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UNDERSTANDING KEY DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TOWARDS GREEN COSMETIC CONSUMPTION AMONG GENERATION Z CONSUMERS: A THEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Green and organic beauty products are gaining popularity since last decades, the market is evolving at a higher rate, still a little focus has been placed on how younger consumers perceive and respond to the sustainability principles related to these products. Often popularly called as digital natives and innovators or change agents, the Generation Z cohort reflects a paradoxical position because on one hand, they show a strong concern towards the environment, while on the other, they are affected by trends, fashion, aesthetics, and price considerations. This disparity often results in a question whether factors actually affect their consumption patterns and preferences regarding environmentally friendly cosmetics. The present study employs a qualitative approach, conducted by the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), instead of being dependent on empirical data or quantitative methodologies. The review mainly finds two prominent thematic clusters through a systematic review of 25 peer-reviewed articles and market reports published during 2012 and 2024 i.e. key barriers including price sensitivity, lack of product availability, perceived ineffectiveness, and trust issues regarding greenwashing practices and key drivers including environmental concern, health consciousness, self-identity and social influence. The conceptual mapping of these themes attempts to draw consciousness to the contextual and psychological discrepancies that determine Gen Z's attitude, perceptions and actions towards green consumption. By presenting a thorough understanding of the factors that motivates or discourages Gen Z consumers in the green beauty space, the study further aims to add to the existing body of literature. Marketers, educators, and policymakers are recommended to incorporate cost, transparency, and trust into their green product strategy.

KEYWORDS: *Generation Z, Eco-Friendly Cosmetics, Green Beauty, Sustainability, Consumer Behaviour, Thematic Analysis, Ethical Consumption*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumerism has become the talk of the town nowadays, as the beauty industry witnessed a huge shift in consumer demand related to sustainable and eco-friendly products. This changed demand is the result of growing environmental awareness, social influence and health consciousness in consumer. Among all cohorts, the Generation Z, born between 1997 to 2012, evolved as the most environmentally conscious consumers, who are vocal for environmental sustainability and readily experiments with green lifestyle choices, promoting ethical consumption. Recent studies have informed their adoption of eco-friendly choices in beauty and personal care products (Trinh et al., 2023; Ewe & Tjiptono, 2023).

Eco-friendly cosmetics or green cosmetics, are often known for their use of natural and plant-based ingredients, manufactured by using cruelty-free practices, that ensures environmental sustainability. These cosmetics have gained preference over the conventional, chemically manufactured cosmetics especially among the younger generation like Gen Z (Nguyen et al., 2023). However, despite its significance, studies (Gomes et al., 2023; Venciute et al., 2023) have shown a constant attitude-behaviour gap when it comes to consumer's actual purchasing behaviour towards these products. Gen Zs strongly support these sustainable products, but there prevails a difference in their actual buying behaviour, may be due to social, psychological and structural barriers.

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Various studies have explored the factors influencing green buying behaviours, such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, brand trust and social media effects (Song & Qin, 2020; Ahmad & Omar, 2020; Wong & Yap, 2022). However, there is limited literature available when it comes to thematic analysis of the findings, specially within the context of green beauty consumption with reference to Gen Z consumers. Bridging this gap, the present study attempts to conduct a thematic review of previous studies, exploring the key drivers and barriers that influences Gen Zs preferences towards green cosmetic products. The insights from the study will help in formulating effective green branding and engagement strategies specifically for the younger generation by exploring the factors that drives their eco-conscious behaviour.

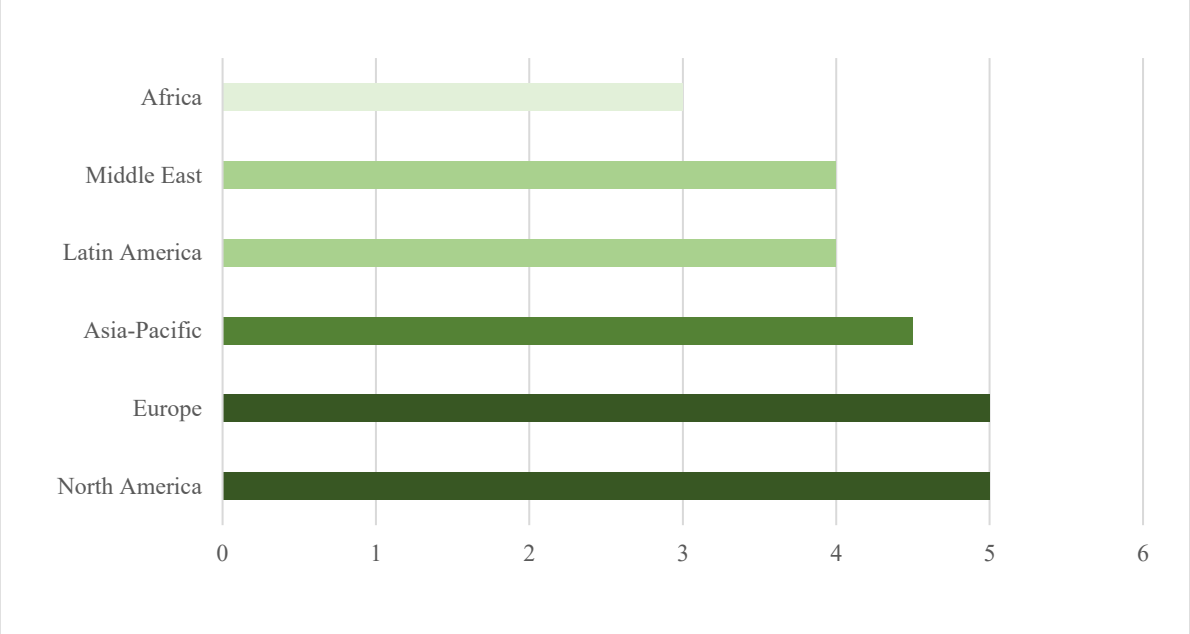
1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To analyse key themes and factors determining Generation Z's concerns towards green cosmetics and beauty products.
- To identify key drivers and barriers influencing Generation Z's choices towards green cosmetic and beauty products.
- To provide practical insights for businesses, marketers and brands seeking to serve better and capitalize on younger generation consumers.

1.2 Generation Z's Concern towards Sustainability: Worldwide View

Sustainability nowadays has become a universal concern especially for younger generation or so called Green Generation, but there concern is influenced by cultural and economic barriers which hinder their sustainability concerns in certain regions globally. According to recent reports (Statista, Deloitte, First Insight), North America, Southeast Asia have the highest pro-environmental attitude, however Latin America and African continent have economically constrained adoption. Further, digital activism plays a significant role in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East nations which drives both awareness and bring change.

Figure 1: Region wise distribution of Gen Z's Awareness Regarding Sustainability Concerns

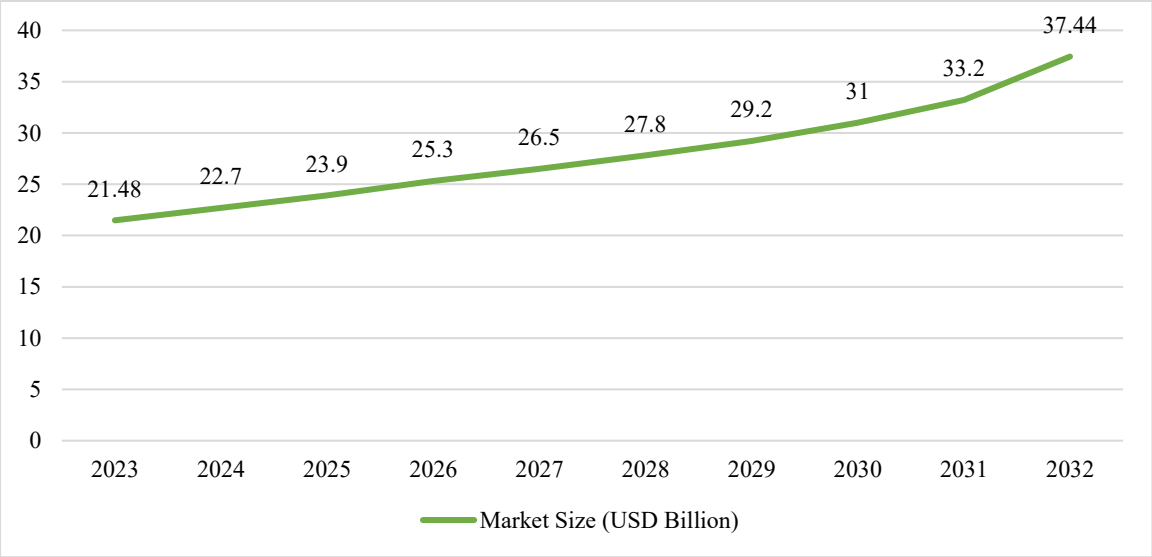


***Source**: Compiled by author based on reports*

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1.3 Global Market Outlook of Green Cosmetics:

Figure 2: Green Cosmetics Global Market Size (USD Billion)



Source: *Zion Market Research*

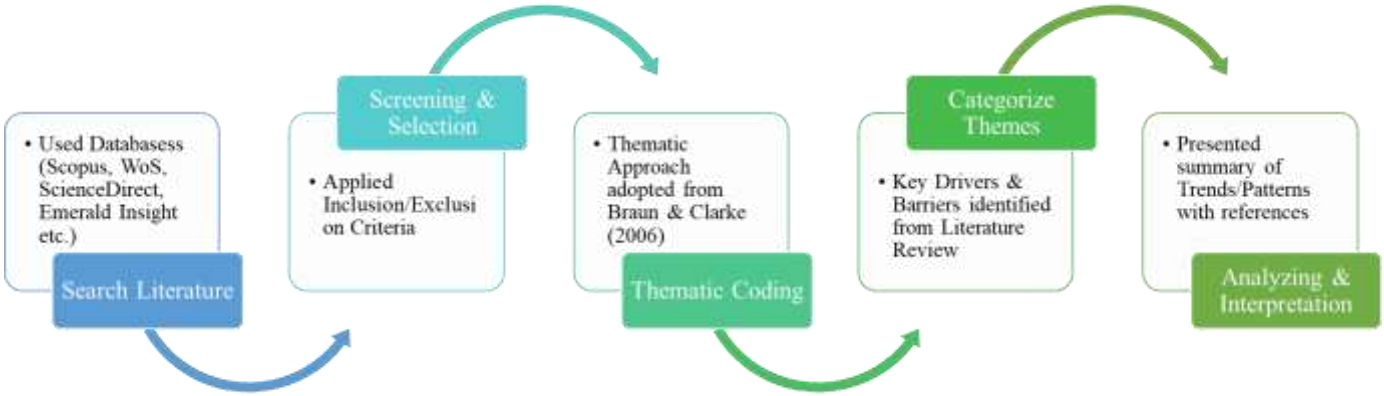
As per the estimations made by Zion Market Research, the global market for green and sustainable cosmetics will grow rapidly, reaching USD 37.44 billion by 2032 from USD 21.48 billion in 2023 at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 7.19%. This continuous rising trend highlights a crucial shift in customer choices and preferences towards eco-friendly, sustainable, and green beauty products. Growth continues to be constant year over year, with a significant increase in later years, particularly from 2030 to 2032. Consumers in Generation Z are particularly sensitive to problems like ingredient transparency, ethical manufacturing practices, and health safety, which are considered in this trend.

The growing demand for green and organic cosmetics as a result of continuous evolvement of market indicates a great opportunity for companies to innovate and match their products with sustainability and green principles and further capitalize on this growing interest of young consumers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study utilizes the thematic literature review approach to explore and categorize the key motivating and limiting factors influencing Gen Z's green cosmetics sustainable consumption behaviour.

Figure 3: Process of Thematic Review under Study at Glance



Source*: Compiled by Author*

2.1 Search Strategy and Literature Sources For the purpose of review, the literature was collected from the articles published in academic databases and peer-reviewed journals namely, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, Sage Journals, Springer, MDPI and Google Scholar. The study includes articles published between 2012 to 2024, with more emphasis on studies published in the recent 5 years' time (2019-2024), so as to understand the recent consumption behaviour trends. The search strategy employed combination of specific keywords including 'Generation Z' OR 'Gen Z', 'Sustainable Cosmetics' OR 'Green Cosmetics' OR 'Eco-Friendly Beauty', 'Sustainable Consumption Behaviour' OR 'Consumer Behaviour' OR 'Purchase Intentions', 'Drivers of Green Consumption' OR 'Motivating Factors in Sustainable behaviour' OR 'Barriers in Green Consumption'. Boolean operators like 'AND', 'OR' were utilized while searching the literature in order to limit and narrow down the search results as per the requirement of the study.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
The present study considered both qualitative and quantitative research articles that focused on Gen Zs or younger generation who were aged between 18-28 years. These articles mainly explored their behaviour and purchase intention in the context of sustainable consumption with reference to green cosmetics. The articles were limited to English language only.

Articles other than English language were filtered from the search results. Additionally, the search was filtered out of publications that didn't specifically address green cosmetics or Generation Z. This ensured a greater level of academic or professional rigour in the sources chosen, including blogs, opinion articles, and content that had not been subjected to peer review.

2.3 Screening and Selection
Initially, a total of 195 articles were identified after applying the filters required for the study. However, after screening titles, abstracts and full texts availability based on quality and relevance, 25 peer-reviewed articles were incorporated for the purpose of the present thematic review.

2.4 Thematic Review Approach
This is the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) for the conduct of qualitative research in discovering, investigating, and analysing patterns of meaning ("themes") within a dataset. This included the initial step of understanding the content in the studies selected, and the application of systematic coding across concepts, ideas, and findings that were relevant and specifically pertaining to the consumption behaviour among Generation Z for the sake of green cosmetics and beauty. These codes were further concentrated into more general, regular patterns that identify the ultimate motivations and limitations driving Gen Z's behaviour. They were classified under two broad categories:

Key Drivers including elements like environmental concern, consciousness regarding health and safety, influence of peer and social media, and trust in ethical branding

Key Barriers including matters such as premium price perception, scarce availability and accessibility, greenwashing and scepticism, and unfamiliarity with the product

Themes were filtered with regard to their frequency, relevance, and explanatory capability within the literature under review. Relationships and contradictions between studies were carefully analysed and interpreted in order to develop a consolidated conclusion. This procedure promoted a disciplined yet adaptive analysis, so that a subtle investigation of the facilitating and constraining influences which determine the green beauty decisions made by Gen Z could be conducted.

Lastly, the thematic analysis provided an organizing and evidence-based framework for interpreting the motivations and challenges in the complicated landscape that underlies Gen Z's purchase behaviour and sustainable consumption patterns within the green beauty market.

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3. FINDINGS

Table 1: Major Themes & Key Authors under Review

Major Themes	Broad Categorization	Key Authors
Environmental Concern	Driver	Dakshayani & Rajendran (2024), Nguyen et al. (2023), Trinh et al. (2023), Kumar et al. (2022), Sung & Kim (2021)
Health Consciousness	Driver	Dutta et al. (2023), Wang et al. (2020), Song & Qin (2020)
Social Media Influence	Driver	Chaturvedi & Agrawal (2022), Wong & Yap (2022), Nielsen (2020), Ahmad & Omar (2020)
Ethical Branding	Driver	Gomes et al. (2023), Gupta & Sinha (2021), Lee et al. (2020)
Price Sensitivity	Barrier	Ewe & Tjiptono (2023), Jain et al. (2022), Singh et al. (2023)
Limited Availability	Barrier	Sharma & Mehta (2021), Bhardwaj et al. (2022)
Trust Issues (Greenwashing)	Barrier	Lee (2018), Chen & Chang (2013)
Lack of Awareness	Barrier	Sinha et al. (2020), Mishra & Raj (2021)

***Source**: Compiled by author based on review*

3.1 Factors influencing Green Beauty Choices among Gen Z Consumers: Key Drivers

Environmental awareness has evolved as one of the dominant themes across the review as it shows the strong alignment with Gen Z values. Gen Z customers were found to be more conscious of ecological issues because they were digital natives who grew up in a time of social activity and climate change conversation. As a result, consumers now favour companies that provide vegan formulations, cruelty-free testing, and environmentally friendly packaging (Lee, 2020; Kim & Seock, 2022).

For them, green beauty is more than simply a fad; it's frequently viewed as a way to express oneself and consume ethically. **Health consciousness** is also another significant motivating factor. According to several studies, Gen Z consumers believe that green cosmetics have cleaner chemicals, less pollutants, and better skin compatibility (Jain & Srivastava, 2021; Hwang & Choi, 2022). This generation views "natural" as being equivalent to "safe," and they are increasingly reading labels, looking into ingredients, and choosing products that fit with their wellness-focused lifestyles.

Alignment with **ethical branding** and **personal identity** emerged as a more complex motivator. Brands that promote social justice, diversity, and openness are typically supported by Gen Z (Brydges et al., 2021). Because of this, it has become very important that companies interact in a genuine and transparent manner, showing a sustained dedication to their declared principles rather than only profiting from fads. It is expected of brands to genuinely incorporate these principles into every aspect of their business, from marketing and employee relations to sourcing and production.

Social influence is important in addition to above stated drivers of green cosmetics consumption. Online connectivity among Gen Z, particularly via YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, encourages influencer effect and peer validation (Suki & Suki, 2022). Purchase intents are frequently sparked by positive word-of-mouth, influencer endorsements, and viral sustainability issues. This group is further motivated towards green beauty by the desire for socially acceptable consumption and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Green beauty has become more than just a buy; it's a statement that allows them to show not just their style but also their principles and values.

3.2 Factors influencing Green Beauty Choices among Gen Z Consumers: Key Barriers

Gen Z consumers frequently experience obstacles that prevent them from actually purchasing green beauty products, despite their values and aspirations. The most commonly mentioned obstacle was **price sensitivity**. Many young consumers believe that sustainable alternatives are expensive or unaffordable, particularly those who are students or in their early careers (Sharma et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2022). Regular purchasing is discouraged by the price difference between eco-friendly and conventional solutions.

The **lack of availability** or **accessibility** of genuine green beauty brands, particularly in smaller cities or emerging markets, is another common barrier. There may be a gap between intent and access since some products are only

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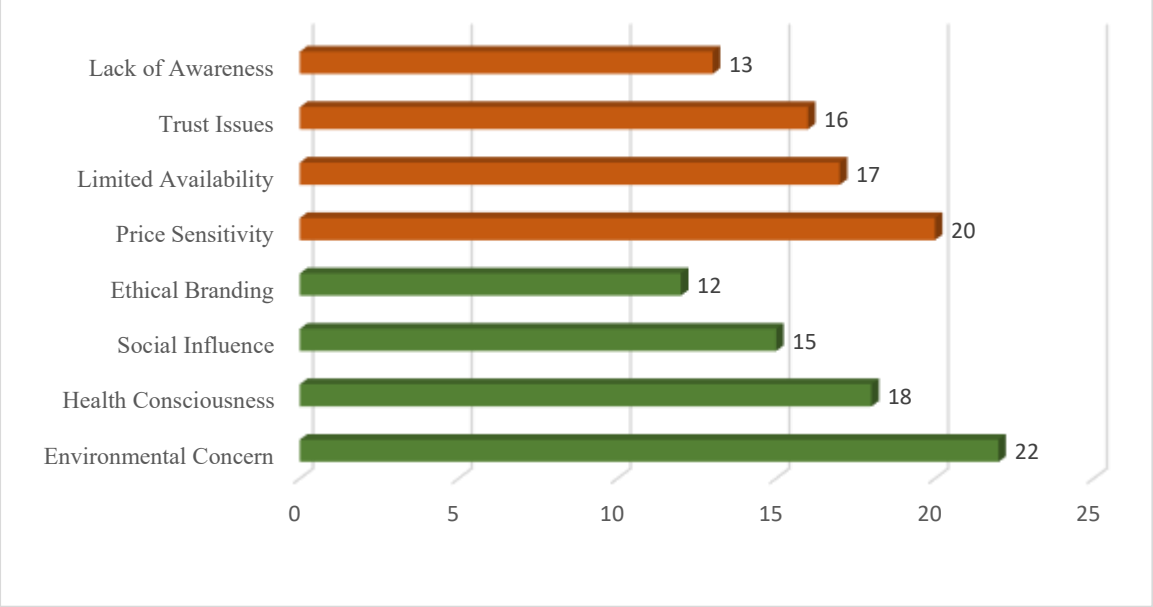
offered online or exclusively through speciality stores. The overall adoption is impacted by this logistical challenge, especially in non-metropolitan regions.

Finally, a constant problem is a **lack of awareness** and product understanding. Some buyers find it difficult to tell the difference between products that are truly green and those that are only labelled with terms like "organic" or "herbal" or "sustainable." Even environmentally conscious people may turn to well-known conventional brands in the absence of consistent education and credible information.

3.3 The Attitude-Behaviour Gap

The discrepancy between Gen Z's sustainable attitude and their actual purchasing behaviour towards green cosmetics is a recurring theme in the literature review. Despite their desire to make morally and environmentally responsible decisions, compromises are frequently made due to real constraints, whether they be cognitive, financial, or logistical. This conflict highlights how important it is for firms to have accessible innovation, reliable marketing, and inclusive distribution plans.

Figure 4: Frequency of major Themes under Review



Source: *Compiled by author based on Review*

Table 2: Region wise Distribution of Key Drivers & Barriers among Gen Zs

Region	Key Drivers	Key Barriers	Awareness Rate
North America	Investing, Activism, Access to Information	Attitude-behaviour gap	Very High
Europe	Circular Economy, Sustainable Choices	Economic limitations	Very High
Asia-Pacific	Social Activism	Convenience, Cost Concerns	High to Very High
Latin America	Local Focus, Brand Transparency, Ethics	Economic Constraints, Price Sensitivity	High
Middle East	Activism, Renewable Energy, Climate Concern,	Economic uncertainty	High
Africa	Digital Activism, Transformation in Food Management System	Economic barriers	Growing Stage

Source: Compiled by author based on reports

4. DISCUSSION

The review highlights Generation Z consumers' continuously increasing interest in eco-friendly and sustainable cosmetic products. However, a complex interaction between practical limitations and motivating factors influences this interest. Adoption of green beauty is facilitated by Gen Z's social media immersion, health-conscious lifestyle, and environmental awareness. Making more thoughtful decisions is made possible by their increased access to information due to their digital fluency. This is in line with past research (Lee, 2020; Kim &

Seock, 2022) that emphasises Gen Z's capacity to evaluate components, brand values, and product authenticity seriously.

But as previous studies have shown (Sharma et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2022), the gap between attitude and action is very significant. This phenomenon is consistent with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1991), which suggests that control factors like trust issues, accessibility or affordability may avoid behavioural intention from always converting into actual buying behaviour. Although Gen Z possess a positive attitude towards green products, they still see limited behavioural control, particularly when it comes to cost and their doubt over greenwashing issues. Additionally, social influence functions as both a gatekeeper as well as a motivator, particularly when it comes to online communities and influencers. Although influencer-led beauty campaigns have the potential to liberalize green beauty, they also possess the risk of creating unrealistic standards or increasing consumer confusion with the help of using contradictory messages.

The results were found to be aligned with the value-belief-norm theory (VBN), which revealed that pro-environmental behaviour is generally a result of personal norms activated by environmental beliefs and values (for example, sustainability and self-care), however this does not work in all cases because of institutional limitations.

As a result, the discussion emphasises that Gen Zs are not only green beauty enthusiasts, but a critical and socially aware consumer group that demands authenticity, accountability and affordability from brands.

5. CONCLUSION

With relation to green cosmetics and beauty products, this review aimed to offer an in-depth thematic understanding of the elements impacting Generation Z's consumption and buying behaviour. By incorporating qualitative and quantitative research, we were able to identify the key motivators- personal values, health consciousness, environmental concern, and social influence as well as the undergoing barriers including price, lack of access, mistrust, and lack of information.

Although Gen Z has a positive alignment with the essentials of sustainable consumption, structural and psychological issues continue to occur as a hinderance in the shift from intention to actual behaviour. This gap needs to be bridged by brands and policymakers through focused education, innovation in pricing, and transparent green marketing practices. In the end, Gen Z's enthusiasm towards sustainability is authentic, but how well the beauty industry responds to their demands for diversity, openness, and ethical innovation will regulate how well they can execute it.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The present study has important implications for philosophy, practice, and policy. The review expands our theoretical knowledge of the behavioural and psychological foundations of Generation Z's sustainable consumption. It assures the functionality of widely accepted frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value–Belief–Norm theory in clarifying green purchasing behaviours, precisely in situations where intention does not automatically convert into action. This study reveals the difficulty of Gen Z's decision-making and suggests for more balanced models that explains the relationship of situational barriers, personal beliefs and perceived societal norms.

From a practical point of view, the review offer direction for marketers aspiring to connect with this ecologically driven and socially conscious group. Transparency and authenticity must be the top priority for brands because Gen Z customers are very conscious of greenwashing and manipulative sustainability claims. It is very important to build trust and confidence among them through open communication, third-party certifications, and fair accounts of environmental impact. Furthermore, affordability or price sensitivity still remains a major issue. Brands must incorporate pricing tactics that either reduce expenses or provide justification for premium prices, like ethical sourcing or long-lasting skin health advantages, to support premiums. If influencer marketing is utilised properly, it can become a powerful tool when their mutual collaborations based on shared values, knowledge, and authenticity over gaining fame or aesthetics alone. Further enhancing product availability, accessibility and customisation to suit a range of needs across genders, skin types, and geographical areas can expand market adoption and promote diversity, eventually increasing overall productivity and sustainability.

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