

# Understanding Indian Gen Z Consumer Behavior towards Sustainability and Luxury in Fashion Choices

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**Abstract:** The integration of sustainability into luxury fashion is transforming the industry, driven by increasing consumer awareness, environmental concerns, and evolving societal values. This study explores the intersection of sustainability and luxury, focusing on consumer perceptions, preferences, and the challenges faced by luxury brands in adopting sustainable practices. Based on survey data, findings reveal that consumers prioritize eco-friendly production, ethical sourcing, and transparency in supply chains, with 89% of respondents agreeing that sustainability is essential for the future of luxury fashion. Key challenges for brands include the high cost of sustainable materials, maintaining exclusivity, and overcoming established business models. The study also highlights the unique potential of the Indian luxury market, where growing consumer awareness and homegrown brands contribute to sustainability efforts. Consumers increasingly align luxury with timeless quality, durability, and ethical practices, and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable luxury products. The research concludes that luxury brands must innovate and integrate sustainability into their core strategies to maintain relevance and credibility. By leading the shift toward sustainability, the luxury fashion can redefine its value proposition and influence the broader fashion industry, fostering a more sustainable and ethical future.

**Keywords:** sustainability, Gen Z, luxury fashion, consumer behavior, ethical sourcing, brand innovation

## Introduction

This paper explores the growing influence of Generation Z consumers on the luxury fashion industry, particularly their demand for sustainability. It discusses the rise of sustainable practices within the luxury sector and the shifting consumption patterns of Generation Z. Sustainability in design has always been a pivotal point in the luxury fashion products. With the emergence of Generation Z, the landscape is rapidly transforming. This consumer group prioritizes ethical practices and sustainability, making these factors essential for luxury brands seeking to maintain relevance and grow. Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, grew up in the digital age. Their passion for environmental protection, individuality, and freedom is reshaping the luxury market with TBL approach, which emphasizes concern for people, planet, and profit. Reports by Bain & Company (2020) highlight that this demographic significantly influences brands' adoption of sustainable practices. Notable leaders in the industry, such as Henri Pinault of Kering Group, emphasize integrating luxury and sustainability. Online platforms have become critical sales channels, with brands like Versace and Dior launching e-commerce sites in recent years. Initiatives such as Kering Group's *Fashion Industry Environmental Protection Agreement* further underline the commitment to sustainability. Luxury brands now prioritize sustainability in design of their products, sourcing of raw materials, manufacturing, and marketing, leveraging the principles of the 6R framework: reducing resource consumption, reusing parts, recycling materials, adopting renewable inputs, reprocessing components, and redesigning products for efficiency. For example, Burberry has pledged to eliminate polyethylene in packaging and replace plastic-based materials with biodegradable alternatives by 2025.

Sustainability is no longer optional—it is a driving force behind innovation in the luxury industry. The concept of “green design” has evolved since the 1980s, emphasizing fairness, ecological harmony, and efficient resource use. This trend aligns with the evolving priorities of Gen Z, who view luxury through the lens of ethics and environmental responsibility. A survey by R.I.S.E. Sustainable Fashion Lab found that 84% of Gen Z consumers are highly aware of environmental sustainability, and 90% expect transparency about the environmental impact of production processes. Furthermore, 79% would boycott brands failing to meet sustainable standards, shows a Significant shift in Gen Z’s luxury purchasing decisions. Contrary to traditional perceptions of luxury as excessive and wasteful, sustainability and luxury share common ground in exclusivity and value. By integrating sustainable practices, luxury brands can differentiate themselves, build consumer loyalty, and foster meaningful relationships. Gen Z’s deep integration with social media amplifies their influence on public opinion and industry practices. Platforms like Vestiaire Collective and The RealReal have grown due to Gen Z’s preference for sustainability and resale culture. Initiatives like eBay’s "Imperfects" campaign exemplify creative approaches to reducing waste while maintaining brand prestige. The rise of Gen Z’s influence raises questions about whether sustainability in luxury is a fleeting trend or a lasting shift. Social media’s ability to expose greenwashing has made authenticity crucial. Brands must demonstrate tangible efforts to align with sustainability goals, as actions increasingly outweigh words in the eyes of conscious consumers. As Generation Z emerges as the largest consumer group, retailers and brands face increasing pressure to accelerate sustainability efforts. Beyond checking the "sustainability box," luxury brands must now integrate meaningful and measurable practices into their operations to meet the expectations of this ethically conscious generation. Sustainability has become a major driver of innovation in the luxury industry, emphasizing resource-efficient products in response to climate change. This dual focus benefits both the environment and the brand. Luxury brands, with their higher profit margins and extensive resources, are uniquely positioned to pioneer sustainable practices. By leveraging innovative materials, adopting circular economy principles, and collaborating with tech start-ups, luxury brands are redefining their production processes while addressing social considerations such as ethical labor practices. Luxury and sustainability, though seemingly at odds, share underlying principles: quality, exclusivity, and responsibility. While luxury brands emphasize exceptional craftsmanship and ethical practices, sustainable brands prioritize environmental stewardship and transparency. Together, these values form the foundation for a more responsible and conscious approach to luxury, where both realms converge to create a new standard of excellence. Sustainability is reshaping the luxury fashion sector, traditionally associated with exclusivity, premium pricing, and high-quality materials. Today’s consumers, particularly Gen Z and millennials, are driving this transformation by aligning their purchasing decisions with their values. This shift encompasses more than eco-friendly products—it signals a move towards ethical production, fair labor practices, and transparent supply chains. Luxury brands are now exploring alternatives to resource-intensive materials, such as bio-based and recycled options, while adopting technologies like blockchain to enhance traceability and foster trust.

The luxury sector faces a dual challenge: maintaining exclusivity and craftsmanship while addressing the demand for sustainability. Traditional hallmarks of luxury, such as exotic skins, premium leathers, and precious metals, have raised environmental and ethical concerns. However, luxury brands are adopting innovative solutions, including biodegradable materials, renewable resources, and waste reduction strategies. Transparency is becoming a critical consumer demand, prompting brands to rethink their supply chains and embrace technology to ensure accountability. While the global luxury market has experienced rapid growth, India presents a unique and emerging landscape for sustainable luxury. With a growing middle class and an increasing number of ultra-high-net-worth individuals

(UHNWIs), the Indian market offers significant opportunities for luxury brands. Indian luxury brands, particularly in fashion and grooming, are increasingly adopting sustainable practices in their production processes, packaging, and brand strategies.

Gen Z represents a significant portion of the luxury market, demanding ethical and environmentally responsible practices. These consumers are reshaping the definition of luxury, prioritizing sustainability alongside traditional markers of quality and exclusivity. Luxury brands, as global influencers, carry a responsibility to adopt sustainable practices and inspire other sectors to follow suit.

## **Literature review**

**Sustainable Luxury Fashion:** The concept of sustainable luxury fashion has gained significant prominence, driven by growing consumer awareness, environmental concerns, and evolving societal expectations. Historically, luxury fashion has been synonymous with exclusivity, extravagance, and high-quality craftsmanship. These attributes were often seen as incompatible with sustainability, which emphasizes moderation, ethical production, and environmental stewardship (Veblen, 1899; Janssen et al., 2013). However, recent research has shown that these two seemingly divergent ideals can coexist, creating a new paradigm in the luxury fashion industry and reshaping consumer perceptions. The global luxury market has experienced exponential growth, with sales surpassing \$1 trillion in 2014 and the number of consumers tripling over the past two decades (D'Arpizio, 2014). Asia, particularly countries like China, India, and the Middle East, has played a pivotal role in this expansion (Kim & Ko, 2012; Ko et al., 2019). India stands out as a key emerging market, with the luxury sector projected to reach \$8.5 billion by 2023. This growth is fuelled by an expanding middle class, increasing entrepreneurship, and rapid urbanization (ASSOMULL, 2022). With robust domestic demand, advancements in digital infrastructure, and a 7% annual economic growth rate, India represents a lucrative market for luxury brands, especially those embracing sustainability to cater to discerning consumers.

**Consumer Behaviour and Sustainability Trends:** Millennials and Gen Z, comprising 60% of the luxury market, are driving demand for sustainable practices in luxury fashion (McKinsey & Company, 2020). These cohorts prioritize ethical sourcing, environmental accountability, and transparency, with many willing to pay a 15–20% premium for sustainable and ethically produced goods (Akash Seth, 2022). Over the last three years, 70% of high-end clothing brands have eliminated fur, reflecting a consumer-driven shift toward eco-conscious practices. Post-pandemic, consumer spending on luxury has diversified, encompassing experiences like destination weddings, fine dining, and real estate. Indian millennials, in particular, have embraced luxury rentals and sharing economies, aligning with values of social projection and sustainability (Jain & Mishra, 2020).

**Sustainability & Luxury Fashion:** Luxury fashion faces significant challenges in adopting sustainability practices: **Resource-Intensive Materials:** The use of exotic leathers and metals raises ethical and environmental concerns (Kapferer, 2015). **Production Costs:** Transitioning to sustainable materials and methods increases costs, posing risks to profit margins (Bain & Company, 2020). **Greenwashing:** Misleading sustainability claims can erode consumer trust. Transparent and authentic practices are essential to mitigate skepticism (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The fashion industry is a significant contributor to global pollution, accounting for 10% of carbon emissions and 85% of textiles ending up in landfills annually (UNECE, 2018). The rise of "slow fashion," which emphasizes durability, ethical labor, and waste reduction, contrasts sharply with the environmental toll of fast fashion (Cervellon & Shammass, 2013). Sustainability and craftsmanship share foundational values, including quality, longevity, and ethical production. Sustainable luxury fashion emphasizes eco-friendly materials and slow production processes, aligning seamlessly with traditional luxury principles (Fletcher, 2014). Leading brands like Hermès and Louis Vuitton are adopting circular economy practices and responsible sourcing to appeal to eco-conscious

consumers while preserving their brand essence (Giroto et al., 2019). Sustainability has emerged as a marker of exclusivity. Eco-conscious practices enhance brand desirability, positioning sustainability as a status symbol among forward-thinking consumers (Liu et al., 2021). Collaborations with start-ups and innovations in material science allow luxury brands to maintain exclusivity while aligning with sustainability values (Kim et al., 2012).

**Sustainability Awareness and Purchasing Behavior:** Gen Z exhibits heightened awareness of sustainability issues, valuing attributes such as eco-friendly materials and cruelty-free production processes (Kovacs, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019). Marketing campaigns emphasizing ethical practices significantly influence their purchase decisions (Arora & Manchanda, 2022). However, a value-action gap persists, where cost-conscious behavior and economic constraints often lead to choices favoring affordable fast fashion over sustainable options (Dragolea et al., 2023). Gen Z's digital-first approach amplifies the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer attitudes (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). Hybrid advertising formats and virtual fashion events during the pandemic have further deepened their engagement with brands promoting sustainability (Cristófol-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Despite their stated preferences, the economic realities of limited disposable income often lead to conflicting behaviors. Collaborative consumption models like rentals and peer-to-peer exchanges resonate with Gen Z's values, though adoption varies across regions and demographics (McCoy et al., 2021). To bridge this value-action gap, luxury brands must leverage storytelling, cost-effective production strategies, and targeted marketing campaigns. Aligning Gen Z's sustainability aspirations with practical affordability can foster a deeper connection between brands and consumers.

### **Objective**

- To analyze Gen Z consumer behaviour towards sustainable luxury fashion and evaluate the factors influencing their purchasing decisions.
- To examine the integration of sustainability in the luxury fashion.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employs a mixed-methods framework to explore the integration of sustainability within the luxury fashion sector. By utilizing both primary and secondary data, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions, industry practices, and the challenges luxury brands face in adopting sustainable practices. The study integrates statistical methods to identify key underlying dimensions influencing consumer behaviour toward sustainable luxury.

### **Data Collection**

**Primary Data:** Primary data was collected via a structured survey administered to 200 Gen Z participants selected through convenience sampling. Respondents were screened to ensure prior experience with luxury item purchases, ensuring relevance to the study's objectives.

**Secondary Data:** Secondary data was derived from academic literature, industry reports, and brand case studies. Sources included peer-reviewed journals, market analyses, and sustainability reports from leading luxury brands.

### **Discussion & Analysis**

As sustainability becomes a defining expectation among consumers, luxury brands are increasingly integrating eco-conscious practices into their operations. These initiatives not only address environmental and social challenges but also align with the timeless values of quality, craftsmanship, and exclusivity that define luxury. From adopting innovative materials and reducing carbon footprints to supporting ethical labor practices and promoting circular economies,

luxury brands like Gucci, Stella McCartney, Hermès, and Louis Vuitton are setting new benchmarks for sustainable excellence. This shift reflects a commitment to redefining luxury in a way that resonates with modern values while maintaining its core essence.

Table 1. Sustainability Initiatives of Luxury Brands

Brand	Key Initiatives
Kering (formerly PPR)	Partnerships: Collaborated with the Centre for Sustainable Fashion for education and internships. Sustainable Leather: Sourced 100% of leather from verified sources. Chemical Management: Phased out hazardous chemicals by 2020.
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EDUN	African Sourcing: Produces 95% of collections in Africa. Fair Trade Materials: Uses organic and biodegradable materials. Community Projects: Partnered with CCIU to support displaced farmers.
Maiyet	Artisanal Collaborations: Works with artisans in India, Peru, and Kenya. Jewellery Innovation: Incorporates rough-cut diamonds into designs. Global Impact: Collaborates with Nest to develop sustainable businesses.
Louis Vuitton	Eco-Certifications: 96% of leather certified by the Leather Working Group. Bioclimatic Design: Built France's first bioclimatic building. Recyclable Packaging: 100% recyclable, with 50% made from recovered materials.
Dior	Mentorship Programs: Partners with UNESCO on Women@Dior. Environmental Objectives: Targets a 50% reduction in energy emissions by 2030. Recycling Innovation: Creates items from ocean waste with Parley for the Oceans.
Prada Group	Re-Nylon Project: Converts recycled nylon into luxury items. Renewable Energy: Sources 65% of electricity from renewable sources. Inclusive Leadership: First luxury brand to join The Valuable 500 for disability inclusion.
Gucci	Waste Reduction: Introduced Gucci Scrap-less to reduce leather waste. Sustainable Collections: Uses recycled materials in Gucci Off the Grid. Carbon Neutral: Achieved carbon neutrality across operations in 2021.
Stella McCartney	Animal-Free Materials: Focuses on mycelium leather and biodegradable rubber. Circular Innovation: Launched a fully regenerated nylon parka. Advocacy: Engages in climate policy for sustainable fashion.
Burberry	Climate Goals: Aims for climate positivity by 2040. Recycled Materials: Introduced ReBurberry Edit using castor oil-based fabrics. Circular Economy: Collaborates with Vestiaire Collective for pre-loved luxury.
Chanel	Emission Reductions: Plans to cut operational carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. Eco-Friendly Materials: Partners with Sulapac for biodegradable packaging. Digital Sustainability: Reduced website carbon emissions by 16%.
Hermès	Circular Craftsmanship: Repairs over 200,000 products annually. Innovative Alternatives: Uses mycelium-based leather from MycoWorks. Local Production: Manufactures 75% of products in France.
Yves Saint Laurent (YSL)	Fur-Free Policy: Eliminated fur in 2021 and aims for 100% traceable raw materials by 2025. Waste Reduction: Reuses leather scraps, saving 200 tons annually. Renewable Energy: Targets 100% renewable energy by 2025.
Vivienne Westwood	Sustainable Collections: Over 90% of materials are organic, recycled, or regenerative. Animal Welfare: Sources responsibly with high animal welfare standards. Renewable Energy: Transitioning to 100% renewable by 2024.

Source: Secondary Data & Coste-Manière et al., 2016

## Demographics

Primary data was collected via a structured survey administered to 200 Gen Z participants selected through convenience sampling

Table 2. On the basis of demographics

Area	Question	Answers and analysis	%
Demographics	Age of the respondents	18-23 (majority).	86.7%
		23-27	13.3%
	Gender of respondents	Male	51.50%
		Female	48.50%
	Occupation of respondents	Students	63.4%
		Working professionals	23.80%
		Entrepreneurs	5.90%
		Homemakers	6.9%
	Income levels of respondents (Family Income)	Below 20 LPA	62.60%
		20- 30 LPA	17.20%
		30-40 LPA	4%
		More than 40 LPA	16.20%

*Source: Created by authors with data collected*

The survey results highlight key insights into consumer preferences and perceptions regarding luxury brands and sustainability. Among the luxury items owned by respondents, luxury clothing emerged as the most common category (74.3%), followed by handbags or wallets (56.5%) and accessories (53.5%). Perfumes or beauty products are moderately popular (29%), while luxury shoes and bikes are owned by only 1% of respondents each. Regarding brand ownership, globally recognized names like Gucci (6%) and Tommy Hilfiger (6%) were the most frequently mentioned, alongside other premium labels such as Dior (5%), Coach (4%), and a wide array of others (79%). Notably, 47.5% of respondents expressed a willingness to pay a premium for luxury brands adopting sustainable practices, with 43.6% considering the possibility and only 8.9% outright declining. When asked about their perception of luxury brands incorporating sustainability, 64% had a positive view, 27.7% were neutral, and 5% were negative, suggesting that while sustainability enhances brand image for most, it must be integrated carefully to maintain exclusivity. Furthermore, 61.4% of respondents indicated that knowing about a luxury brand's sustainable practices would influence their purchasing decisions, emphasizing the growing importance of sustainability as a key factor in consumer choices. The survey findings reveal important consumer perceptions and behaviors regarding luxury fashion brands. High quality (81.2%) and exclusivity (41.6%) are the most frequently associated attributes with luxury fashion, followed by craftsmanship (38%) and prestige (28.7%). Innovation (24%) and value for money (36%) are moderately valued, while sustainability (1%) is still a minor consideration, indicating room for growth in aligning sustainability with luxury. Regarding purchasing frequency, 47% of respondents purchase luxury items occasionally, 41% rarely, 7% frequently, and 6% never, suggesting that luxury fashion is primarily viewed as an occasional indulgence for special occasions. On the topic of sustainability, 28% of respondents strongly agree and 46% agree that luxury brands can maintain their prestige and exclusivity while being sustainable, though 24% remain neutral, reflecting some skepticism. Transparency in sourcing and manufacturing processes is a significant priority, with 65% considering it very important and 35% somewhat important, underscoring a strong consumer demand for ethical and transparent practices in the luxury fashion industry. The survey results provide insights into consumer

perceptions, preferences, and challenges related to sustainability in luxury fashion. Familiarity with the concept of sustainability in fashion is growing, with 37.6% of respondents being very familiar and 53.5% somewhat familiar. Eco-friendly production processes (73.7%), ethical sourcing (53.5%), and recycling/upcycling (52.5%) are seen as the most relevant elements of sustainability in luxury fashion, followed by reducing carbon footprint (50.5%) and fair labor practices (44.6%). Challenges for luxury brands in adopting sustainability include the high cost of sustainable materials (59.4%), maintaining exclusivity with mass adoption (51.5%), and perceived lack of consumer demand (47.5%). Consumers expect luxury brands to prioritize eco-friendly manufacturing processes (73.3%), use recycled materials (53.5%), and invest in carbon offset initiatives (52.5%). A majority (72.7%) support brands offering sustainability certifications like Fair Trade or Eco-Cert. Regarding feasibility, 36.7% believe it is very realistic for luxury brands to fully integrate sustainability into their business models, while 40.8% find it somewhat realistic. A significant portion (77.8%) agrees that luxury brands' shift toward sustainability can influence the broader fashion industry. Consumers also see themselves as key players, with 57.6% believing they play a major role in pushing brands toward sustainability. Many have made personal changes to embrace sustainable fashion (39.2%) or are planning to do so (40.2%). The main factors that would make consumers choose a sustainable luxury brand over a non-sustainable one include environmental impact, ethical practices, quality, and brand storytelling, reflecting a strong alignment between consumer values and the sustainability narrative. The survey highlights the increasing importance of sustainability in the future of luxury fashion brands, with 50.5% of respondents strongly agreeing and 38.6% agreeing that sustainable practices are essential for the long-term success and credibility of luxury brands. None of the respondents disagreed, reflecting widespread acknowledgment of sustainability's role in shaping the industry's future. Consumers are adopting various strategies to balance luxury fashion consumption with sustainable practices, such as prioritizing quality and timeless pieces, supporting sustainable brands, second-hand shopping, recycling, reducing fast fashion consumption, minimizing waste, and making informed decisions. These findings indicate that consumers are increasingly conscious of their environmental impact and value brands that align with sustainable and ethical practices. Luxury brands that integrate these principles into their business models are likely to gain a competitive advantage and foster stronger customer loyalty.

## Findings

1. **Consumer Awareness and Preference for Sustainability:** A significant majority of respondents recognize the importance of sustainability in luxury fashion. Over 89% (50.5% strongly agree, 38.6% agree) believe sustainable practices are essential for the future success of luxury brands.
2. **Familiarity with sustainability is high,** with 91.1% being at least somewhat familiar with the concept, suggesting growing awareness and interest in environmentally conscious practices.
3. **Key Attributes Associated with Luxury Fashion:** Consumers primarily associate luxury fashion with high quality (81.2%) and exclusivity (41.6%), but sustainability (1%) remains a minor consideration compared to traditional attributes. However, the shift toward eco-conscious values is evident in consumer behaviour and preferences. **Relevance of Sustainability in Luxury Fashion** Eco-friendly production processes (73.7%) and ethical sourcing of materials (53.5%) are the most valued elements of sustainability, followed by recycling/upcycling activities (52.5%) and reducing carbon footprints (50.5%).
4. **Challenges for Luxury Brands:** The high cost of sustainable materials (59.4%) and difficulty maintaining exclusivity with mass adoption of sustainability (51.5%) are seen as major hurdles. Additionally, 47.5% believe a lack of consumer demand poses challenges, despite the growing trend toward sustainability.

5. Consumer Behaviour and Purchasing Decisions: A majority of consumers (61.4%) would consider a luxury brand's sustainable practices in their purchasing decisions, while 72.7% support brands offering certifications such as Fair Trade and Eco-Cert, demonstrating a strong preference for transparency and accountability.
6. Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage: Consumers are actively adopting sustainable practices in their lives, such as prioritizing quality and timeless pieces, second-hand shopping, and reducing fast fashion consumption. These behaviors highlight an alignment with sustainable luxury and a growing demand for brands to integrate these values.
7. Impact of Sustainability on Industry Leadership: Over 77.8% of respondents believe that luxury brands' shift toward sustainability can influence the broader fashion industry, underscoring their role as trendsetters and leaders in ethical and environmental practices.

## Conclusion

The findings underscore the growing importance of sustainability in the luxury fashion industry. Consumers increasingly recognize the necessity of sustainable practices for the long-term success and credibility of luxury brands, with many willing to pay a premium for eco-conscious products. Attributes like eco-friendly production, ethical sourcing, and transparency in supply chains are becoming critical factors influencing purchasing decisions. However, luxury brands face challenges, including the high cost of sustainable materials and concerns about maintaining exclusivity. Overcoming these hurdles requires innovative approaches, such as leveraging certifications, adopting circular economy models, and enhancing transparency. As consumers prioritize quality, durability, and ethical practices, sustainability has emerged as a key competitive advantage. Luxury brands that integrate these values into their core business models are poised to lead not only the luxury segment but also influence the broader fashion industry, redefining what it means to be "luxurious" in a modern, eco-conscious world. The convergence of Generation Z's values with luxury fashion's sustainability efforts marks a pivotal moment for the industry. By embracing sustainable practices, luxury brands can not only cater to the ethical demands of Gen Z but also secure their position in an evolving market. This integration of sustainability into luxury design is essential for creating a better tomorrow.

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