

PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AMONG GENERATION Z IN SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT.

Background: Considering the current state of the environment and alarming information about global warming, sustainable development is a pressing issue. Sustainable consumption and production are the primary ways to achieve sustainable development globally as well as locally. **Aims:** The aim of the paper was to examine the extent to which Generation Z consumers are interested in environmental issues and their willingness to adjust their consumption in favour of sustainability. **Methods:** To achieve the goal, a questionnaire survey was implemented. **Sample:** Primary research was conducted on a sample of 357 respondents. The sample was stratified to ensure gender representativeness. **Results:** The primary research revealed that less than half of young consumers are interested in environmental issues. Approximately half of the respondents perceive the consequences of climate change and express concerns about the future in this regard. Only 57% of consumers are willing to adapt their own behaviour in favour of environmental protection and sustainable development. Based on the examination of secondary data, it was found that there is no communication and information campaign focused on sustainable development in the Slovak Republic. **Conclusions:** Although Generation Z is considered the most environmentally conscious, only half of young consumers in Slovakia show interest in sustainable development issues. The reason may be the lack of a communication and information campaign in Slovakia. **Implications:** The results highlight the necessity of well-designed communication strategies to strengthen consumer environmental awareness. In this context, social media campaigns and narrative approaches could be essential tools.

Keywords: sustainable consumption, Generation Z, information and communication campaign

JEL Classification: Q01, M30, M31

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Introduction

Sustainable development aims to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and promote sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, as well as sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth. Sustainable development refers to meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Sustainable Development Goals pose a challenge for all countries in the world. They aim to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They are founded on the premise that ending poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that build economic growth and address social needs, including education, health, social protection, and jobs, while also taking into account climate change and environmental protection (OSN, 2023).

All sustainable development goals are interconnected, and goal number 12 - Responsible consumption and production – is considered the one whose fulfilment will lead to the fulfilment of the other goals (Brown, 2012; Mukendi et al., 2020). Although this goal is officially called "responsible consumption and production", its detailed description already uses the term "sustainable". In literature, the term "sustainable consumption" is used in connection with the topic analysed in the paper and will therefore be used in this paper. The term "responsible consumption" will be used only if the text refers to the original wording of the 12th UN goal.

Theoretical background

Sustainable consumption represents meeting current needs while preserving the environment for future generations (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2022). Sustainable consumption encompasses various manifestations, from consuming ecological products, through water use and recycling, to buying fewer products to achieve a simpler and minimalist life (Milfont & Markowitz, 2016; Wang et al., 2021; Francis & Sarangi, 2022). Sustainable production is usually reflected in corporate social responsibility (Veselovská, 2025).

People are increasingly interested in sustainable development (Defra, 2002). However, this interest is not always reflected in consumer behaviour (Cornelissen et al., 2008). One of the reasons consumers do not behave sustainably is cost - higher prices for organic products, the costs in terms of time, effort and inconvenience (Follows & Jobber, 2000). The situation remains complex, also due to various unpredictable global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent security and economic crises (Veselovská & Hudáková, 2023).

Kotler (2020) claims that segments of consumers oriented towards sustainable consumption are forming in society and distinguishes five types of sustainable consumers:

1. Simple living advocates are consumers who deliberately consume less. They seek to reduce the number of possessions, especially those that they do not use and do not need. Some of these consumers do not need to own a car or a house, preferring to rent such property.
2. Downsizing activists are consumers who lack the time and energy for extensive shopping and subsequent consumption. They are concerned that the Earth cannot sustain unlimited consumption.
3. Climate activists look at consumption through the carbon footprint and water and air pollution. They care about nature and are truly concerned about the future of the planet.
4. Vegans and vegetarians, according to whom, eating fruit and vegetables is sustainable.
5. Conservative activists who disagree with getting rid of things by throwing them away, but prefer to reuse, repair, modify, or donate them to people in need.

According to Kotler (2020), consumers oriented towards sustainable consumption want to live a simpler life, buy fewer products, or buy local products from responsible entrepreneurs. In addition, they are willing to grow or produce their own products, reuse existing products, or exchange things they already own. All these consumer behaviours allow people to live a slower, simpler, and healthier life. Eating unprocessed foods from local sources and engaging in physical activity (walking or cycling instead of driving) are considered the basis of a healthy lifestyle (Cantero et al, 2023; Fatima et al., 2023; Nishimi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Interest in a healthy lifestyle is growing not only in the world (Bao et al., 2022; Kudubes et al., 2022), but also in Slovakia (TASR, 2020; Retail magazin, 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that incorporating sustainable consumption strategies into daily life as part of a healthy lifestyle can support sustainable consumption in the Slovak Republic.

The research focused on the interest in adopting responsible consumption among Generation Z consumers, as this cohort is generally considered the most environmentally conscious and responsible

group, strongly favouring sustainable practices and organic products (McKinsey, 2024; Pradeep & Pradeep, 2023; Wang, 2021).

Generation Z is made up of teenagers and young adults who are often described as individually ambitious, globally oriented, technologically savvy, and linguistically advanced (Kaplan, 2020). Information and communication technologies are deeply embedded in their daily lives, shaping their perspectives on education, work, and consumption. Generation Z represents the first truly global cohort for whom information technology is a fundamental part of their daily lives and deeply influences their values, expectations, and aspirations (Porubčinová et al., 2020; Manson et al., 2022; Dimock, 2019).

Generation Z is a consumption-driven cohort, primarily focused on industries such as food, fashion, entertainment, and technology, where they exhibit different consumer patterns and preferences compared to older generations (Kılıç et al., 2021). Members of Generation Z demonstrate an early understanding of financial matters and align their spending habits with their values. They demonstrate the ability to quickly adapt their spending behaviour in response to changing circumstances and preferences (Loring & Wang, 2022; Kotler et al., 2021).

Methodology

The aim of the primary empirical research was to determine the extent to which Slovak consumers of Generation Z perceive the issue of sustainable consumption and how this knowledge influences their purchasing behaviour. To achieve this goal, partial goals were set: to determine the extent to which consumers of Generation Z are interested in the state and development of the environment, and to what extent they are willing to adapt their consumption to support sustainable consumption.

A research question regarding Generation Z's attitudes towards climate and environmental issues was formulated (based on the theoretical premise that they are the most environmentally conscious consumers, it is assumed that the majority are interested in environmental issues, perceive threats, worry about the future and are willing to adapt their lives to support environmental protection) and subsequently four hypotheses were set:

H1: More than half of the respondents are interested in the state and development of the environment.

H2: More than half of the respondents perceive threats resulting from climate change.

H3: More than half of the respondents are worried about the future in terms of climate and the environment.

H4: More than half of the respondents are willing to adapt their own lives in favour of environmental protection.

To investigate the Generation Z consumers' willingness to apply sustainable consumption methods, a questionnaire survey was conducted. The questionnaire included 25 questions – 16 closed, 3 semi-open and 6 open. Of the total number of questions, 17 questions were dedicated to the research issue, 7 questions were identification questions and the last one allowed respondents to provide any comments on the research.

The compiled questionnaire was tested as part of a preliminary survey, which was conducted in January 2024. Participants from the Slovak Republic took part in the survey. The selected set of respondents consisted of a total of 113 respondents, of which 70 were women and 43 were men. Based on the preliminary survey, the questionnaire was refined and subsequently, primary research in a sample of 559 respondents between October and December 2024 was conducted. From these, respondents born between 1995 and 2010 (there were no respondents born in 2011 or 2012 in the sample) were selected, thus creating a sample of 357 Generation Z consumers.

The respondents who completed the questionnaire were subsequently analysed in terms of selected consumer behaviour factors: gender, interest in a healthy lifestyle, monthly income level, and the type of locality in which they live. More detailed information on the structure of the sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the sample according to selected factors of consumer behaviour

Factor of consumer behaviour		Number of respondents
Gender	Women	188
	Men	169
Interest in a healthy lifestyle	Interested in a healthy lifestyle	259
	Not interested in a healthy lifestyle	98
Monthly income level	Without income	86
	With income 400-1000 € per month	158
	With income 1001-1600 € per month	74
	With income more than 1600 € per month	37
Type of locality	Urban	191
	Rural	166

Women are generally considered to be more environmentally engaged; they pay greater attention to the composition and quality of products and are more interested in ensuring that goods are healthy and safe. From the perspective of consumer personality, the analysis was focused on examining the relationship between consumers' interest in a healthy lifestyle and their willingness to behave sustainably in their consumption. Some forms of sustainable consumption are regarded as part of a healthy lifestyle, and healthy products are often seen as ecological, and vice versa. Also, respondents in terms of their income level were examined. Since ecological product alternatives often have a higher price for the end consumer than conventional products, it can be assumed that income level will play a role in sustainable consumption. The last factor explored in more detail was the type of settlement in which consumers live, as urban areas offer different possibilities for sustainable consumption than rural areas.

The study examined whether the gender of consumers, as one of the basic factors of consumer behaviour, influences the perception of the issue of sustainable consumption. Therefore, a sample was created with respect to this factor to ensure representativeness. To verify the representativeness of the sample set, the chi-square test was used. The null hypothesis assumed that the sample set was representative. The alternative hypothesis assumed that the sample was not representative. Table 2 presents the data used to assess representativeness.

Table 2. Assessment of the representativeness of the sample by gender

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	OT18	
0 women	188	174.9	13.1	Chi-Square	1.915
1 men	169	182.1	-13.1	df	1
Total	357			Asymp. Sig.	0.166 p value

The chi-square test confirmed that the sample of respondents was representative with respect to the gender of the respondents, as the p-value is 0.166, which is more than the alpha significance level (0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

To process the respondents' answers, the analytical software IBM SPSS Statistics, Microsoft Excel and Survio were used. The questionnaire data were processed and analysed using mathematical and statistical methods. These included frequency distribution, measures of dependence between variables, methods for verifying representativeness, and others. Graphical methods, such as charts and tables created in Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, were also used to present the results clearly.

Results

The primary research aimed to examine the extent to which Slovak consumers of Generation Z perceive the issue of sustainable consumption, and how this knowledge influences their purchasing behaviour.

At the beginning of the research, the study focused on interest in environmental and related issues. The respondents answered four questions: whether they are interested in the state and development of the environment, whether they perceive threats arising from climate change, whether they feel concerns about their future from this perspective, and the extent to which they are willing to adapt their lives to support environmental protection. The results regarding these attitudes are presented in Chart 1.

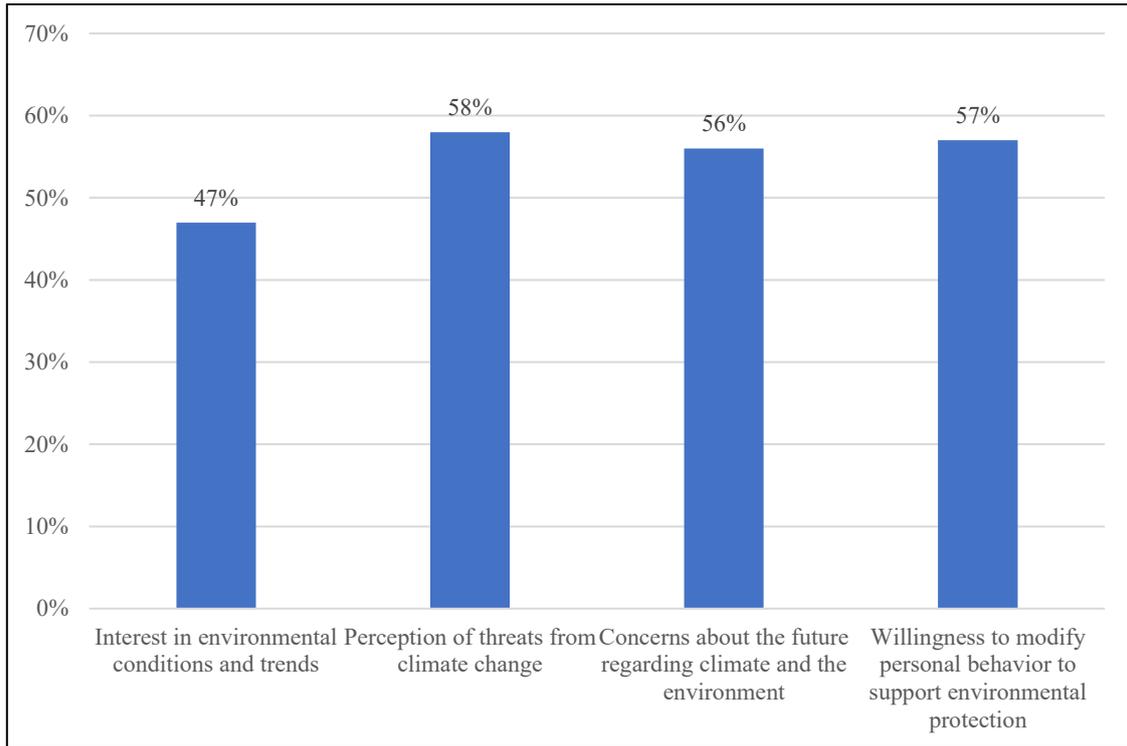


Figure 1. Attitudes of Generation Z towards Climate and Environmental Issues

Source: Own data.

As the data shows, although young consumers perceive threats and have concerns about the future regarding the environment and are willing to adapt their lives to protect it, their overall interest in the issue is low. This result is somewhat surprising, as Generation Z is considered the most environmentally conscious generation. It is assumed that this may be a consequence of the long-term lack of educational and information campaigns by the Slovak Republic, starting from the lowest levels of education.

The first hypothesis was tested based on a non-parametric, binomial test for two independent samples. The null hypothesis assumes that $H_0: \pi=0.5$ and the alternative hypothesis assumes that $H_1: \pi>0.5$ (and therefore, that the majority of Generation Z is interested in the state and development of the environment). Testing was carried out in SPSS Statistics. The condition of minimum frequency of responses $n>9/\pi(1-\pi)$ was met.

As shown in Table 3, only 47% of respondents were interested in the state and development of the environment. The p-value for the one-sided test is at the level of 0.171 ($0.341/2$), which is more than the specified significance level α (0.05). For this reason, the null hypothesis was not rejected; therefore, it cannot be concluded that the majority of Generation Z is interested in the environmental conditions and development.

Table 3. Proportion of Generation Z respondents interested in the state and development of the environment and results for H1 testing

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
H1	Group 1	188	0.53	0.50	0.341
	Group 2	169	0.47		
	Total	357	1.00		

This result suggests that while a considerable portion of Generation Z shows some awareness of environmental topics, overall engagement is not as strong as might be expected based on characteristics of Generation Z. It may indicate that environmental concerns are not yet a primary driver of consumer behaviour for this generation, highlighting potential areas for targeted educational or marketing interventions.

In contrast, the analysis of the second hypothesis (Table 4) shows a one-sided p-value of 0.001, below the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative. This confirms that a majority of Generation Z perceives threats arising from climate change.

Table 4. Proportion of Generation Z respondents perceiving threats resulting from climate change and results for H2 testing

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
H2	Group 1	149	0.42	0.50	0.002
	Group 2	208	0.58		
	Total	357	1.00		

This finding demonstrates that while general environmental interest may be moderate, Generation Z is clearly aware of specific global challenges such as climate change. Such awareness may influence certain consumption decisions, particularly those related to sustainable products, even if overall environmental engagement remains variable.

The non-parametric binomial test was also applied for the third hypothesis. The null hypothesis assumes $H_0: \pi = 0.5$, while the alternative is $H_1: \pi > 0.5$. The minimum sample size condition was satisfied ($n > 9/\pi(1-\pi)$). The one-sided p-value is 0.013, below the significance level of 0.05, allowing rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative. This indicates that a majority of Generation Z is concerned about the future in terms of climate and environmental issues, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Proportion of Generation Z respondents worried about the future in terms of climate and the environment and results for H3 testing

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
H3	Group 1	200	0.56	0.50	0.026
	Group 2	157	0.44		
	Total	357	1.00		

This result highlights that although general environmental interest may vary within this generation, there is a clear concern regarding climate change and environmental sustainability. Such concern may serve as a key driver for sustainable consumption behaviour and suggests that initiatives aimed at promoting eco-friendly products and practices could find a receptive audience among young consumers. Compared with the previous hypotheses, it is evident that Generation Z differentiates between general environmental interest and concern about specific global issues, such as climate change, which appears to elicit stronger engagement.

In previous tests, it was found that the majority of Generation Z perceives threats arising from climate change and is worried about the future in terms of climate and the environment. The study examined whether this generation is willing to act, consequently, influence their behaviour. Using binomial tests, the results indicate that 57% of Generation Z is willing to adapt their lives to support environmental protection (the p-value for the one-sided test is at the level of 0.0075, confirming the alternative hypothesis $H_1: \pi > 0.5$). Table 6 presents the statistical testing results for Hypothesis 4.

Table 6. Proportion of Generation Z respondents willing to adapt their lifestyles for environmental protection and results for H4 testing

	Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
H4	Group 1	202	0.57	0.50	0.015
	Group 2	155	0.43		
	Total	357	1.00		

This finding indicates that awareness and concern about environmental issues among Generation Z are accompanied by a tangible willingness to engage in pro-environmental behaviour. Such willingness suggests that young consumers are not only aware of environmental problems but are also prepared to make personal changes to mitigate these issues. This insight has practical implications for policymakers and marketers, highlighting the potential for interventions and campaigns aimed at promoting sustainable practices that resonate with the values and motivations of this generation. Moreover, the result aligns with the observed pattern in H3, where concern about climate change was strong, suggesting that specific environmental threats are more likely to trigger behavioural intentions than general environmental interest.

Although Generation Z is considered the most environmentally oriented, the results of primary research indicated that only half of Slovak young consumers show interest in this issue, perceive threats from climate change, and are willing to adapt their lives to protect the environment. This relatively low level of interest may be attributed to the lack of effective information and educational campaigns by the state.

Discussion

Based on secondary data research, it was identified that Slovakia lacked an information, education, and communication campaign aimed at all stakeholders. This was also noted as a shortcoming by the National Audit Office (Mészárosová Kleinová et al., 2022). Given that the research focused on Generation Z, the campaign proposals are aimed at young people.

Marketing communication experts agree on several key elements for a good sustainability campaign (Lampert, 2025; Cross, 2024). The most important thing is to adapt the communication of the values of sustainable development and sustainable consumption to the target audience. Given that the subject of our research was Generation Z, the proposals for the implementation of the campaign will also be targeted at young people.

Based on the theoretical definition of Generation Z, these are young people who are technologically savvy, familiar with information and communication technologies, and regularly monitor social networks. As shown by research conducted by the Go4Insight agency from 2024, up to 94% of Slovak young people under 26 use social networks daily (Danitová, 2024). Women and people from rural areas use them more frequently than men or urban residents, although the differences are not large. The most popular social network is Facebook, followed by YouTube, Instagram and TikTok (TASR, 2024).

Young people use social networks, in addition to a tool for communication and entertainment, as a space for work, professional and personal development. Social networks are becoming a source of information and are gradually replacing or making news available, although they are not primarily intended for this purpose. Based on the results of research into the credibility of social networks in three areas: as a source of news, in the context of shopping and in the protection of personal data, it can be concluded that across all age groups in Slovakia, YouTube is the most trusted social network. Instagram

came in second place, then Facebook and TikTok, which proved to be the least trusted social network, even among young people. The credibility research methodology has shown that YouTube is the most trusted social network as a source of information about world events for Generation Z. However, none of the studied social networks scored above 60 out of 100 in any of the three areas (Hrnčárová, 2025).

As the results of the primary research show, 41% of respondents cited environmental degradation and concerns about the future as the reason for their increased interest in protecting the environment in the future. Maturity, awareness and knowledge were cited by 35% of respondents, and preserving the environment for children and future generations was cited by 24%. Therefore, it is recommended that the depiction of the expected state of the environment in the future, which current behaviour leaves for future generations, become the main motif of the campaign.

As shown by the research on the 12 best environmental campaigns of 2024, the most effective form of communication is storytelling (Greenhouse, 2025). Storytelling is not only recommended as a form of conveying information, but also as a form of education, including for adults (Maľa, 2019). Therefore, it is suggested that the main theme – “In what state will we leave the environment for future generations” – should be communicated within the campaign through storytelling. Stories of people affected by climate change, high temperatures, droughts, climate-induced migration due to rising sea levels, and extinction of endangered species (e.g., polar bears due to melting glaciers) are drastic, but if presented appropriately, they can be effective. Emotions play a crucial role in communication and can enhance the effectiveness of a campaign.

Conclusion

Responsible consumption and production is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations. Responsible consumption covers various areas and can be put into practice through various consumer behaviour strategies. Given the current state of the environment and alarming information about global warming, this is a current and relevant issue, and sustainable consumption and production are the essential ways to achieve sustainable development at all levels.

Based on primary research, it was revealed that young people of Generation Z in Slovakia do not perceive environmental and sustainable development issues as strongly as suggested by their theoretical definition. Only half of the respondents expressed interest in these issues, and only half are willing to adjust their behaviour in favour of achieving sustainable development. This can be attributed to the lack of an information and communication campaign, which was identified through the examination of secondary sources. Therefore, a framework for an information and communication campaign was proposed based on how Generation Z responds to marketing campaigns. The proposed campaign is based on disseminating information through storytelling via social networks.

A limitation of this study is that it focused exclusively on Generation Z, which may not fully represent the behaviour and preferences of other age groups. Differences in consumer behaviour across generations could lead to different patterns, which this study does not capture.

Based on this limitation, future research could extend the investigation to include other generational cohorts. This would allow for a better understanding of how consumer behaviour evolves over time, as individuals age and progress through different stages of the life cycle.

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