address price barriers directly by offering more affordable sustainable options, ensuring greater transparency in their supply chains, and developing circular business models such as rentals and second-hand platforms. Building genuine brand trust and avoiding greenwashing practices will also be essential for long-term success with Gen Z consumers. From a theoretical perspective, the review suggests that Theory of Planned Behaviour can be enhanced by

introducing more detailed social media dimensions and economic factors while studying emerging economies. Future models may benefit from integrating variables related to price sensitivity, perceived product accessibility, and cultural moderators.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The reviewed literature confirms that the Theory of Planned Behaviour remains a factor for understanding Gen Z's relationship with sustainable apparel. However, a persistent gap exists between stated intentions and actual purchasing behaviour. Economic constraints, the dual role of social media, and issues of brand trust appear to be the main reasons behind this gap.

### 4.1 Suggestions for Future Work

Future research in the Indian context should move beyond measuring purchase intentions and focus more on actual buying behaviour and willingness to pay. Longitudinal studies that track changes in consumer behaviour over time would be particularly valuable. Researchers should also examine the specific pathways through which different types of social media content influence attitudes and purchase decisions. It is equally important to explore demographic differences within Generation Z, such as the role of gender, income levels, education, and urban-rural divides. Comparative studies between metropolitan cities and smaller towns could provide deeper insights. Additionally, qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, would help uncover the nuanced reasons behind the intention-behaviour gap that quantitative surveys may miss.

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