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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Sustainable consumption government policy influencer and message credibility impact on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore why and how sustainable consumption government policy influencers and message credibility directly impact Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework was applied in the current study to provide a review of sustainable consumption. The PRISMA results indicate a probable, testable relationship between sustainable consumption government policy influencers and message credibility, and Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets, as outlined in a designed conceptual model. The study adds to the theoretical literature development by extending knowledge on the proposed theorised conceptual modelling framework due to the paucity of research that has directly applied the same model to measure the impact of government policy influencers, message credibility, and Gen Z's sustainable consumption behaviour in emerging markets. This study contributes to the conceptual development of theoretical and practical government policy directions. The conceptual modelling framework developed can be tested in future studies to establish its validity and reliability using alternative methodologies.

Keywords Gen Z · Government policy · Sustainable marketing · Sustainability · Sustainable consumption and production · Circular economy

JEL Classification M36

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

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Introduction

While previous studies on sustainable consumption in emerging markets provide valuable insights on corporate-level green marketing drivers, benefits, challenges, and strategies (Hinson et al. 2021; Mukonza et al. 2021; Mogaji et al. 2022), the current study is founded on the proposition that sustainable consumption governance is central to the transition to a circular economy. Developing countries are known to be ambivalent about transitioning to sustainable consumption and green economies due to concerns about the investment costs of clean technologies and the possibility of job losses. In this regard, the roles of environmental laws and ethics, ecological ideology, the politics of sustainability, environmental treaties, carbon credits, the moral economy, and eco-socialism are interrogated as they are conveyed through social media platforms. The African continent, with powerful emerging markets such as South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, Ghana, and Tanzania, is still grappling with inequalities and social injustices. Perceptions of sustainable consumption, green capitalism, and the commodification of green marketing are also of interest to this study. The attainment of sustained economic growth, the creation of employment, and the improvement in the quality of life are central to Africa's Agenda 2063. Therefore, the current study examines the impact of sustainable consumption government policy influencers and message credibility on millennials' social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Global sustainable consumption and environmental treaties are recognised as platforms for addressing environmental challenges (Bellelli et al. 2023; Mittal and Bansal 2023; Flavián and Barta 2023). This study integrates the level of commitment according to environmental agreements by drawing lessons from the Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement, and Congress of Parties (COP) among others. The competing interests of national governments and international environmental agreements are discussions on today's trends in sustainable consumption.

The promotion of responsible sustainable consumption is imperative for the successful implementation of a green marketing strategy that is necessary for influencing Gen Z's. Thus, this study examined Gen Z's willingness to support sustainable consumption practices, such as collaborative consumption, the sharing economy, and green product consumption, as well as their willingness to engage in circular economy practices, such as recycling and reuse. Although the African continent, with emerging markets, is endowed with vast resources, materialism is blamed for causing inequalities and environmental harm. Thus, the contestations of consumer ethics, environmental beliefs, and values in promoting sustainable consumption are also of interest in this book. Although Mukonza et al. (2021) explored the practice of green marketing communications, we argue that the promotion of sustainable consumption strategies is increasingly situated within the fourth industrial revolution. Hence, this study also examined the role of sustainable consumption government policy influencer and message credibility directly impacting Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets.

The research gaps (practical and theoretical) identified in the current study indicate that available research studies, empirical evidence, and anecdotal literature clearly show that the few studies conducted in emerging markets have not examined the impact of sustainable consumption, government policy influencers and message

credibility on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Current research shows that theoretical and practical exceptions arise from provocation, as the findings and conclusions contradict the available evidence on sustainable consumption government policy (SCGP). The nature and scope of sustainable consumption, government policy influencers, and the impact of message credibility on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets have not been explored effectively. Past evidence supports the need for this study (e.g., Mukonza et al. 2021; Bellelli et al. 2023; Flavián and Barta 2023) to address the paucity of research and theory-forming investigations in this area. The current study shows that there have been some provocative exceptions to this, as the conclusions appear to contradict commonly available conclusions regarding the sustainable consumption government policy influencer and the impact of message credibility on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Furthermore, past studies have mostly employed qualitative methodologies, which are evidently different from the currently applied methodology, particularly in the context of emerging markets. In addition, previous studies used various methodological applications that differ significantly from the current methodology. Many studies that are not from the African emerging market context (e.g. Boo et al. 2009; Sweeny and Swait 2008; Melewar et al. 2017; Keller 2003; Stock et al. 2013) have mainly applied qualitative or blended research methodologies.

Research problem theorisation

Cognitive dissonance and attribution theory have been applied in current research, with a fundamental review serving as a roadmap for developing thorough analytical reasoning. The theoretical framework was designed to explain phenomena, draw conclusions, and make informed predictions. The following is a discussion of these theories:

Cognitive dissonance theory

The theory of cognitive dissonance has been considered one of the most important and influential theories in social psychology because of its decisive contribution to the construction of attitudes and beliefs, the internationalisation of values, the outcomes of decisions, the impact of disagreements between individuals, and other significant psychological processes (Jones 1985; Harmon-Jones and Mills 2019). Consistent with Festinger's (1957) views, the cognitive dissonance theory posits that cognition comprises two essential elements that may or may not seem relevant to one another (Harmon-Jones and Mills 2019). Suppose these two elements are equally relevant to each other. In this case, they can be either dissonant (the opposite or alternatively, one cognition follows from the other) or consonant with each other. Consistent with the current study, the presence of dissonance suggests that pharmaceutical customers may be psychologically uncomfortable. As a result, online Gen Z social media users may gain insights into behaviours, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings towards a corporate brand.

Attribution theory

Attribution theory explains the mechanisms by which customers evaluate others' influences, desires, and behaviours (Weiner 2000; Robinson 2017). In short, attribution theory is more concerned with how customers in the current study context use information from the social environment and societal pressures (Crandall et al. 2001; Robinson 2017) to develop causal explanations for their evaluations of the corporate brand performance of local pharmaceutical firms. A pleasing quality may be viewed favourably, leading to positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption, which improves the success of a brand. Assessments of others are formed through integrated information about the actors and their behaviours, the behavioural context, and any prior history with the actor or behaviour (Jones and Nisbett 1987; Weiner 2000). Using Kelley's covariation attribution theory, this study investigates how customers evaluate SCGP and Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement (Fiske 2017; Kelley 1973). Attribution theory concerns the causal conclusions people draw from observations made over time and across various contexts. Heider (1958) suggested that people employ "common sense" to discern causation.

Gen Z customers behave much like naïve scientists, trying to determine why things happen to them or to others (Dubinsky et al. 1989; Heider 1958a, b). Kelley (1967, 1972, 1973) and Weiner et al.'s (1972) research studies in attribution theory have received some support (for example, Deaux, 1976; Harvey and Weary 1984; McArthur 1972; Mizerk et al. 1979; Pruitt and Insko 1980; Mitchell et al. 1981; Weiner et al. 1979; Tetlock 1985; Sedikides et al. 1998; Weiner 2000; Robinson 2017; Foroudi 2018) and so providing conceptual support for the current study on sustainable consumption government policy and Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement. Three factors influence customers' behaviours and attitudes at a given time (Weiner 2000; Robinson 2017). This is supported by Kelley's (1973) "principle of covariation model, in which they found that customers use three main categories (consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness) in their attempts to figure out others' behaviour. Three basic assumptions conceptually ground the theory of attribution: (i) Gen Z tries to determine the causes of their behaviour and the behaviour of others; (ii) Gen Z tends to have causal explanations for behaviour systematically; and (iii) attributions that customers make have results that affect future behaviour or interactions on social media (Dubinsky et al. 1989). In addition, Gen Z members often experience attributional bias when making decisions. However, they may not be able to fully engage with and understand the differences between personality and situational attributes (Trenholm and Jensen 2013) because of the likelihood of natural biases. Ordinary consumers see many brand signatures every day, as they are common in the marketplace (Foroudi et al. 2014, 2016, 2017; Hagtvedt 2011). The components of primarily sustainable consumption government policies influence Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement.

The two theories' commonalities toward current study's focus

The current study is anchored by Cognitive Dissonance and Attribution theories, in line with how SCGP policy affects Generation Z's social media behavioural engage-

ment. The perspectives of attribution theory are more concerned with how customers in the current study context use information in the social environment and societal pressure (Crandall et al. 2001; Robinson 2017) to discover causal explanations for how they evaluate sustainable consumption government policy and the effect on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement. This aligns well with the views of Cognitive Dissonance theory, which focuses on attitude change (Giri 2022). Reducing consumer dissonance, sustainable consumption, and green marketing professionals may assist an entity not only in attracting new customers or retaining existing ones, but also in building strong brand awareness on social media platforms (Giri 2022; Nasr and El-Deeb 2023). This study contributes to the development of practice and theory by supporting the use of cognitive dissonance and attribution theories to explain the complexity of the sustainable consumption government policy (SCGP) influencer, and by examining the impact of message credibility on Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Because cognitive dissonance and attribution theory are used in service and product branding to understand customer satisfaction, this study goes further by applying them to a sustainable-consumption government policy influencer and to the impact of message credibility on Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets (Flavián and Barta 2023). The dimensions of these theories have not been widely adopted when examining social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets in an African context.

Theoretical integration of cognitive dissonance and attribution perspectives

The cognitive dissonance theory and the attribution theory have traditionally been applied independently to explain consumer behaviour; their integration offers a better comprehension of how consumers react to sustainability-related information. The cognitive dissonance theory explains the internal psychological tension that arises from consumers' exposure to conflicting beliefs or information. While Gen Z may envisage sustainability manifesting through consumption, contribution and creation behaviour, internal psychological appraisals lead to intention re-evaluation due to external variables such as green washing, digital misinformation and related shared generational sustainability beliefs. The attribution theory focuses on how individuals interpret and assign meaning to external cues, such as message credibility and source characteristic as avenues to neutralise internal cognitive tensions and improve Gen Z sustainability conviction on social media. The theory provides lens through which the present study posits information value, entertainment value, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness as key precursors for message and influencer credibility (of SCGP) as trust builders. Integrated with Gen Z self-congruity, shared posts trust becomes a lever for achieving the desired social media engagement behaviour. Thus, the attribution theory serves as a mechanism through which the Gen Z may overcome cognitive dissonance, a deterrent to social media sustainable engagement behaviour. The attribution theory focuses on how individuals interpret and assign meaning to external cues, such as message credibility and source characteristics. Through combining these perspectives, the current study provides a more nuanced explanation of

how Gen Z evaluates sustainable consumption government policy influencers and message credibility, which then translates into social media behavioural engagement.

In line with this, to fulfil the theoretical puzzle, the main research objective of the study is "*to explore why and how sustainable consumption government policy influencers and message credibility directly impact Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets*. This study contributes to the development of practice and theory as it supports the use of cognitive dissonance and attribution theories to explain the complexity of how literature is conceptualised in explaining the impact of sustainable consumption government policy (SCGP) influencers and message credibility on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Because cognitive dissonance and attribution theory are used in service and product branding to understand customer satisfaction, this study goes further by applying them to examine sustainable consumption government policy and Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement. The dimensions of the theories have not been widely adopted when examining sustainable consumption government policy and Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in an emerging African context.

Methodology

Search strategy and screening protocol

This review followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al. 2021) to ensure methodological rigour and reproducibility. On March 10, 2026, we searched the Scopus database using the following Boolean string in TITLE-ABS-KEY fields:

("sustainable consumption" OR "green consumption" OR "circular economy" OR "sustainable marketing") AND ("government policy" OR "policy influencer" OR "policy communication") AND ("message credibility" OR "source credibility" OR "information credibility") AND ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z" OR "digital natives" OR "youth") AND ("social media engagement" OR "behavioural engagement" OR "online engagement") AND ("emerging markets" OR "developing countries" OR "Africa" OR "BRICS")).

Inclusion criteria

Peer-reviewed journal articles (2010—2026), English language, with a primary focus on sustainable consumption, social media marketing in emerging market contexts.

Exclusion criteria

Non-English publications; conferences/bbok chapters/editorials/notes/surveys; purely technical studies without marketing application and duplicates.

Screening procedure

Two independent reviewers conducted title/abstract screening followed by full-text assessment. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Studies were excluded if: (1) research questions focused solely on technological model performance metrics (2) empirical analysis used non-marketing data without marketing outcome implications or (3) marketing theory/practice implications were absent.

The PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1) summarises the screening process: 748 initial records → 316 final publications.

Analytical approach

We employed a two-stage mixed-methods design (Table 1):

- **Stage 1: Bibliometric Analysis** using Biblioshiny (R package) to map publication trends, influential documents, authors, and geographical distribution (Donthu

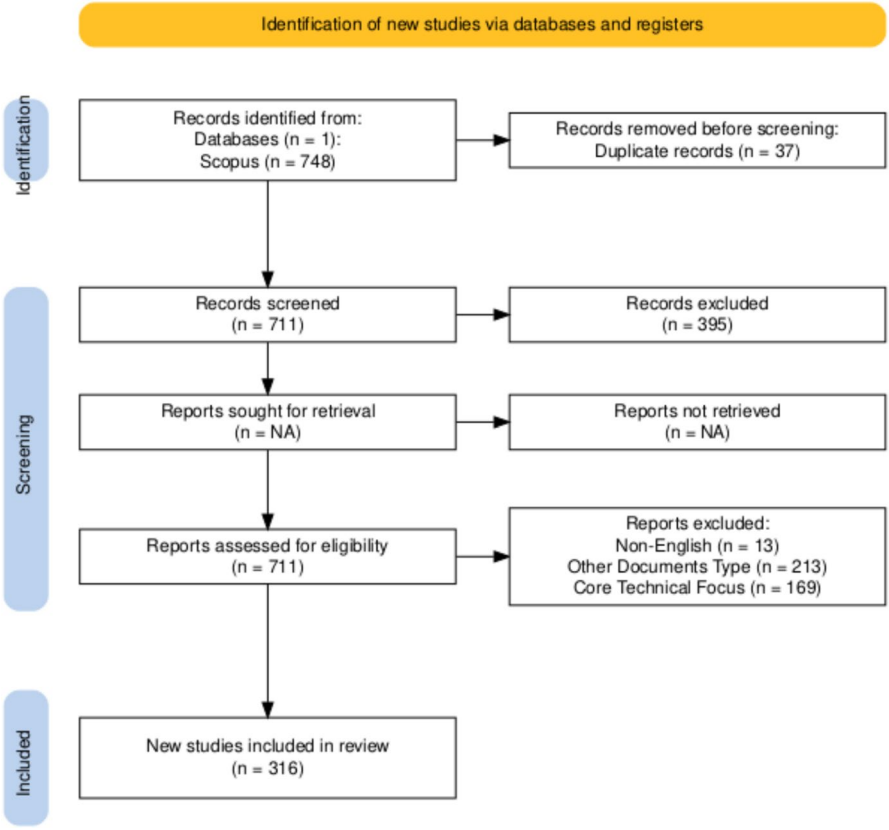


Fig. 1 PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process for the systematic review of Sustainable consumption of youth via social media in emerging market contexts (2010–2026). Source: Authors' conception (2026)

Table 1 The systematic research methodology process

Step	Purpose	Tools used	Key activities	Outcome
1. Data Extraction	Search and identify relevant publications	Scopus Search Engine	Boolean keyword search in TITLE-ABS-KEY; download metadata	Initial dataset of 748 documents
2. Data Cleaning and Screening	Filter dataset to retain high-relevance publications	Excel, Manual Review	Remove duplicate (37), non-English (13), exclude irrelevant document types (213), eliminate purely technical studies (169)	Refined dataset of 316 documents
3. Bibliometric Analysis	Explore publication trends and scientific mapping	Biblioshiny (R)	Analyze annual trends; identify top papers, authors, journals, geographical distribution	Snapshot of research productivity and influence
4. Network Analysis	Uncover co-authorship patterns and thematic clusters	VOSviewer	Keyword co-occurrence; Co-citations analysis	Identification of emerging themes and collaboration networks

Source: Authors' conception (2026)

et al., 2021).

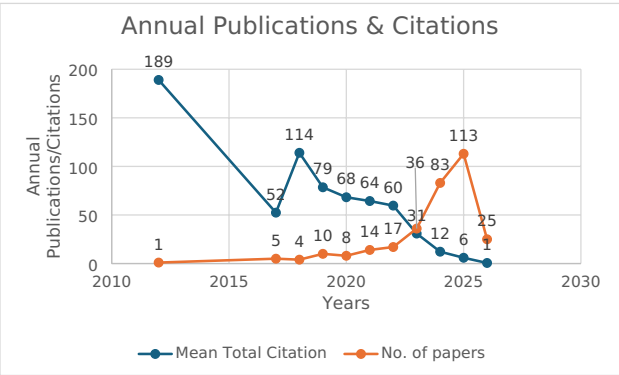
- **Stage 2: Network Analysis** VOSviewer application is used for the network cluster creation to visualise the research landscape in the adoption and application of machine learning in marketing. It is one of the most applied methods in the visualisation of scientific landscape of a given research domain (Selim et al., 2022). We conducted Co-Citation and keyword co-occurrence analyses to create intuitive maps for understanding the current research paradigm.

Bibliometric analysis results

Data characteristics	
Main information about data	
Timespan	2012:2026
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	188
Documents	316
Annual Growth Rate %	25.85
Document Average Age	2.32
Average citations per doc	22.04
References	44,413
Keywords Plus (ID)	691
Author's Keywords (DE)	1048
Authors	990
Authors of single-authored docs	28
Single-authored docs	29
Co-Authors per Doc	3.31
International co-authorships %	29.11
Article	316

Source: Authors' conception (2026)

Annual Publications & Citations Trend



Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Annual Publications & Citations Trend. Source: Authors' conception (2026)

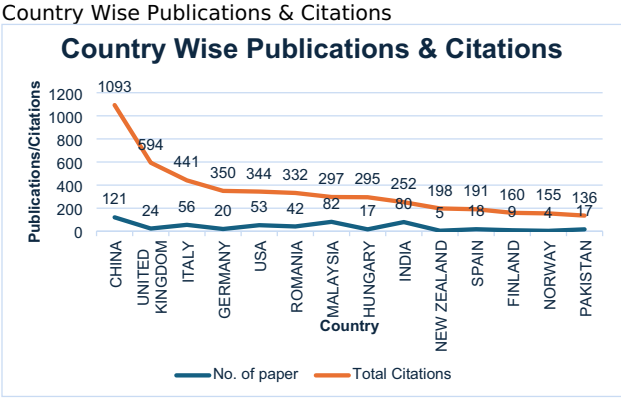
Most influential authors

Most Prolific Authors

Based on No. of Papers		Based on h-index		Based on Total Citations	
Author	No. of Papers	Author	h-index	Author	Total Citations
Balińska Agata	4	Balińska Agata	3	Liu Hongfei	296
Jaska Ewa	4	Jaska Ewa	3	Liu Wentong	296
Seyfi Siamak	4	Seyfi Siamak	3	Osburg Victoria-Sophie	296
Werenowska Agnieszka	4	Werenowska Agnieszka	3	Yoganathan Vignesh	296
Huang Miao	3	Huang Miao	3	Seyfi Siamak	250
Long Ruyin	3	Long Ruyin	3	Fekete-Farkas Maria	250
Mohamad Saleh Mohamad Saifudin	3	Mohamad Saleh Mohamad Saifudin	3	Naz Farheen	250
Ertz Myriam	3	Ertz Myriam	2	Nekmahmud Md	250
Al Mamun Abdullah	2	Al Mamun Abdullah	2	Ramkissoon Haywantee	250
Butnaru Gina Ionela	2	Butnaru Gina Ionela	2	Djafarova Elmira	229

Source: Authors' conception (2026)

Country Wise Publications & Citations



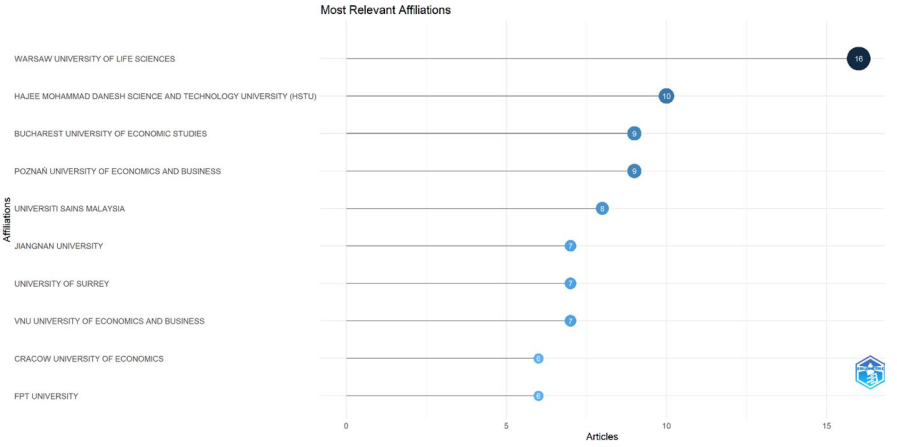
Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Country Wise Publications & Citations. Source: Authors' conception (2026)

The most meaningful documents

Author	Year	Journal	Tittle	Total Citations
Djafarova E	2022	Young Consumers	Exploring ethical consumption of generation Z: theory of planned behaviour	229
Pilgrim K	2019	BMC public health	Selling health and happiness how influencers communicate on Instagram about dieting and exercise: mixed methods research	202
Mcneill L	2019	International Journal of Consumer Studies	Identity, self-concept and young women's engagement with collaborative, sustainable fashion consumption models	197
Pop R-A	2020	Information	Social media goes green—The impact of social media on green cosmetics purchase motivation and intention	195
Minton E	2012	Journal of advertising	Sustainable marketing and social media: A cross-country analysis of motives for sustainable behaviors	189
Bedard SAN,	2018	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Millennials' green consumption behaviour: Exploring the role of social media	186
Han W	2018	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Evaluating user-generated content in social media: an effective approach to encourage greater pro-environmental behavior in tourism?	183
Simeone M	2020	Journal of Cleaner Production	Sustainable consumption: how does social media affect food choices?	128
Sogari G	2017	Sustainability	Millennial generation and environmental sustainability: The role of social media in the consumer purchasing behavior for wine	127
Nguyen MTT	2019	Young Consumers	Materialistic values and green apparel purchase intention among young Vietnamese consumers	122

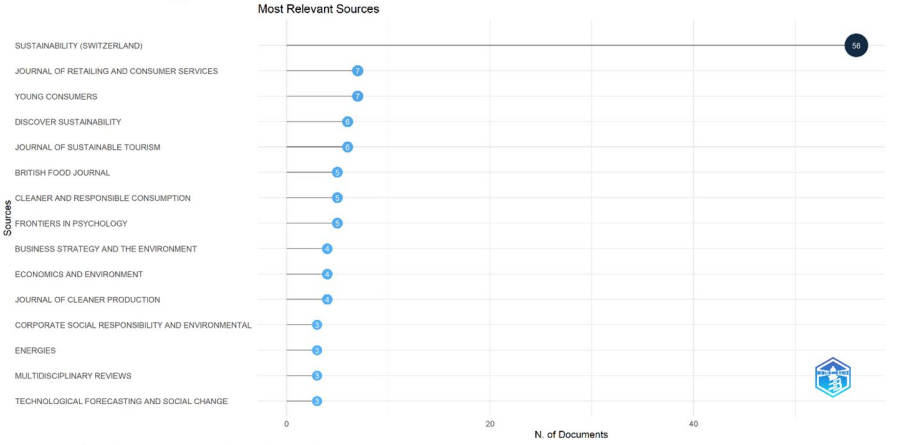
Source: Authors' conception (2026)



Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Most influential affiliations. Source: authors' conception (2026)

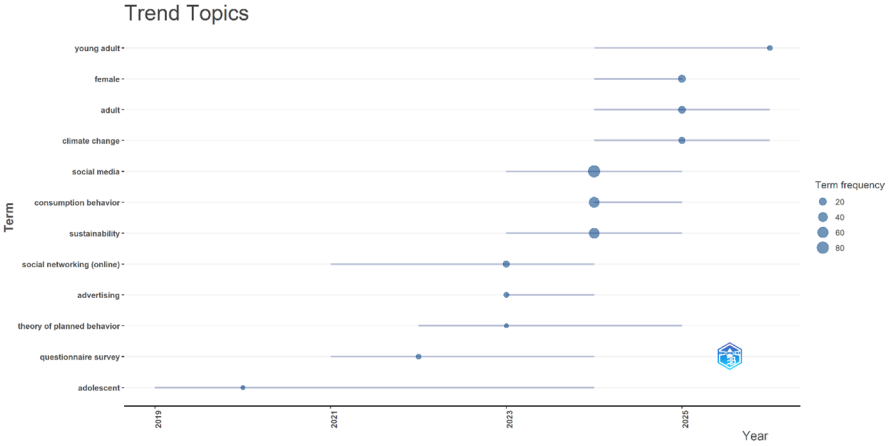
Most Contributing Journals



Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Most contributing journals. Source: Authors' conception (2026)

Trending Topics



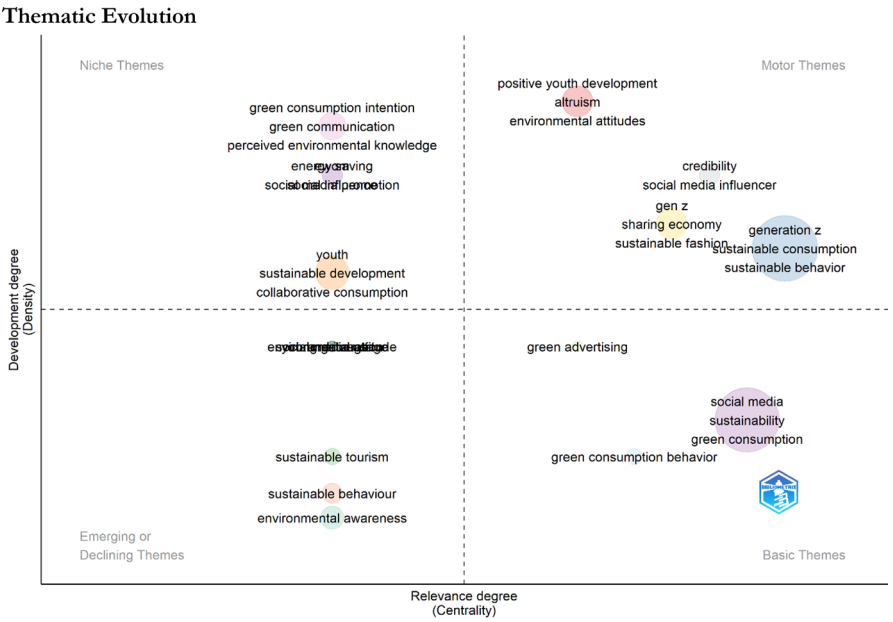
Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Trending topics. source: Authors' conception (2026)

The Word Cloud

Source: Authors' conception (2026).

The word cloud. Source: Authors' conception (2026)



Source: Authors' conception (2026).

Thematic evolution. Source: Authors' conception (2026)

Network analysis

Keywords co-occurrence analysis

We have applied the VOSviewer application to conduct a keyword co-occurrence analysis to map the conceptual framework of sustainable consumption research pertaining to Generation Z consumption behaviour through social media in emerging economies. The analysis produced 3172 links and a total link strength of 5323, using 188 keywords with a minimum occurrence threshold of 5. There were four distinct thematic clusters (see Fig. 2).

Cluster 1 (red 63 items): sustainable consumption foundations

This largest cluster focuses on sustainable consumption and is strongly related to ethics, altruism, environmental attitude, environmental concern and consumption behavior. Scopus and a literature review indicate an established research stream with well-defined methodologies. The theoretical foundation for comprehending the ethical and psychological foundations of sustainable consumption behavior is provided by this cluster.

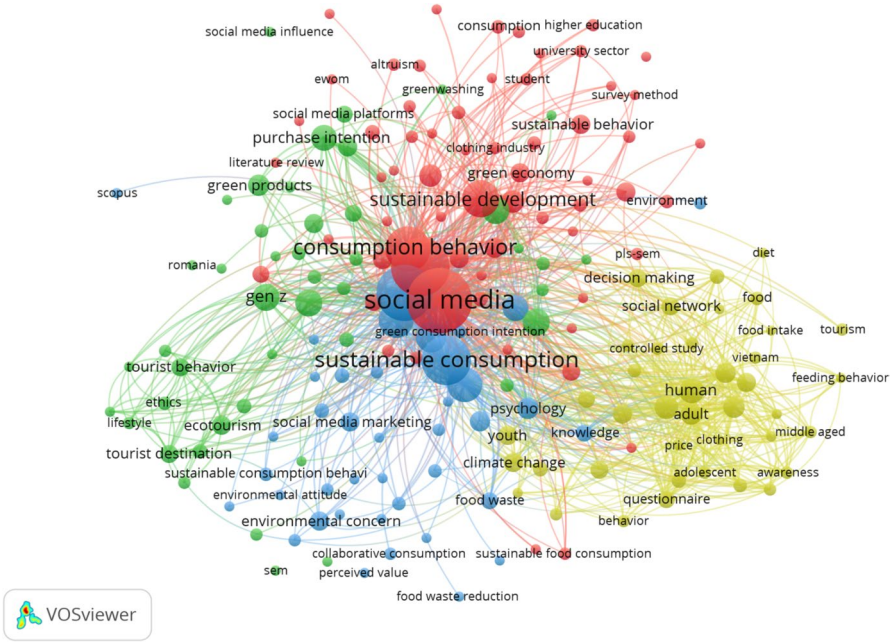


Fig. 2 The Keywords Co-occurrence Network

Cluster 2 (green 45 items): Generation Z and digital engagement

This cluster encapsulates how social media influence social media platforms purchase intention and greenwashing interact with Generation Z (or gen z). The emergence of greenwashing is especially noteworthy because it implies that Gen Zs mistrust of sustainability claims is a significant research theme that directly relates to the message credibility construct in our study. This cluster supports our emphasis on using social media to reach young consumers with sustainability messages.

Cluster 3 (blue 40 items): tourism and collaborative consumption

This cluster is concerned with reducing food waste, ecotourism, tourist behaviour, and collaborative consumption. It demonstrates that research on sustainable consumption goes beyond goods to include experiences and sharing practices, both of which are pertinent to Gen Z's adherence to circular economy ideas. In emerging markets, collaborative consumption is a crucial sustainable practice that appeals to younger consumers.

Cluster 4 (yellow 40 items): credibility and value perceptions

eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), perceived value, and environmental concern are some of the emerging themes associated with information credibility. The co-occurrence of eWOM and sustainability constructs emphasises how peer-generated

content shapes perceptions of sustainable consumption, which is a crucial mechanism for message credibility on social media. The network attests to the fact that our study's emphasis on how Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets is impacted by sustainable consumption, government policy influencers, and message credibility is based on established literature, while filling in noticeable gaps.

Co-citations analysis

To determine the most important academic and intellectual underpinnings which are influencing research on social media engagement, Gen Z and sustainable consumption, an author co-citation analysis was carried out. 9937 links and a total link strength of 26,741 were generated by 184 authors who were co-cited with others in the analysis. The major theoretical pillars of the field were represented by four distinct clusters that arose (see Fig. 3).

Cluster 1 (red 52 authors): foundations of sustainable consumer behavior

This cluster includes foundational theorists like Bandura A. (social cognitive theory), S. H Schwartz (values theory), and Belk R. (sharing and consumer behaviour). It serves as the theoretical foundation for comprehending how individual values and social learning influence Gen Z's environmental attitudes and behaviours, and it sym-

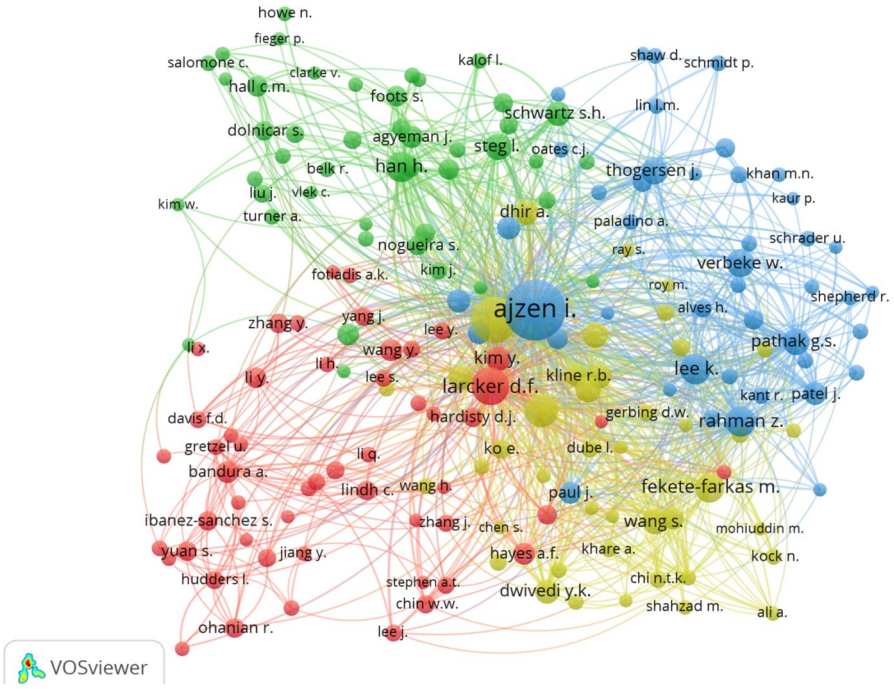


Fig. 3 The Co-citations analysis network. Source: authors' conception (2026)

bolises the psychological and sociological foundations of sustainable consumption research.

Cluster 2 (green 45 authors): Gen Z research and contemporary sustainability

This cluster comprises well-known modern writers like Dhir A. (Gen Z and social media) Dwivedi Y. In K. Paul J., as well as digital marketing. (conscientious consumption). Our study's focus on Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement is directly informed by these academics who represent the current research frontier looking at how young consumers interact with sustainability through digital platforms.

Cluster 3 (blue 44 authors): credibility and information influence

This cluster focuses on academics who work at the nexus of digital communication and credibility, such as Davis F. and Ohanian R. (source credibility). The D. (adoption of technology) and Hayes A. (F). (The use of statistics in communication research). The message credibility construct in our study is theoretically and methodologically supported by this cluster, which explains how source attributes and information quality affect consumer trust.

Cluster 4 (yellow 43 authors): emerging markets and policy context

Authors like Khan M. N who concentrate on developing country contexts and policy implications are part of this cluster. Pathak G. To S. as well as Mohiuddin M. (emerging economies sustainability). These academics' presence supports our study's emphasis on emerging markets and government policy influences, pointing to a unique research stream that looks at how contextual factors affect sustainable consumption in the Global South.

The co-citation network verifies that our research incorporates four well-known academic traditions: emerging markets scholarship (yellow), source credibility literature (blue), modern Gen Z and digital engagement research (green), and foundational consumer behaviour theory (red). Our conceptual model's contribution to literature is strengthened by its multi-theoretical foundation.

Proposed model

The following are the results from the systematic literature review (SLR) using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Fig. 1), along with emerging themes, hypotheses, and a conceptual modelling framework.

Sustainable consumption, government policy influencer credibility, and shared posts trust

Attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, beliefs, and associations of Gen Zers are triggered and shaped by their awareness of a given shared sustainable consumption government policy post and the quality and credibility (Nyagadza et al. 2022; Yoo and Donthu 2001; Mittal and Bansal 2023), which assist an organisation in garnering a competitive advantage against competitors (Batra and Atola 1991; Dangaiso 2023). Confirmation bias aids in minimising or eradicating cognitive dissonance brought on by contradictory information and increases the precision of sustainable consumption government policies (Stone & Wood 2018). Some Gen Zers naturally engage in social media because of the SCGP posts (Omar and Williams 2006; Nasr and El-Deeb 2023; Nyagadza et al. 2023), even if they do not know about a product or service (Kotler 2000). Social media influencers use Gen Zers' sustainable consumption government policy awareness to influence their attitudes, behavior, perception, association (Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001) and beliefs about a given social media post to gain positive trust based on the credibility of the message itself (Washburn and Plank 2002; Flavián and Barta 2023). By reducing Gen Zers' dissonance, social media influencers may assist not only in attracting new followers or retaining existing ones, but also in building strong awareness and trust in SCGP posts (Giri 2022). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1 *Sustainable consumption government policy influencer credibility (expertise (H_{1a}), trustworthiness (H_{1b}), attractiveness (H_{1c}), and similarity (H_{1d}) positively impact shared posts trust.*

Sustainable consumption, government policy, message credibility, and shared posts trust.

The promotion of responsible, sustainable consumption is imperative for the successful implementation of a green marketing strategy, which is necessary to influence Gen Zers. It links well with the perspectives of attribution theory, which is more concerned with how Gen Zers in the current study context use the information in the social media environment and societal pressure (Dangaiso 2024; Crandall et al. 2001; Robinson 2017; Mittal and Bansal 2023) to discover the causal explanations for how they evaluate sustainable consumption government policy message credibility and shared posts trust. Corporate brand benevolence refers to the affect-oriented, non-profit-motivated actions of a company, which trigger interest among customers and other stakeholders (Byon and Zhang 2010). The topic of the causal conclusions drawn by Gen Zers from sustainable-consumption government policy messages, and the credibility of those messages over time and in various contexts, is covered by attribution theory. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_2 *Sustainable consumption government policy message credibility (information value (H_{1a}), and trustworthiness (H_{1b}) positively impact shared posts trust.*

Shared posts trust and Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour

Whenever a social media influencer experiences an increase in Gen Zers' loyalty and recommendations about its shared posts trust (Pappu et al. 2005), it is not always an effect of sustainable consumption government policy (Boo et al. 2009). Many other factors are attributed to Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour, whether local or international market targeted (Stock et al. 2013; Flavián and Barta 2023). An improved government policy on sustainable consumption has a significant effect on Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour (Melewar et al. 2017). In addition, Gen Z members often experience attributional bias when making decisions. However, they may not be able to fully engage with and understand the differences between personality and situational attributes (Trenholm and Jensen 2013; Mittal & Bansal 2023) due to the likelihood of natural biases. In short, attribution theory is more concerned with how customers in the current study context use information in the social media environment and societal pressure (Crandall et al. 2002; Robinson 2017; Nasr and El-Deeb 2023) to discover causal explanations for how they evaluate government policy on sustainable consumption. This is because sustainable consumption, government policy, and social media posts can be viewed as integrating benevolence, respect, admiration, confidence (Lee et al. 2012), and reliability for future enhanced prospects and/or survival in a competitive market. Gen Zers tend to be positively associated with SCGP social media posts with positive outlook (Yasin et al. 2007). However, this is based on their emotional attachment to sustainable consumption, government policy, and social media posts that perform well (Foroudi et al. 2017). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_3 *Shared posts trust positively impact Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour.*

Self-congruity, shared posts trust and Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour

Gen Zers consistently share positive experiences about posts that are trustworthy and self-congruent, which adds value to their social media engagement behaviour (Melewar and Akel 2005; Van den Bosch et al. 2006; Flavián and Barta 2023). However, they may also experience dissonance when their expectations of a shared post do not align with the actual performance of the promise regarding sustainable consumption (Anderson 1973). For example, Gen Zers often associate high-end government policy posts with high quality and prestige, and if they are exposed to a sustainable-consumption government policy post that does not fit these expectations, it may cause them to change their perceptions and beliefs about the qualities associated with the former. Familiarity with a given government policy on sustainable consumption directly affects Gen Zers' attitudes when purchasing products (Kwon and Lennon 2005, 2006, 2009). Once Gen Zers are aware of a given brand and its reputation, they use this information to evaluate its performance against sustainable-consumption government policy within the same industry (Ha and Perks 2005; Nasr and El-Deeb 2023). Hence, increased cognitive dissonance can produce dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to a purchaser's remorse (Lake 2009), i.e., Gen Zer regrets

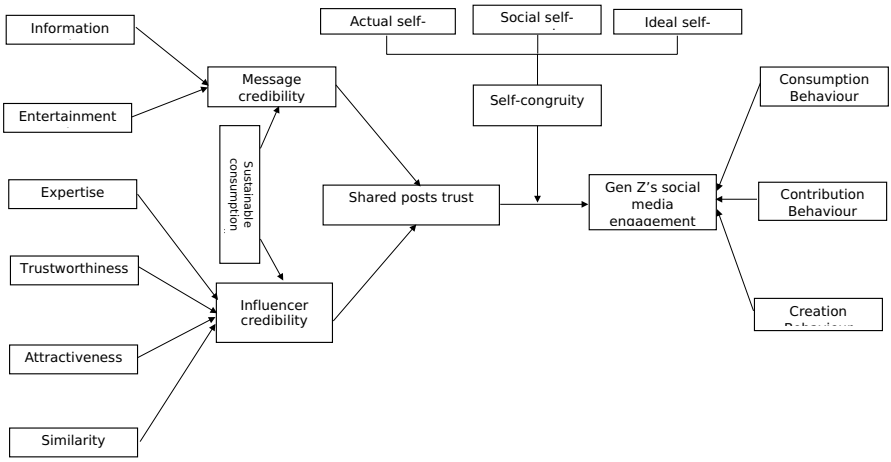


Fig. 4 Conceptual model. Source: Researchers' conception (2026)

making the purchase. Resistance to changing what they frequently buy is driven by a behavioural-cognitive element that depends on the level of pain or loss endured and the degree of satisfaction derived from social media engagement (Brehm, 1956). However, this is based on their emotional attachment to sustainable brands that perform well (Foroudi et al. 2017).

Hence, the following hypothesis is developed:

H_4 *Self-congruity positively moderates the relationship between trust in shared posts and Gen Z's social media engagement behaviour.*

The conceptual modelling framework illustrated in Fig. 4 is based on the theory and literature:

Discussion of implications for future research avenues

The following sections dwell on discussion of implications for future research avenues.

Theoretical implications

This study extends the cognitive dissonance theory by rethinking it from its traditional post-purchase and product-evaluation domains to the context of policy-driven sustainable consumption communication on social media. Through this approach, the study therefore reveals that cognitive dissonance in emerging markets is generally caused by the inconsistency between consumer expectations and government sustainability claims, Generation Z's lived realities, values and digital engagement. This moves beyond the traditional understanding of cognitive dissonance as arising only from inconsistency between expectations and consumption outcomes (Harmon-Jones

& Mills 2019; Giri 2022). This study adds to cognitive dissonance literature through the addition of shared posts in its theoretical framework. The inclusion of "shared posts" contributes to the fact that consumers can make informed evaluations prior to sustainability consumption behaviours, thereby reducing cognitive dissonance. The study further adds to the theory by showing that self-congruity moderates the relationship between trust in shared posts and social media behavioural engagement. The outcome provides the insight that when sustainability messaging resonates with Gen Z's self-concept the moderation effect is higher.

The study also extends the attribution theory by revealing that in social media-based sustainable consumption settings, Gen Z does not merely evaluate message content in isolation, but attributes meaning and credibility simultaneously to the source as well as the message itself. By distinguishing between government policy influencer credibility and message credibility, the study advances attribution scholarship beyond traditional sender- and receiver-based evaluations. It therefore demonstrates that causal judgements in digital sustainability communication have multiple facets. The study also contributes to theory by supporting the use of attribution theory to explain the complexity of the sustainable consumption government policy influencer and the impact of message credibility on Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets. Gen Z social media users infer whether sustainable consumption messages are believable, authentic, and worthy of engagement by evaluating both the sender of the message and how it is framed. This is particularly important in emerging markets, where scepticism in government sustainability claims could influence how consumers evaluate and interpret sustainability within the digital space (Flavián & Barta 2023). This could make young consumers think more carefully before trusting what they read on social media. This further adds value to the body of knowledge related to attribution theory by extending the nascent literature, as found in recent prior sustainable consumption, government policy, and social media marketing psychology research (for example, Sedikides et al. (1998) Weiner, (2000) Robinson, (2017); Foroudi (2018). The model developed in the current study can serve as a theoretical foundation for future related studies. The basic assumptions of the Theory of Attribution are conceptually grounded in the idea that customers seek to determine the causes of their own behaviour and that of others. They tend to have causal explanations for the behaviour in a systematic manner and attributions that have results that affect future behaviour or interactions of sustainable consumption, government policy influencers, and message credibility impact Generation Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets (Bashar et al. 2024).

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide practical, actionable insights for policymakers, marketers, and business practitioners seeking to operationalise sustainable consumption within emerging markets, particularly among Generation Z. While sustainable consumption is widely recognised as a latent element within the marketing mix (Mendoza et al. 2021; Mukonza et al. 2021; Flavián and Barta 2023), this study demonstrates that its effectiveness is contingent upon the alignment between policy

communication, message credibility, and digital engagement mechanisms. In this regard, policymakers are encouraged to move beyond generic sustainability advocacy by developing structured, youth-centred communication strategies that resonate with Gen Z's digital behaviours. This includes leveraging credible influencers whose expertise, trustworthiness, and relatability enhance policy acceptance, as well as ensuring that sustainability messages are transparent, evidence-based, and locally contextualised. By doing so, governments can reduce scepticism and cognitive dissonance, thereby strengthening engagement with sustainability initiatives, which extends prior assertions by Mendoza et al. (2021) and Bosch and Schmidt (2019) regarding the need to reconcile sustainable consumption with perceptions of green capitalism.

From a managerial perspective, the study highlights the need for organisations to transition from symbolic green marketing practices to measurable, performance-driven engagement strategies. Firms should embed sustainability within their core value propositions by clearly linking environmental benefits to consumer value, such as cost savings, health improvements, and social identity. Furthermore, organisations are encouraged to adopt real-time analytics to monitor engagement with sustainability-related content, including metrics such as social media interactions, content sharing, and sentiment analysis. In line with Jeannotte and Dick (2024), incorporating sustainability indicators into marketing dashboards enables organisations to evaluate the effectiveness of their green marketing strategies, thereby facilitating benchmarking and continuous improvement. This shifts green marketing from a communication function to a strategic capability that drives behavioural outcomes and long-term customer engagement.

In terms of business model innovation, the study reinforces the centrality of sustainable consumption to the development of sustainable business models (Mondal et al. 2022) and addresses concerns that existing green marketing efforts have not sufficiently transformed economies (Bosch & Schmidt 2019). Practically, organisations should redesign their business models to incorporate circular economy principles, such as product take-back systems, recycling initiatives, and refurbishment programmes. Additionally, firms should foster organisational citizenship behaviours that promote environmental stewardship and encourage employees to actively participate in sustainability initiatives. By co-creating value with stakeholders, including customers and supply chain partners, organisations can generate relational rent through green marketing practices, thereby enhancing both environmental and economic performance.

The study further underscores the critical role of supply chain integration in facilitating the transition towards sustainable consumption and the green economy (Mishra et al. 2017). Practitioners are encouraged to implement sustainable sourcing strategies by partnering with environmentally certified suppliers, adopting green transportation systems to reduce emissions, and developing reverse logistics capabilities that support recycling, remanufacturing, and refurbishment processes. These operational interventions ensure that sustainability is embedded across the entire value chain, thereby translating strategic intent into measurable environmental outcomes and supporting the broader transition to a circular economy.

Furthermore, the findings have important implications for digital platforms and the sharing economy, particularly regarding Gen Z's engagement patterns. Platform developers and operators should prioritise trust-building mechanisms, such as verified sustainability claims, transparent user reviews, and product and service traceability. In addition, incorporating behavioural nudges, including rewards and gamification strategies, can incentivise sustainable participation and reinforce pro-environmental behaviours. Addressing the financial sustainability challenges faced by sharing economy platforms, organisations should explore hybrid revenue models that combine transaction-based income with partnerships and subscription services, thereby ensuring long-term viability.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of addressing behavioural barriers such as materialism and contamination concerns, which were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Practitioners should reframe sustainability messaging to position it as aspirational and aligned with identity and lifestyle, rather than as a sacrifice. Additionally, enhancing transparency in hygiene and safety practices can mitigate concerns associated with collaborative consumption. Given that Gen Z's participation in the sharing economy is driven by diverse motivations (Böcker & Meelen 2017), targeted campaigns that leverage peer influence, interactive digital content, and co-creation strategies are recommended. Overall, the study advances practice by demonstrating that sustainable consumption initiatives must be credibility-driven, digitally embedded, and operationally integrated to effectively influence Gen Z's social media behavioural engagement in emerging markets.

Conclusion

The commitment of national governments to sustainable green marketing and green consumption issues often depends on the governing party's political ideology. In many emerging African markets, a transition to sustainable consumption and green economies is regarded as not urgent and is perceived as an antithesis to economic growth. The lack of environmental standards and lapses in monitoring and enforcing environmental laws are also evident. Exploiting this reality, large corporations often implement self-regulated voluntary sustainable consumption initiatives, which are often criticised for being skewed towards profitability. As elsewhere, achieving net-zero targets is a key objective for African emerging markets (Musa et al. 2024). Carbon credit schemes are emerging as voluntary tools for reducing carbon emissions (Swinkels 2024). This study examined the efficacy of carbon credits as a strategy for attaining carbon neutrality. The success of carbon credit schemes also depends on demand (Gupta & Rakshit 2023). Therefore, this study supports the efficacy of voluntary carbon credits as a strategy for sustainable consumption in Africa.

Limitations and future research avenues

The current research has been conducted, and only selected articles in English Have Been Used. This meant that other articles in different languages were excluded. The study was limited to an inductive approach to theme identification, thereby precluding triangulation. The current methodology has limitations, including limited external

validity, risk of overinterpretation, unexplained heterogeneity, and bias amplification. In the next predictive research, there is need for prioritization of pre-registration, hypothesis-driven research designs, which include sub-group analyses, and multi-site replication, to validate these proposed relationships and strengthen external validity. In addition, future research can explore the avenues related to how the practice of sustainable consumption and green marketing, marketing mix elements must be aligned with sustainability principles (Mogaji et al. 2022). Alignment is required to manage the prevailing tensions between sustainable production and consumption (Turkcu & Tura 2023). Sustainable consumption is underpinned by principles that promote minimal consumption, such as collaborative consumption and sharing (Netter et al. 2019; Flavián and Barta 2023; Bashar et al. 2024). Gen Z's attitude towards collaborative consumption and the status of the sharing economy in Africa are important elements necessary for sustainable consumption.

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Declarations

Competing interests The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Ethics approval This article does not involve any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

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