

Generation Z and Greenwashing: A Comprehensive Study of the Marketing Phenomenon and Its Implications on Boston College's Undergraduate Clothing Consumption Habits

Diana Maria Bunge



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**Generation Z and Greenwashing:
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Diana Maria Bunge

Advisor: Richard Spinello, Ph.D.

This thesis studies the effects of greenwashing in the fashion industry on the Generation

Z cohort. It aims to understand the behaviors, motivations, attitudes, and processes behind their clothing shopping habits, including external and internal factors. It seeks to broaden the discussion around greenwashing in the 21st century, especially in the current age where firms are being evaluated on their Environmental, Social, and Governance practices. Therefore, it includes an extensive research background, including a brief history of greenwashing as a marketing tactic, the fashion industry, a study of clothing supply chains, and finally background information on Generation Z and their generational characteristics. This, as well as the small research study conducted at Boston College, all inform the conclusions of this study.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Business, Environment, Consumption, Generation Z, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Green Marketing, Environmental Social Governance (ESG).

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INTRODUCTION

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This thesis project aims to understand how Generation Z is responding to external (e.g. marketing schemes, peer pressure, lack of regulation/oversight) and internal (value systems) pressures related to sustainable or conscious fashion and how these do or do not guide their shopping habits. It seeks to further the study of greenwashing, highlighting its effects on Generation Z, their shopping habits, values, and so forth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept 1: History of Greenwashing in Marketing and Its Ethical

Implications

1.1 What is greenwashing?

1.1.1 For this study, I will be drawing from Delmas and Burbano's definition of greenwashing as, **“the intersection of two firm behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance”** (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

1.1.2 In the context of fashion, greenwashing goes beyond environmental performance to encompass a clothing brand's entire value chain.

1.1.3 Here, a value chain may be defined as, “A business model that describes the full range of activities needed to create a product or service. For companies that produce goods, a value chain comprises the steps that involve bringing a product from conception to distribution, and everything in between—such as procuring raw materials, manufacturing functions, and marketing activities.” This includes its Tier I, II, and III suppliers, ensuring that all parts of the brand's process are accounted for (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

1.1.4 Therefore, for this study, **greenwashing is when a clothing brand strategically adopts language in its marketing or outreach strategy to communicate that some or all facets of the brand's value chain is “ethical” “transparent” and/or “sustainable” to humans, the environment, and/or animals for the purpose of attracting more investors, consumers, and/or revenue. These claims may be wholly untrue, half true, or somewhat true,**

but due to a lack of accountability, framework, or international/national regulatory regime, the burden [to decipher these claims] unduly falls upon consumers at present (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

1.2 What are the ethical issues at play in greenwashing? 1.2.1 For the purpose of

this study, I draw on assertions established via *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* that assign personhood to corporations. Here, it can be understood that firms make moral decisions and have moral agency like individuals do. **By engaging in greenwashing, they interfere with an individual's moral aspirations to consume according to their values.** 1.2.2

Since the rise of neoliberalism, the United States has seen a growth of eco and "green" labels (e.g., labels indicating energy efficiency and organic certification standards). Voluntary tools such as these are thought to put pressure on highly polluting industries to reduce their contribution to environmental degradation and reward environmentally friendly companies. **Ecologically minded citizens, the reasoning goes, can vote with their dollars to encourage new social and economic arrangements focused on quality of life and environmental improvement** (MacKendrick, 2018).

1.2.3 Yet, given the spotty and often lax regulation of these labels, consumers have been left to puzzle out for themselves what foods, consumer products, and clothing are actually what they say they are. For example, when it comes to chemicals, consumers must use their own standards of precaution by consulting product labels or ingredient lists to determine if products contain unwanted

chemicals or by looking for a seal of approval from the USDA organic program or the Non-GMO Project (MacKendrick, 2018).

1.2.4 This framework **creates undue burden on consumers** (e.g. need access

to information, time, etc.) and **allows them to be exposed to greenwashing marketing tactics that violate their consumer rights** that go beyond the short-term.

1.2.5 Here, **a right can be understood as a moral power to do or have something** (*Consumer Rights*, 2019). Rights provide a way of conceiving justice from the viewpoint of the “other” to whom something is owed and who would be injured in some way if they were denied something. These claim rights, therefore, almost always **imply correlative duties on the part of individuals**. Thus, rights are normative structures that usually require **legal enforcement** to make them effective.

1.2.6 In this way, fraudulent green claims violate the **Right of the Consumer** outlined by President John F. Kennedy, which states that every person has four basic consumer rights—**the right to be accurately informed, the right to choose, the right to safety, and the right to be heard** (*Consumer Rights*, 2019).

1.2.7 In general, consumer rights and consumer protection law provides a way for **individuals to fight back against abusive business practices (e.g. FTC Act, Dodd-Frank Act)**. These laws are designed to hold sellers of goods and services accountable **when they seek to profit by taking advantage of a consumer's lack of information or bargaining power** (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013).

1.2.8 Currently, the United States **Federal Trade Commission regulates “Truth in Advertising.”** When consumers see or hear an advertisement, whether it’s on the Internet, radio or television, or anywhere else, federal law says that **ad must**

be truthful, not misleading, and, when appropriate, backed by scientific evidence (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013).

1.2.9 The FTC enforces these truth-in-advertising laws, and it applies the same standards no matter where an ad appears – in newspapers and magazines, online, in the mail, or on billboards or buses (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013). 1.2.10 While the **law** can act as an adequate hindrance to greenwashing, oftentimes, it is **far too reactive**. Instead, **corporate moral agency**, or the idea that **corporations have a conscience and can be held accountable for their actions and policies should be the bar for evaluating and regulating the ethical problem of greenwashing**.

1.2.11 For example, as mentioned above, rights are often associated with duties. Corporations and their managers must at least assume responsibility to **(1) avoid depriving [of rights] and (2) protect from deprivation**. Thus, the corporation as **a moral agent** should avoid depriving people of their rights and avoid cooperation in such deprivation by another party (Spinello, 2020). 1.2.12 A **rights-based ethic** is a more plausible normative framework because it is anchored in morality and the **intrinsic worth of the human person**. Here, every person's fundamental rights and dignity for human flourishing are protected by basic human rights (Spinello, 2020).

1.2.13 Within corporations, this is understood as **duties to uphold transparency, fairness, corporate citizenship, and property**. All of these play a prominent role in the proper conduct of business and are their duties (Spinello, 2020).

1.2.14 In this way, corporations are morally bound to avoid predatory marketing tactics, to disclose risks to consumers, to pay a fair wage to their workers, to respect employee rights (Spinello, 2020).

1.2.15 **To summarize, the corporation, therefore, is obliged to pursue its economic interests, follow relevant laws and regulations, and observe ethical principles as defined above, which can be understood as the “Modified Social Entity Model”¹(Spinello, 2020).**

1.2.16 This trio of duties underscores the binding legal and moral obligations not only toward those core stakeholder groups, who deserve fair treatment and benefits proportionate to their contributions, but towards **every individual or group affected by the corporation’s activity, including downstream and upstream customers** (Spinello, 2020).

1.2.17 These legal and moral principles **prescribe the proactive avoidance of greenwashing (e.g. harm)** as it **violates this third moral principle** (e.g. observe ethical principles), is **actively deceptive and harmful**, and unfair in terms of competition in the wider community or industry to which the corporation belongs (Spinello, 2020). Specifically, this means **firms who greenwash violate ethical principles**, are actively deceptive and harmful, and have a leg-up in the industry

¹ According to Spinello (2020), this model views the responsibilities of corporations as three fundamental duties: “to pursue their economic mission through the efficient allocation of resources that creates value and enhances shareholder wealth, to follow society’s rules and laws, and to recognize and respect human rights and other moral principles that ensure justice and social harmony.”

because they are able to profit off looking “more green” without doing the work and retaining a faster or more profitable business model.

1.3 A Consumer Guide to Greenwashing

1.3.1 In 2007, to describe, understand and quantify the growth of greenwashing, TerraChoice (acquired by UL), developed and launched a study of environmental claims made on products carried on category-leading big box store shelves. Based on the results of the original study and subsequent studies, **the Seven Sins of Greenwashing** were developed to help consumers identify products that made misleading environmental claims (UL, 2019). Below are the seven sins: (1) **Sin of the Hidden Trade Off** - A claim suggesting that a product is green based on a narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues. (2) **Sin of No Proof** - An environmental claim not substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification. (3) **Sin of Vagueness** - A claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer. All-natural is an example. Arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous. All natural isn't necessarily green. (4) **Sin of Worshiping False Labels** - A product that, through either words or images, gives the impression of third-party endorsement where no such endorsement exists, fake labels, in other words. (5) **Sin of Lesser of Two Evils** - A claim that may be true within the product category but that risks distracting the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the category. Organic cigarettes or fuel-efficient sport-utility vehicles could be examples of this sin. (6) **Sin of Irrelevance** - An environmental claim that may be truthful but is

unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products.

(7) **Sin of Fibbing** - Environmental claims that are simply false. The most common examples are products falsely claiming to be ENERGY STAR® certified or registered.

1.4 Why do fashion companies engage in greenwashing? 1.4.1 Companies have

recognized the importance the environment plays for their long-term business operations, whether it's manufacturing, product development, marketing and communications, or employee satisfaction. 1.4.2 Consumer demand for more

environmentally responsible products is growing. **As of 2020, 45 percent of consumers surveyed stated that they were interested in finding brands that were sustainable or environmentally responsible** (Haller et al., 2019).

Likewise, 44 percent of consumers stated that they were interested in brands that supported recycling (Haller et al., 2019). 1.4.3 Other drivers of greenwashing include (Haller et al., 2019):

(1) **Increase in sales of environmentally oriented products**

(2) **Demand remaining strong despite the economic downturn** (3)

Pending regulation and government action

(4) **Lack of industry-wide standards for communicating environmental messages**

1.4.4 There are many avenues of conveying environmental leadership to consumers and constituents. However, because everyone has become more aware and sophisticated in understanding environmental issues, whatever form the

message takes, it must be authentic, or perceived as so.

1.4.5 As mentioned above, **a main driver of greenwashing in the fashion industry is a lack of accountability and transparency.** As many know, the clothing, textiles, and footwear industry is incredibly **labor intensive** with an **estimated 60 million people employed within it worldwide** (Haller et al., 2019). To understand how and why fashion companies greenwash, **it is important to understand the complex process behind it.**

1.4.6 **Most fashion houses function as multinational corporations that often have parts of their supply chain in many countries across the globe.** 1.4.7 Here, **a clothing supply chain** refers to the process of tracing each step of the textile manufacturing process — from the sourcing of the raw materials to the factories where those materials are made into garments; and the distribution network by which the clothes are delivered to consumers (Lundblad & Davies, 2015).

1.4.8 The fashion industry is valued at \$3 trillion USD, involving millions of people, water, chemicals, crops, and oil (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). **Within the last 20 years, there has been an increased demand for high speed, high volume, and cheap consumption (refer to concept 2).**

1.4.9 While the rest of this process will be discussed in concept 2, it's important

to note that the **clothing production phase**, which involves the cutting, sewing,

and finishing of a garment, often involves **one of the key pieces of greenwashing.**

1.4.10 More specifically, within the last 30 years, most production has shifted to developing countries, predominately to Asia, in search of cheap labor (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). The arrival of large clothing brands into developing countries was initially greeted with hope for the emancipation of millions of workers. Yet, it has also **led to poor working conditions in some factories and sweatshops.**

1.4.11 Unfortunately, many of these nations like Bangladesh, Vietnam, etc. have either very relaxed or negligible regulations to ensure livable wages, encourage environmental practices, and prevent discrimination (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). **This regulatory environment contributes to a highly fragmented and uncertain process.**

1.4.12 Yet, even highly industrialized nations like the United States have tricky accountability systems. As mentioned earlier, **the US government does not currently mandate corporate disclosure of environmental practices, with a few exceptions such as toxic releases** (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013). Typically, **corporate disclosures fall under the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC).**

1.4.13 Currently, the US Federal Trade Commission is **empowered to apply Section 5 of the FTC Act to environmental marketing claims** by prohibiting unfair or deceptive acts or practices (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013). 1.4.14 Recently, the FTC voted to expand its enforcement efforts under Section 5 of the FTC Act. **Section 5 authorizes the FTC to investigate and challenge**

45(a)(1)).

1.4.15 Courts have not precisely defined the outer bounds of the FTC's Section 5 authority. **If the FTC finds that an advertiser violated Section 5, it can issue a cease-and-desist order to the violator, and if they don't stop then a fine can be imposed** (*Truth In Advertising*, 2013).

1.4.16 Despite this important progress, **mandatory disclosure of environmental practices and third-party auditing of such information is still not standard, allowing firms to greenwash and “cherry pick” what and how they wish to disclose.**

1.5 How does Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fit into all this?

1.5.1 **Environmental, Social, Governance, or ESG**, is an evaluation mechanism used to account for risks or liabilities associated with the way a company conducts business via auditing. **It functions as an indicator of corporate purpose, strategy, and quality of management** (Paraguel et al., 2011) **and can be used to evaluate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).**

1.5.2 Thus, ESG is geared to help investors understand how a company responds to (Spinello, 2020):

- (1) Climate issues
- (2) Employees
- (3) Innovation
- (4) Supply chain

1.5.3 **Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR**, can go beyond the “Modified

Social Entity Model,” proposing that modern corporations must also be **committed to a broad social agenda. At a minimum, firms should meet their economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities (thin CSR). These responsibilities can be extended to include philanthropic activities (thick CSR), which are seen as an “added bonus,” but are not mandatory.** Rather, they are aspirational, as corporations **should strive** for contributions to the **resolution of severe social problems** (see Figure 1).

1.5.4 According to this “thick CSR” view (top part of pyramid), corporations are bound to avoid depriving people of their rights, protect rights so they are not deprived, and also aid those deprived of their rights (Spinello, 2020). **Figure 1**

Carroll's Pyramid Model of Corporate Social Responsibility



Note. This is a representation of Carroll's pyramid model of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1991). From Balmann, Alfons & Chatalova, Lioudmila & Valentinov, Vladislav & Gagalyuk, Taras. (2016). *When Growth Obliges: Social Responsibility of Farms in Light of the Technological Treadmill*.

1.5.5 In general, by practicing CSR, also called corporate citizenship, companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society,

including economic, social, and environmental. Here, the social aspect is much more **proactive in nature** as it aims to address society's weaknesses and inequities, acting as a self-correcting mechanism within capitalism. **Thus, with the help of ESG, which functions as the evaluation mechanism, CSR can be evaluated by reporting on workplace quality, employee treatment, and so on** (Spinello, 2020).

1.5.6 While CSR and ESG can help companies be more proactive in their impact assessments, **how can investors and stakeholders be sure that the information is not a sham?**

1.5.7 Given the **limited formal regulation and enforcement of greenwashing**, NGOs and the media can only bring about **reputational damage to greenwashing firms**. The threat of exposure would have much more of a deterrent impact if there were legal ramifications for being caught and exposed.

1.5.8 For example, in the last few years, **more U.S. public companies have been publishing sustainability reports and other ESG disclosures, with some investors expressing concern over a lack of standardized ESG disclosure framework** (Spinello, 2020).

1.5.9 This makes it difficult for **investors to meaningfully evaluate and compare companies' ESG practices and risks, reducing the value of such disclosures** (Spinello, 2020).

1.5.10 However, public companies are facing mounting pressure from investors, including influential institutional investors such as BlackRock, Vanguard, and

State Street, which have indicated in public statements in the past year that they are **in support of companies making ESG disclosures aligned with both the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) frameworks**. Additionally, they are encouraging the voluntary adoption of ESG disclosure standards, especially the SASB and the TCFD frameworks, which have gained traction in the United States.

1.6 The Difficulty in Establishing a Framework in Relation to Fashion 1.6.1

Some of these standard-makers approach the **concept of materiality** in ways that are notably differently from the SASB and TCFD, whose frameworks focus on information they consider to be **financially material** (though both recognize that issuers are best positioned to determine which standards are financially material to their business and which associated metrics to report). 1.6.2 In contrast, the **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)**, whose framework covers topics such as labor and human rights issues, effects on biodiversity, and energy use and reduction, **assesses materiality based on impacts made by issuers on the economy, environment, and society**, which may be a better fit for adopting a standard regulatory regime within the fashion industry.

Concept 2: Fast Fashion and the Sustainable Fashion Movement

2.1 Brief Overview of Fast Fashion

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2.1.1 Fast fashion is a phenomenon that was born in the '90s, concurrently with the era of globalization. At its core, it refers to low-cost clothing collections that

mimic timely, luxury trends that are first seen on runways (Drennan, 2015). 2.1.2 It aims to replace exclusivity, glamor, originality, and luxury with the masses and thrives on fast cycles, including rapid prototyping, efficient transportation and delivery, and merchandise that is presented as “floor ready” on hangers with price tags already attached. Moreover, instead of the traditional four seasons, there are 15-16 collections in a year (Drennan, 2015).

2.1.3 Aside from contributing to flagrant material consumption and approximately ten percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, fast fashion has become synonymous with gross humanitarian violations, especially for women and children (Drennan 2015).

2.1.4 In the US alone, according to 2015 statistics, roughly \$250 billion are spent each year on manufacturing and sales (Drennan).

2.2 How Do Clothing Supply Chains Work?

2.2.1 **Producing Materials** - the production of textiles encompasses the complex process of growing or creating the raw textile material, spinning it into a fiber, weaving it into a fabric, and dyeing and finishing it (Lundblad & Davies, 2015).

2.2.2 Textile production is a major contributor to environmental pollution because of the associated high greenhouse gas emissions and contamination of air and freshwater supplies (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). In addition, lots of chemicals are used throughout the world to turn raw materials into textiles, many of which

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are released into freshwater systems—potentially contaminating water used for agriculture and human consumption.

2.2.4 Forced labor can also be found in textile production, especially cotton

picking, spinning, and weaving stages. Child labor is common in Uzbekistan, as children work for no pay as cotton pickers (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). 2.2.5

Producing Clothes - see above.

2.2.6 **Distribution and Retail** - as clothes are manufactured, they need to then be transported globally to retailers and consumers. This widespread transportation of clothes and textiles leads to increased pollution (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). 2.2.7

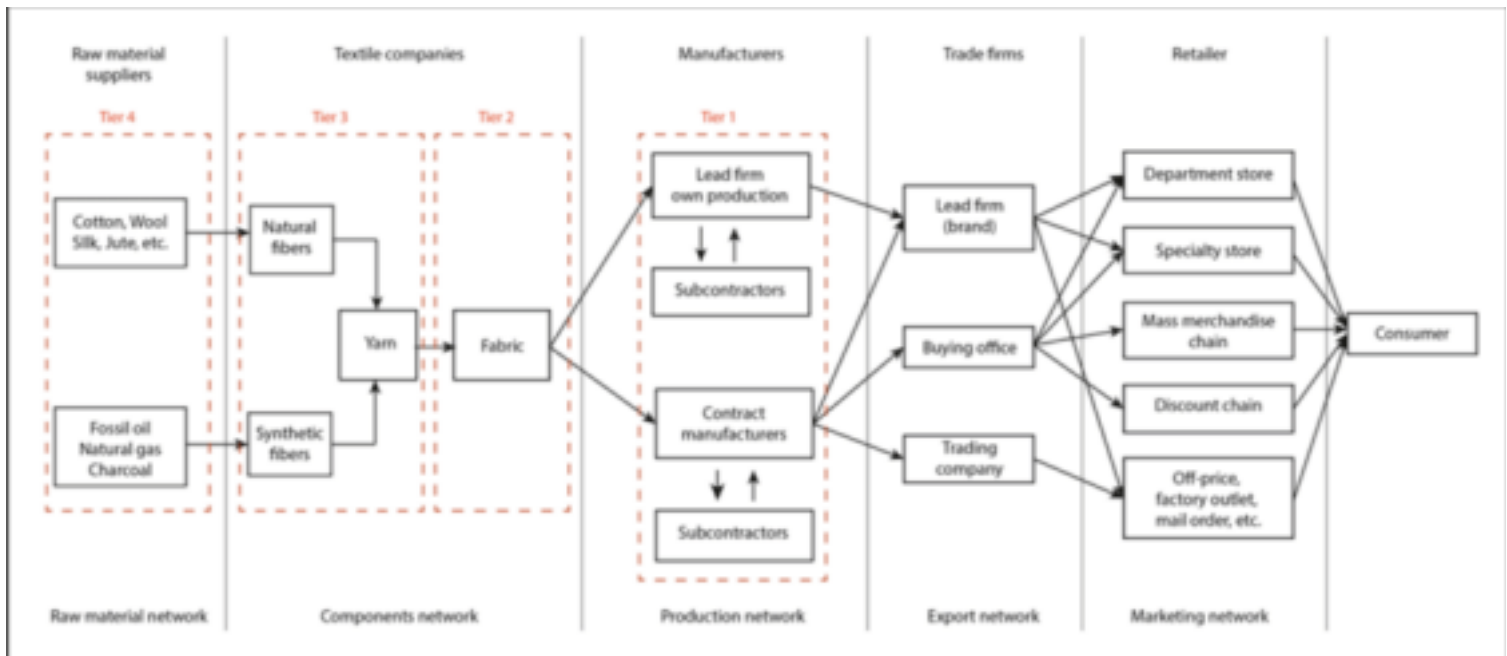
Producing carbon emissions is inevitable in distribution. However, brands and companies can take measures towards minimizing this impact by offsetting their carbon emissions (e.g., planting trees) or using recycled packaging (Testa et al., 2020).

2.2.8 **Consumers and End-Of-Life** - the consumer stage of the clothing supply chain comprises the consumer usage of the garment, the laundering of the clothing, and the end of product use (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). 2.2.9 **Much of a garment's environmental impact comes from laundering and not just growing, processing, and producing the fabric.** For example, in 2017, a report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimated that 35% of all microplastics in the ocean came from the laundering of synthetic textiles like polyester.

2.2.10 **Across the board, textile recovery rates for recycling remain relatively low, despite textiles being considered almost 100% reusable or recyclable** (Testa et al., 2020).

2.2.11 According to the Ellen McArthur Foundation, more than \$500 billion of value is lost every year due to clothing underutilization and the lack of recycling. In fact, only around a quarter of all waste textiles in the West are reclaimed, with **13% going to material recovery and 13% to incineration** (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021).

2.2.13 **The remainder goes to landfills, where fabrics contribute to the overall environmental impact of those sites, including production of methane emissions to air and pollution of groundwater** (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021).



Note. Example of Clothing Supply Chain. From Obser, Sarah. (2015). *Transparency and Traceability in the Textile and Clothing Supply Chain*. 10.13140/RG.2.2.16892.74883.

2.3 What is Sustainable Fashion?

2.3.1 In contrast to fast fashion, **sustainable, slow, or conscious fashion**, **contemplates each phase of the clothing supply chain. The designer considers the materials and their impact, the production, and the consumer-use stage to minimize the adverse effects on the world around them, including people, planet, and animals** (Hill, 2018).

2.3.2 A conscious fashion brand may use a **high proportion of eco-friendly materials**, including **recycled, vegan, and/or organic fibers** (e.g. recycled polyester, organic cotton, and organic bamboo). **In terms of environmental**

impact, a sustainable brand seeks to minimize waste not only via packaging, but also with its production processes. Its use of eco-friendly materials limits

the amount of chemicals, water, and wastewater used in production. In order to do this, some sustainable brands may use vegetable or plant-based non-toxic dyes in its products and processes, recycle wastewater, and so forth (Hill, 2018). **2.3.3 In terms of labor, a sustainable brand aims to go beyond an adequate wage, and pays living wages that allow workers to flourish beyond livelihood.**

Additionally, they will have a **Code of Conduct** (e.g. ILO Four Fundamental Freedoms principles), **source all stages of production, trace their supply chain, and audit and/or visit most, if not all, of its suppliers to ensure worker health, safety, and rights** (Hill, 2018).

2.3.4 In terms of animal rights, a brand may still be sustainable and use animal products if they do so humanely and avoid undue harm to the non-human animal. For example, a non-vegan, sustainable brand may not use fur, leather, down, exotic animal skin, exotic animal hair or angora, but source wool from non-mulesed sheep (Hill, 2018).

2.3.5 For more information see Appendix B.

Concept 3: Generation Z as Consumers and Stakeholders

3.1 Consumption Patterns and Behaviors

3.1.1 Before beginning this study, it is important to contextualize the nuances of **Generation Z** and how the cohort tends to consume on a more general basis.

3.1.2 This generation was born between the years of 1997-2012 and will become the main purchasing power in a few years.

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3.1.3 Other names have been adopted for this generation group, such as:

iGeneration, Gen Tech, Gen Wii, Net Gen, Digital Natives, and Plurals. As can be

inferred, significant for this generation is the considerable extent of their use of Internet technologies, which form a major part of their social networks and social life (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.1.4 Because of their ability to seek out information, they are, in fact, among the **smartest online consumers that tend to be skeptical of business claims** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.1.5 Gen Z women, especially those with a university degree, are more likely to change their shopping behavior over men, with men with basic education changing their shopping habits the least (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021). 3.1.6 Gen Z also easily adopts eco-friendly products and tends to have an intrinsic motivation to act in environmentally friendly ways (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.1.7 **In relation to consumption, Gen Zers are more likely to consume responsibly. They are more open to new and innovative ideas than previous generations** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.1.8 **Therefore, Generation Z consumers are expected to consume in a more responsible manner by preferring, for example, recycled clothing** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.2 Belief Systems

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3.2.1 While consumption in Generation Z has been outlined, the crux of this issue lies in understanding motivations, values, and belief systems when it comes

to shopping habits. **As Lunblad explores, sustainable fashion consumers perceive value in non-economic terms** (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). 3.2.2 Costs such as a narrow choice of natural materials, premium prices, lack of availability, search time on environmental or social justice topics and limited product ranges become perceived product benefits of healthier, longer-lasting, unique designs that **provide psychological benefits of accomplishment, individuality, and “feeling good”** (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). 3.2.3 Thus, there is a clear matching of the associated costs of sustainable fashion with increased perceptions of value.

3.2.4 Yet, a juxtaposition in both Gen Z and consumers overall exists. **Lee explores this concept by highlighting how consumers often have positive attitudes about green marketing, yet their fashion purchases are not linked to sustainability, revealing an unbalanced psychological state** (Lee et al., 2020).

3.2.5 Based on balance theory, they explain how environmental priming can increase consumer preferences for fashion products with green logos. Because consumers may think favorably about sustainability issues, they are unwilling to make the sacrifice of accepting the inferior fashion performance that is associated with non-green fashion products (Lee et al., 2020).

3.2.6 **Since imbalance creates tension, consumers are motivated to resolve the tension by changing either their attitudes or their behaviors** (Lee et al., 2020).

3.2.7 **This study aims to apply this value system to Generation Z. Before doing so, however, it's important to outline some known value belief systems currently at play for the respective cohort.**

3.2.8 According to Šramková, they are considered **highly educated, creative, and innovative, able to perform tasks in an ever-changing environment**. They have a high moral code and a worldview that is strongly influenced by the **nature of human rights and anti-discrimination laws** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.2.9 Additionally, the **"Cult of the Body" Theory (i.e. what they look like and how they eat) is significant for this cohort, indicating that “the look” or how they present themselves has become a goal and a means** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.2.10 For some, this may mean shopping and/or eating sustainably for the deeper goal or status symbol that comes along with it. **Thus, the dictates of fashion, advertising, and especially the media lead members of this cohort to constantly improve their bodies via their appearance, to go hand in hand with current trends** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.2.11 In sum, **by representing their status through branded products, Gen Zers present their unique personality through fashion, which they believe is their right** (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021).

3.2.12 In addition to this theory, Pallavi discusses that in the Indian context, **Environmental Concern (EC) appears to be a strong predictor of eco-friendly behavior**. Here, EC is defined as, **“an evaluation of or an attitude toward facts,**

one’s own behavior or other’s behavior with consequences for the environment” (Pallavi et al., 2020).

3.2.13 **Recent studies indicate that environmentally concerned young**

consumers have strong intentions to buy eco-friendly products for reducing environmental impact. Further, EC seems to be a significant variable influencing buying intention by affecting the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Pallavi et al., 2020).

Conclusions

When applying the tenants of Corporate Social Responsibility to the study, it is evident that firms can participate in CSR in a number of ways. For example, as Figure 3 demonstrates, they are able to participate in corporate philanthropy, innovate to a more sustainable business model, promote environmental awareness and so forth. While this all seems wonderful on paper, in terms of accountability, especially within the United States, the “workplace” and “marketplace” components of CSR (see Figure 3) are much more accounted for and regulated via institutional actors, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Sherman Antitrust Act, myriad labor rights organizations, including the United States Department of Labor, AFL-CIO, and so forth.

Yet, it wasn’t until the 1970’s Environmental Movement and Rachel Carson’s seminal publication of *Silent Spring*, that corporate environmental responsibility came into the picture on a national level. While I did not provide a lengthy overview of this history, for the purpose of the study, I will categorize

corporate environmental accountability in the US as inconsistent and loose at best with de-regulation and a lack of accountability being the status-quo. By this, I mean that while administrations vary, generally the EPA functions as a “reactive”

agency, working in the background and not actively policing firms unless a claim is brought forth. This same categorization also applies to the last piece of this figure, “community,” which involves social accountability, or the idea that firms can be held liable for community-wide downstream effects of their business such as their chemical footprint, pollution, and greenwashing.

While this study will not assess why the bottom two components (e.g. workplace and marketplace) of CSR are much more regulated and overseen, it will seek to understand a consequence of this reality. Namely, that consumers are picking up the slack where institutions are falling short. In simple terms, without a strong and standardized regulatory framework holding firms accountable within the environment (e.g. their environmental impact) and community (e.g. their social impact), consumers are forced to accept what firms tell them or do the research themselves, effectively placing undue burden on their decision-making processes (MacKendrick, 2018). This framework can be applied to many consumer decisions such as sustainable investing, what beauty products to buy at the store, and finally what clothes to wear. In light of these realities, this study aims to assess how one subset of consumers (Generation Z) is coping with this confusing or opaque reality of not knowing who and what to believe, and how this translates into their clothing consumption habits.

Figure 3

Illustration of Stakeholders and Outcomes Involved in CSR



Note. Example of Stakeholders and Outcomes from participating in CSR. From Northamptonshire

Community Foundation, Northamptonshire Community Foundation, <https://www.ncf.uk.com/give/fof/csr>.

This thesis project aims to understand how Generation Z is responding to external (e.g. marketing schemes, peer pressure, lack of accountability) and internal (value systems) pressures related to sustainable or slow fashion and how these do or do not guide their clothing shopping habits. It seeks to further the study of greenwashing, highlighting its effects on Generation Z, their shopping habits, values, and so forth. As mentioned above, this particular cohort is an interesting case study because they are said to be more “environmentally conscious/aware” than previous generations (Šramková & Sirotiaková, 2021). Yet, growing up in a digital and Fast Fashion society, it seems that these two pressures are working against each other, presenting a paradox. Thus, this project seeks to explore this paradox, if it exists, and if so, how it functions within a loose regulatory framework.

These aims are evaluated through the following questions:

- To what extent is Generation Z falling prey to green marketing schemes aimed at luring them in?
- To what extent do they care about the planet and its inhabitants? ● How savvy are they in distinguishing greenwashing in the fashion industry? ● What brands are they shopping from?
- What are their shopping values?
- Are their values aligning with their shopping habits?
- How often are they shopping?

Before conducting any research, I predict that Generation Z is not shopping in accordance with their value systems. Instead, they are dealing with opposing forces or a cognitive dissonance (i.e. trend shopping versus value systems) by purchasing sustainably or according to their values “every once in a while.” Additionally, I predict that they are “somewhat savvy” at predicting which brands are greenwashing versus not, meaning they may get some, but not all greenwashing questions correct (around half). This may be the case because they are unsure or unclear about (1) how to shop sustainably; (2) sustainable terminology; and (3) what is true or untrue in terms of company claims. Finally, I believe that their biggest hindrance to shopping sustainably will be price (e.g. sustainable brands tend to be pricier than fast fashion ones). Thus, while the intention (e.g. care for the environment) is there, they are still not shopping how the market and brands predict.

Demographics

While this study aims at understanding the entirety of the Generation Z cohort, unfortunately due to COVID-19 restrictions it is limited in scope to a small subset of the current undergraduate population at Boston College. As mentioned earlier, these students were chosen for this study because they are part of this generational cohort as most current undergraduates were born between the years of 1999-2004. Along with their age, it is important to note that among the total 9,445 Boston College undergraduates, 53% are female and 47% are male, while approximately 8% of students are international (*Facts and Figures*, 2022).

While other demographic information was not specifically publicized on the university's website, according to one report, as of 2019, the enrolled student population at Boston College, both undergraduate and graduate, is 56.1% White, 9.83% Hispanic or Latino, 8.94% Asian, 3.99% Black or African American, 3.17% Two or More Races, 0.061% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.0271% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders (*Boston College | Data USA*, 2019).

In terms of socioeconomic status, according to the New York Times, the median family income of a student from Boston College is \$194,100, and 70% come from the top 20 percent. Additionally, about 16% come from the top 1% and about 1.6% of students at Boston College come from a poor family (AISCH et al., 2017).

While this information provides a broad overview of the demographics at Boston College, below are the demographics for the actual survey respondents:

- 52 were female and 14 were male; 33 did not respond when asked about gender identification;
- The most popular majors included Environmental Studies and Environmental Geoscience (14), followed by Political Science (7), Biology (6), and Economics (5);
- The most represented age category was 21 with approximately 22 respondents reporting this age; all college ages were represented.

Thus, it can be inferred that most of the respondents in this survey were female with a background in the environment. Additionally, while the respondents were not asked about their race or socioeconomic status, it is important to keep the information above in mind when assessing this study. In other words, it can be inferred that most respondents are white and come from a background of relative affluence with a flexible lifestyle that allows for relative purchasing power.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, I used Qualtrics XM to create a questionnaire with 58 questions divided into two sections. The first section asked respondents to think about their general clothing consumption habits. This included their fashion preferences and influences, how, why, and how often they are purchasing clothing, and what sorts of qualities and prerequisites they have when purchasing items. Additionally, it assessed their general understanding of definitions related to the study including greenwashing, sustainable or slow fashion, etc.

The second section functioned more as an evaluation of the respondent's ability to discern greenwashing. Namely, it presented a series of claims and/or mission statements that came from actual clothing brands (both well-known and

less well-known) and asked them to label the claims as either “greenwashing,” “sustainable,” or “not sure.” These statements are all publicly available and were found via the brand’s website and/or social media (refer to Appendix A for the full questionnaire).

In terms of the “answer key” for this section of the study, I used brands found on Good On You’s Directory of Brands in order to categorize each brand as sustainable or not. Good On You is a world-leading source of trusted brand ratings, articles, and expertise on ethical and sustainable fashion. Since 2015, they’ve built a database of thousands of fashion brands, all assessed against their robust rating system for a brand’s impact on people, the planet, and animals.

It is important to note that for the purpose of this study, I simplified sustainability ratings into a binary in order to codify the results. Specifically, for the “sustainable” options, I chose brands rated Good or Great on the Directory (some well-known options and some obscure). For the “nots,” I chose brands that have been assumed to be greenwashing (e.g. Lululemon) with some more well-known and others not (refer to Appendix B for full Good On You methodology report). However, I understand and acknowledge that a brand’s ethics are not black and white and that even more consciously-minded brands are not perfect. At the end of the day, the truly most ethical choice for the environment and people is to consume less.

Finally, in terms of survey dissemination and distribution, I posted physical flyers (see Appendix C) around all around campus for over 3 months, sent the digital questionnaire to multiple departments including the Environmental Studies Department, Marketing Department, and Economics Department, and networked with several

on-campus groups to have them post it on their respective social media sites, including each Boston College Class Instagram and Facebook page and the Boston College Fashion Club Instagram.

Figure 4

Initial Findings Summary Table

Greenwashing
All the respondents noted an increase in sustainable marketing with 43% feeling skeptical about it
63% of students had heard of "greenwashing" and described it as "claims" or "marketing"
Respondents earned an 8/10 with only two claims being scored as greenwashing when it was not (tentree) and sustainable when it was not (lululemon). The rest were scored correct
General Shopping Habits and Information
Most students get their fashion influences from social media, specifically Instagram with SM averages of about 2-3 hrs per day
It is pretty split in terms of following influencers; the biggest influencer following came from Emma Chamberlain
Most students purchase about 2 pieces of clothing per month with an even split of spending between \$20-30 and \$50-60 USD
Most students shop at brick and mortar stores by a wide margin
The top 3 stores that students have purchased from in the last three months are: Amazon (top), Nike (second), and Lululemon (third)
48% of respondents said they would like to shop sustainably in the future but "don't know how"
37% said that sustainable clothing is sometimes or often too expensive for them
Most people cited Patagonia as their favorite sustainable brand
Around 75% of respondents agreed that despite their values, they have found themselves purchasing clothing, knowing it is harmful to the environment, people, and/or animals
66% of respondents said they purchase ON budget and DO NOT shop outside of their budgetary means
Value Systems
Most students feel that they have a unique sense of style independent of trends and look towards peers for approval (by a wide margin)
Most described their shopping values as "sustain," "quality," "environmental"
Most students consider price most important factor when purchasing clothing with close seconds in environmental, impact, quality, longevity
Most students have heard about PETA Approved Vegan and Fairtrade, but not other clothing certifications such as Bluesign, etc.
The top 3 recognizable materials include organic cotton, recycled cotton, and recycled polyester respectively
About 68% of students impulse buy monthly with most of those [?] feeling bored initially and then regret afterwards; however, feeling excited afterwards was one point behind
Most students agreed that they liked to dress well and felt like they had a "basic" sense of style
Around 59% of students did not feel that fashion was tied to their identity
Most students used the following words to describe fast fashion: cheap, produce, impact, trend
84% of students said they were "concerned about the impact of fast fashion on the environment and/or workers"
82% of students claimed that they have stayed away from certain brands because they thought they were fast fashion
77% of respondents said they "sometimes" shop according to their values (e.g. staying away from FF and harmful brands)
30% of students said that these pressures to shop sustainably were coming from a concern about the climate crisis
More than 90% of respondents agreed that they care about the environment and laborers receiving a living wage

Initial Findings: Greenwashing

For this study, I wanted to evaluate the extent to which this generational cohort understands greenwashing, their ability to detect and negate it, as well as their general knowledge of sustainable terminology. After reviewing the survey results, contrary to the initial hypothesis, this sample was actually **MORE than "somewhat savvy"** at detecting greenwashing. In fact, as a whole, they scored about **8/10 on the greenwashing portion of the survey**, with **only two claims** being scored as greenwashing when it was not (tentree) and sustainable when it was not (Lululemon) (see Figure 4). **The rest were 37 scored correctly.** Additionally, approximately **63%** of participants had heard of

“greenwashing” and **accurately** described it as “**claims**” or “**marketing**.” All of the respondents noted an increase in sustainable marketing with **43%** of them feeling “**skeptical**” about it (see Figure 4).

While there is certainly variability within the sample (i.e. not every survey respondent scored this way), one may make the assumption that generally, **most students are aware of this phenomenon in current marketing strategies and are approaching sustainable claims with hesitancy**. When put to the test, it also appears that students are able to distinguish between false sustainability statements and truisms. While the survey did not ask for students to substantiate their reasonings for why they thought a claim to be true or false, or how they came to their conclusions, below I offer a shallow analysis of the incorrect responses.

To begin with, **only 26% of respondents accurately answered that Lululemon is greenwashing**. The claim states that “*By 2025, [we] will achieve at least 75 percent sustainable materials for our products—including fibers that are recycled, renewable, regenerative, sourced responsibly, or some combination thereof, and/or are manufactured using low-resource processes.*” Unlike other false statements, this one uses a timeframe that is in the near future and uses vocabulary such as “regenerative,” which is relatively cutting-edge and may purport sustainable qualities. These language choices may have tripped up students into thinking this brand was more sustainable. However, students failed to see the lack of specificity in the claim or “emptiness” that doesn’t point to any specific science-based targets or mechanisms already in place that are addressing sustainability.

vague and specific language. For example, they say, *“Everything [we] do stems from how to do better by our planet—like planting trees. We plant trees because it’s one of the best ways to create a more sustainable future. But over the years, we’ve realized that our journey doesn’t start and end with planting trees. We’re constantly looking at innovative ways to make apparel with the smallest possible footprint and create more circular supply chains. To give you some context, a _____ sweatshirt uses on average 75% less water to make than the other sweatshirts in your closet.”* Unlike Lululemon, tentree is able to expand on their broad claim, pointing to specific data and explaining that they “don’t just plant trees.” Perhaps, however, this margin of error can be explained by students only reading the beginning of the claim and not the rest, or being skeptical about such generic claims as “planting trees.”

Initial Findings: General Shopping Habits

As seen in Figure 4, most students are still **shopping in person, at physical stores**, buying about **two pieces of clothing per month** with an even split of between **\$20-30 and \$50-60 USD**. The top three stores that students have purchased from in the last three months are: **Amazon (top), Nike (second), and Lululemon (third)**.

Importantly, these brands are rated “Not Good Enough,” “It’s A Start,” and “Not Good Enough,” respectively by Good On You. In terms of the NGE rating, this means that “these brands have provided some information in one or more areas, but not enough to address key issues or assess impacts across their supply chains” (“Guide to the Good on You Brand Rating System,” 2018).

ensure payment of a living wage in their supply chains and aren't taking adequate steps to limit carbon emissions in their productions (among other environmental impacts). While Nike's IAS rating is definitely better, according to the GOY Directory, it only ensures a living wage in small parts of its supply chain. In terms of its environmental impact, Nike uses some eco-friendly materials including recycled materials. Additionally, it has set science-based targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated from its own operations and supply chain but there is no evidence it is on track to meet this target. Thus, indicating a "good start," but not there yet.

All in all, these three brands highlight that students mostly shop from less consciously minded brands that are large, produce high volumes of clothing, and are highly well known in society (e.g. social capital). Additionally, approximately 66% of respondents said they purchase ON budget, claiming to, more often than not, shop within their budgetary means.

Initial Findings: Value Systems

When analyzing value systems, the following results appeared (see Figure 4): (1)

Most students consider **price** most important factor when purchasing clothing with close seconds in **environmental, impact, quality, longevity** (2) Around **59%** (majority) of students did **NOT** feel that fashion was **tied to their identity**

(3) Most students described their shopping values as **"sustain," "quality," "environmental"**

(4) Around **77%** of respondents said they **"sometimes"** shop according to

their values

- (5) **84%** of students said they were “concerned about the impact of fast fashion on the environment and/or workers” with **82%** saying that they have **stayed away from certain brands because they thought they were fast fashion**
- (6) More than **90%** of respondents agreed that **they care about the environment and laborers receiving a living wage**
- (7) Around **75% of respondents agreed** that despite their values, they have found themselves purchasing clothing, **knowing it is harmful to the environment, people, and/or animals**
- (8) Around **48%** of respondents said that they **don’t know how to shop sustainably** in the future and **31%** said that **sustainable clothing is sometimes or often too expensive for them**

As predicted in the hypothesis, most of the respondents exhibit a preference for the environment, wishing to protect it, non-human animals, and its inhabitants while shopping. Yet, as also predicted, this sample also exhibited a tendency to **violate those values with 75% agreeing that they purchased clothing, knowing it is harmful to the environment, people, and/or animals**. Why is this?

Unlike I predicted, most of the respondents did not violate their values in the name of trend, or because they felt that fashion was linked to their identity, but instead **did so due to budgetary constraints**. More specifically, **most respondents considered price the most important factor when purchasing clothing**, and approximately **31%**

More importantly, **48%** of respondents agreed that they “don’t know how to shop sustainably” with **FairTrade and PETA-Approved Vegan** being the most known certifications among the sample.

Thus, **as predicted, this sample is “sometimes” shopping according to their environmental values not due to a want for trend/identities, but due to price hindrances and a lack of knowledge of which brands are more sustainable than others.** Yet, when assessing the survey with the greenwashing claims (both sections together), it seems as though respondents are fairly good at distinguishing which brands are greenwashing, and which ones are not. **Therefore, this “gap” in purchasing according to values, while reflecting budgetary constraints, may also reflect a “gap in knowledge” among the sample regarding sustainability metrics.** Thus, while further studies would have to be conducted to deepen these claims, the interpretation points to a “gap” in this sample that helps to explain current contradictions among this generational cohort and their shopping values.

Research Analysis

As the survey indicates (see Figure 4), most students are purchasing about **two garments per month** and spend either **\$20-30 or \$50-60 USD** for these garments. Students are “staying on budget” with the majority agreeing that they will not shop above their means. Additionally, most students agree that **“price” is the biggest hindrance to shopping sustainably**. But, does this add up? Are sustainable brands really THAT expensive and how do they compare to popular surveyed brands like Nike and Lululemon?

In order to contextualize this, it is important to compare financial data points between Nike (second most popular brand from survey) and conscious activewear brand Girlfriend Collective. A pair of Nike’s best-selling women’s leggings cost approximately \$90 USD and Girlfriend’s most popular high-rise, compressive leggings cost \$78. **So, the sustainable brand is actually cheaper.** Okay, what about Lululemon? A quick browse on the brand’s website demonstrates that an average pair of women’s leggings cost anywhere from \$88-118 USD. Thus, while Nike and Lululemon are not the model for slow fashion, according to GOY data, they are certainly not “cheap” like other Fast Fashion brands and actually more expensive than the conscious brand in this case. So, how can this sample’s shopping habits be explained? While price may certainly be a factor, it doesn’t seem that it is the only one.

As Burke notes in his 2014 publication, consumers are often faced with trade-offs when thinking about sustainable or ethical consumption. Namely, ethical alternatives are often viewed as “substandard” on several performance dimensions (Griskevicius et al.,

2010) and much literature indicates that **most consumers are unwilling to compromise on price, value, quality, and brand**. Similarly, in the case of luxuries, Davies et al. (2012) suggests that **product satisfaction, self-image, and convenience** dominate considerations relative to ethical aspects. In a similar way, my study aimed to explain this “dissatisfaction” with sustainable consumption from the lens of self-image, purporting that students stand-by brands like Nike and Lululemon because they **hold a certain social capital**, which enables them to maintain a constructed self-identity based around individuality, uniqueness, and so forth. Yet, as the study reveals, **this was rejected**, with most students **negating that their taste in fashion is part of their identity**.

Indeed, on the surface, it **seems that price is a driving factor**, but as demonstrated, **perhaps not the DECIDING factor**. When relating these findings to Burke’s study, a similarity abounds. Specifically, Burke finds that reasons used for and against ethical purchasing **are less related to “social aspects”** (e.g., fitting with peers, opinion leadership, social status concerns). Instead, reasoning relates more to **issues of well-being, such as health**, even among ethical consumers. This offers a more **“individualistic perspective”** on ethical consumption than one emerging primarily from themes of altruism or collectivism, which in turn has positioning implications for ethical products and related supply practices. He finds that whilst many consumers would like to make a difference and **do care** about the issues that ethical products address, **the key barriers to ethical consumption among ambivalent consumers relate to confusion and skepticism**.

As Wang finds, this **skepticism in “making a difference”** may stem from the **perceived effectiveness** of environmental behavior (Wang & Lin, 2017). In his study, he

found that **young adults with more confidence in the effect of environmental behavior develop greater environmental responsibility**. When young adults do not perceive responsibility and the effectiveness of environmental behavior, the effect of social influence on actual environmental behavior does not occur. Thus, his study revealed that environmental behavior, in minimizing resource consumption, is significantly **affected by established perceived environmental responsibility** (Wang & Lin, 2017).

These connections, along with the survey results that indicated a “skepticism” among the sample (see Figure 4), implies that there is a need to **create clarity for young consumers by bringing forth credible sources** in regard to **how their consumption makes a difference in minimizing harm to humans, animals or the environment in the production, consumption and disposal of various products, as well as general knowledge about brands and their products**.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, respondents in the survey overwhelmingly care about the environment and that laborers in the industry are paid a living wage. When faced with putting this knowledge to the test, most students were **able to decipher the greenwashing from the not**, indicating a savviness much above what was predicted (8/10). Put simply, **when given the opportunity (i.e. the information and convenience), students are fairly adept at knowing which brands to shop from in accordance with their values**. Thus, as Burke explains, when faced with choice, **respondents ARE acting individually, but not in relation to their identity**. Instead, they are falling on factors like **convenience, familiarity (information), and price** to guide their shopping decisions.

Fashion, it can be argued that according to common knowledge, most respondents would agree that brands such as Zara, H&M, Boohoo, and Shein, are amongst those in that category and Nike and Lululemon are not. Thus, while 82% of respondents agreed that they have “stayed away from brands because they considered them Fast Fashion,” it did not ask whether they would do the same if they considered them “unethical” or “unsustainable.” As Burke acknowledges, many shoppers are **passive, guided only by labeling information and common knowledge rather than engaging in any active search about the ethical aspects of products** (10). As his research finds, this **passivity can often be coded in pricing**. For example, he found that if negatively oriented consumers do buy an ethical option, it is predominantly based on reasons relating to cost savings and benefits to their own health. **Thus, if young consumers are able to dispel the idea that a sustainable brand is not as expensive as they thought, they must also decide that it meets their individual needs.**

Yet, as demonstrated earlier, **dispelling these preconceived notions and accessing this information would all require outside effort and resources**, which may provide a hindrance to this generational cohort. As the survey demonstrates, **approximately 48% of respondents would like to shop sustainably in the future, but “don't know how.”** This falls in line with Pacheco-Blanco’s assertions that **“environmental performance information has the highest influence on the purchasing decisions, even higher than price”** (Pacheco-Blanco et al., 2018). Specifically, she finds that many current products with a good environmental performance **fail to communicate** this information to the public with the **18–35 year-old**

according to her study, **young consumers sought more detailed product information AND used this information precisely when given the chance** (Pacheco-Blanco et al., 2018). With this in mind, the survey results fall in line with existing sustainable consumption and consumer-based literature that **convenience (i.e. accessibility), price, and familiarity (i.e. information) may be the culprits as to why unethical brands still reign supreme among these respondents.**

This study broadened the discussion around greenwashing in the fashion industry, contextualizing the marketing phenomenon by situating it amongst current and past discussions surrounding corporate ethics and responsibilities. It includes an extensive research background, including a brief history of greenwashing as a marketing tactic, corporate ethics, the fashion industry (Fast Fashion and Slow Fashion), a study of clothing supply chains, and finally background information on Generation Z and their generational characteristics. This, as well as the small research study conducted at Boston College, all inform the conclusions of this study.

This study demonstrates that Gen Zers are far more adept at detecting greenwashing in the fashion industry than what was initially predicted. They are very much aware of the green marketing schemes aimed at attracting their purchasing power and are apprehensive (skeptical) about such claims. In accordance with relevant consumer-based literature, when faced with choice in shopping for clothing, respondents are acting individually, but not in relation to their identity (rejection of hypothesis). Instead, they are falling on factors like convenience (accessibility), familiarity (information), and price to guide their shopping decisions. Here, however, price is playing a dual role, acting as a hindrance to some purchasing decisions, but also functioning as a coded element. Plainly, price is obfuscating or functioning as a “catch-all” for the notion that more sustainable or ethical brands are more expensive, inaccessible, and harder to find, allowing complacency or passivity to take hold as described by Burke.

In order to take this study further, the survey would need to have asked questions regarding the amount of time a participant would spend researching a brand and finding out other information that would help inform their choice(s). While the study did assess their ability to sift through brand information or claims (greenwashing test), it did not ask questions such as, “*Do you use other resources while shopping?*” or “*How much time do you spend researching a brand?*” and so forth. Additionally, this study is also very limited in its scope and reach as most respondents were from Boston College and thus represent a very small sample of this generational cohort. In order to be conclusive, the study would need to be applied to a broader set of college students, including more male respondents, a variation in interests (e.g. majors), and socio-economic backgrounds.

Looking beyond, it would be interesting if the students came from a diverse set of majors, as a majority of the respondents had an environmental focus, thus presenting an “environmental bias” that may have influenced their responses. Finally, it would be fascinating to have this same set of questions applied to Gen Zers with disposable incomes (post-graduate students). In doing so, it may effectively eliminate the budgetary constraints currently at play, and may further illuminate the coded pricing behaviors witnessed in the current study.

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X. APPENDIX

A. Sample Survey Questions

(1) What is your major?

A. Write in

(2) What gender do you identify as?

A. Write in

(3) Where do you think you get your fashion inspiration from?

A. Magazines (Vogue, Elle, etc.)

B. Social Media (Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok)

C. TV

D. Peers (second highest)

E. Influencers

F. Youtube

G. Internet

H. What I see on the street

I. All of the above

J. Other (please specify)

(4) What is your preferred social media for fashion (pick one)?

A. Instagram

B. Pinterest

C. Tik Tok

D. Snapchat

E. Youtube

(5) How much social media do you typically consume in a day?

- A. 15 minutes
- B. 30 minutes
- C. 1 hr
- D. 2-3 hrs
- E. 3-4 hrs
- F. 5+

(6) Do you follow any fashion influencers on social media?

- A. Yes
- B. No

(7) Do you follow any of these influencers on social media?

- A. Chiara Ferragni
- B. Matilda Djerf
- C. Camila Coelho
- D. Olivia Palermo
- E. Alexa Chung
- F. Danielle Bernstein
- G. Emma Chamberlain
- H. Other (please specify)

(8) How many pieces of clothing do you purchase monthly (please reference your credit/debit card statement if necessary)?

- A. 1
- B. 2

C. 3-4

D. 5-10

E. 10+

(9) How much do you spend on clothes in a month?

A. Less than \$10

B. \$10

C. \$20-30

D. \$30-40

E. \$40-50

F. \$50-60

G. \$70-80

H. \$80-90

I. \$90-100

J. \$100

K. \$100-150

L. \$150

M. \$150+

(10) Which describes you best (pick one)?

A. I don't care what I wear

B. I wear a basic uniform (wear the same pieces) I adopted some time back and don't
need to change my style

C. I like to fit in and follow fashion trends when I see most people adopt them

D. I like to be on the cutting edge of fashion

E. I have my own unique style independent of trends

(11) How do you know you're shopping on trend? What signals do you look for?

A. Peers - "you look so cute!"

B. Social Media - "you're dressing like Vogue or similar to influencers"

C. Other

D. I don't care about trend

(12) What platform do you typically use to purchase an article of clothing?

A. Instagram or other social media

B. Website of brand

C. Online retailer (Revolve, Farfetch, Nordstrom Online)

D. Online resellers (Depop, Etsy)

E. In-person store (brick and mortar)

F. In-person retailer (brick and mortar Nordstrom or Saks Fifth Avenue)

(13) Before buying an article of clothing I consider... (choose your top 6).

A. Price

B. Brand

C. Performance (of product)

D. Innovativeness (of product)

E. Uniqueness

F. Size

G. Quality (of product)

H. Environmental Impact

I. Social Impact

J. Animal Welfare

K. Longevity (of product)

L. Certifications

M. Material (of product)

(14) Which of the above qualities is the MOST important to you (please choose one). A. Write in

(15) Select which of the following certifications you've heard

of: A. Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)

B. Cradle to Cradle

C. Fairtrade

D. B-Corp by B Lab

E. OEKO-TEX - Standard 100

F. OEKO-TEX - Made in Green

G. Global Recycle Standard

H. Bluesign

I. SA8000 Social Accountability International

J. Ethical Trading Initiative

K. PETAApproved Vegan

(16) Select which of the following materials you've heard of:

A. Organic cotton

B. Recycled cotton

C. Recycled nylon (Econyl)

D. Organic linen

- E. Lyocell
- F. Organic bamboo
- G. Recycled polyester
- H. Tencel

(17) Which of the following brands have you shopped from in the past 3-4 months
(select all that apply)?

- A. Nike
- B. Zara
- C. H&M
- D. Princess Polly
- E. Urban Outfitters
- F. Levi's
- G. Gap
- H. Old Navy
- I. Shein
- J. Boohoo
- K. Forever 21
- L. Misguided
- M. Adika
- N. Pacsun
- O. American Eagle
- P. Aritzia
- Q. Lululemon

R. Vans

S. Champion

T. Verge Girl

U. Amazon

V. I.Am.Gia

W. Brandy Melville

X. ASOS

Y. Pretty Little Thing

Z. Madewell

AA. Nasty Gal

BB. Fashion Nova

CC. YesStyle

(18) Do you ever impulse buy? If yes, how often does this happen?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Write in

(19) When you impulse buy, how do you typically feel BEFORE the purchase is made?

A. Sad

B. Anxious

C. Curious

D. Stimulated

E. Bored

F. Positive

G. Independent

(20) When you impulse buy, what do you typically feel after the purchase is made?

A. Satisfied

B. Pleasured

C. Sad

D. Angry

E. Indifferent

F. Irritated

G. Shameful

H. Regretful

I. Strong

J. Excited

(21) Dressing well (whatever that means to you) matters to me. I like to look good.

A. Yes

B. No

(22) Would you say that you have a “sense of style?”

A. Yes

B. No

C. Not really

D. Don't care

E. Still developing

(23) How would you describe your sense of style?

A. Edgy

- B. Non-conventional
- C. Cute
- D. Preppy
- E. Basic
- F. Quirky
- G. Other (please specify)

(24) Would you consider your taste in fashion part of your identity?

- A. Yes
- B. No

(25) If you answered yes to the question above, please tell a story about how this came about or first developed?

- A. Write in

(26) What does the term “fast fashion” mean to you (in one sentence)?

- A. Write in

(27) I am concerned about the impact of fast fashion on the environment and/or workers. A. Yes

- B. No
- C. Indifferent

(28) I have stayed away from certain brands because I thought they were fast fashion.

- A. Yes
- B. No

(29) I shop for clothes according to my values.

- A. Always

B. Sometimes

C. Never

(30) My “shopping values” are...

A. Write in

(31) I have noticed recently that more and more brands are using words like

“sustainability” “transparency” “recycled materials” when they discuss themselves, their products, and/or brand.

A. Yes

B. No

(32) What are your primary emotions towards the amount of brands using this language?

A. Overwhelmed

B. Indifferent

C. Skeptical

D. Angry

E. Hopeful

F. Engaged

G. Positive

H. Curious

(33) What makes it hard for you to shop sustainably when you want to?

A. I don't know enough about the problems caused by fashion

B. I don't know which brands are sustainable and which are not

C. Sustainable brands are too hard to find in the places I like to shop

D. I can't find the kind of clothes I like from sustainable brands

- E. Sustainable clothing is sometimes or often too expensive for me
- F. I don't trust the claims so called "sustainable brands" make
- G. I don't shop sustainably
- H. Price

(34) I would like to shop more sustainably in the future.

- A. Yes, and I have a plan about how to do it
- B. Yes, but I don't know how
- C. Not sure
- D. No, this is not important to me

(35) I feel pressure to shop sustainably because of... (select all that apply):

- A. My peers
- B. My interests (academic and non-academic)
- C. Brands I follow
- D. Influencers
- E. Social Media
- F. Trend
- G. Climate Crisis
- H. Personal values
- I. I don't feel pressure to shop sustainably

(36) I believe certain brands' advertising targets me online due to my own personal values and/or shopping habits.

- A. Yes
- B. No

C. Unsure

(37) I have heard of greenwashing.

A. Yes

B. No

(38) Greenwashing in the fashion industry is.... (one sentence).

A. Write in

(39) Some of my favorite sustainable clothing brands are...

A. Write in

(40) I have found myself purchasing clothing, knowing it is harmful to the environment, people, and/or animals.

A. Yes

B. No

C. Unsure/Can't remember

(41) I have found myself purchasing clothing, knowing I can't afford it.

A. Yes

B. No

C. Unsure/can't remember

(42) I care about the environment.

A. Yes

B. No

(43) I care about people receiving a livable wage and not being subjected to forced labor.

A. Yes

B. No

C. I don't know enough about this issue

(44) I understand how supply chains work in the fashion industry.

A. Yes

B. No

C. Somewhat

D. I've never heard of a supply chain

(45) I understand how circularity in the economy and/or fashion industry works.

A. Yes

B. No

C. Somewhat

D. I've never heard of circularity

Section II. Greenwashing or Not?

In the following section, you will be presented with a series of claims and/or mission statements that come from actual brands (both well-known and less well-known). These statements are all publicly available and have been found via the brand's website and/or social media. This part of the survey will assess your ability to gauge the reliability of advertising claims within the clothing industry.

1. In collaboration with our partner Oshadi Collective in Erode, India, our Organic Cotton Collection is woven with care and created with consciousness. Each piece is made with organic cotton and colored using natural or organic dyes. They're hand-washable, and ready for all of life's journeys and adventures. This is truly a

collection made from Mother Earth, for Mother Earth, and designed to be loved by generations to come.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

2. At _____, we understand sustainability to be a continuous project. We're developing specific programs with a holistic approach, integrating social and environmental sustainability as well as the health and safety of our products.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

3. At _____, we want the right choice to be as easy as putting on a great T-shirt.

That's why we partner with the best, ethical factories around the world. Source only the finest materials. And share those stories with you—down to the true cost of every product we make. It's a new way of doing things. We call it Radical Transparency.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

4. Not only do we make our clothes from recycled materials, we take back your old _____ pieces to turn them into brand new _____ pieces. (None of that downcycling business.) We're already used to making new stuff out of old stuff. Now we're making new stuff out of old stuff....out of old stuff.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

5. All of our textiles are made from recycled materials in our facility in Taiwan that specializes in eco-friendly and high-quality textiles, then cut-and-sewn in one of our partner facilities carefully chosen for their values and ethics. Our core factory is a magical place in Hanoi, Vietnam, that's SA8000 certified, guarantees fair wages, safe and healthy conditions, and zero forced or child labor. a. This brand is greenwashing.

- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

6. Everything we do stems from how to do better by our planet—like planting trees. We plant trees because it's one of the best ways to create a more sustainable future. But over the years, we've realized that our journey doesn't start and end with planting trees. We're constantly looking at innovative ways to make apparel with the smallest possible footprint and create more circular supply chains. To give you some context, a _____ sweatshirt uses on average 75% less water to make than the other sweatshirts in your closet.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

7. All of our swimwear are made in Bali, Indonesia with an ocean of love at an ethically certified factory. From every bikini bought, our factory donates to

grassroots organizations that support the environment, women's access to education and those in need. We donate proceeds to ROLE Foundation and BALI WISE.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

8. This is one of the most important parts - we handpick every single fabric based on its environmental footprint and lifetime durability. We only ever use Class A and B fibers and as we go we'll only ever look for the most responsible fabric material and technology available. That means natural, renewable, recycled, biodegradable and or low-impact textiles only.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

9. At _____, we want to make better denim by reducing the use of virgin materials and reusing what already exists. Our goal is for all of the raw materials used in our products to consist of 30% recycled materials by 2025. a. This brand is greenwashing. (42%)

- b. I think they are sustainable. (35%)
- c. Not sure.

10. By 2025, we will achieve at least 75 percent sustainable materials for our products—including fibers that are recycled, renewable, regenerative, sourced

responsibly, or some combination thereof, and/or are manufactured using low-resource processes.

- a. This brand is greenwashing.
- b. I think they are sustainable.
- c. Not sure.

Labour	
Worker policies and empowerment	Workers' rights principles applied across the supply chain including monitoring health and safety, child labour, forced labour, freedom of association, collective bargaining, non-discrimination, non-excessive hours and the right and capacity to make a complaint
Low risk production	Risk of labour abuse in supply chains and participation in multi-stakeholder initiatives to improve labour conditions
Living wage	Living wage definition and implementation across the supply chain
Knowing suppliers	Supply chain transparency including publishing supplier lists and tracking subcontractors
Supplier relationships	Auditing and assurance practices across the supply chain and public reporting including unannounced visits and off-site worker interviews

Environment	
Resource management and disposal	Types of materials used, efforts to reduce fabric and material waste in design and manufacturing, types of packaging used, deforestation impacts, product durability and promotion of long-term use
Energy use and greenhouse gas emissions	Energy use including direct emissions and indirect emissions (purchased electricity, emissions generated from the supply chain beyond own operations), setting science based GHG targets and reducing GHG emissions through emissions reduction activities
Chemicals use and disposal	Chemical use and disposal, setting goals to reduce or eliminate chemical use and adopting alternatives such as vegetable based or water based dyes
Water usage and effluent	Water usage policies and practices, engagement on water issues, specific targets to improve water stewardship and quality and treatment of waste

Animal	
Fur	Use of fur, shearing and karakul lamb fur and commitment not to use fur
Leather	Use of leather and if upcycled/recycled
Wool	Use of wool and if sourced from non-mulesed sheep or upcycled/recycled
Down and feathers	Use of down and feathers and how sourced



Angora	Use of angora and commitment not to use angora
Exotic animal hairs	Use of exotic animal hair such as pashmina, cashmere, mohair, alpaca, llama, vicuña and shahtoosh
Exotic animal skins	Use of exotic animal skin such as crocodile and alligator

How we rate

We collect information and score each brand against each issue, using the Good On You brand rating tool. Consistent with the requirement for brands to be transparent, all data is obtained from public sources.

Good On You aggregates data from a large number of external rankings, certifications and standards systems, as well as public company reporting to assess a brand's performance against each material issue. The data sources used to compile Good On You ratings are identified in more detail below.

We distinguish between small and large brands based on annual turnover and the number of employees. We expect larger brands to publish more detailed information on policies and targets and to have greater influence over their supply chain.

The rating process

1. We identify brands to rate, with priority given to user requests, to brands with the largest market share and to brands that are likely to rate highly.
2. We determine if the brand has a parent company, and if it should be rated using our small or large brand rating tool.
3. We collect public information to assess how the brand performs against the material issues identified in the rating tool, using data scraping and other aggregation technology supplemented by desk research.
4. We verify the collected data with automated internal validation and human review.
5. A score is calculated automatically for each of the three key areas (labour, environment, animals) and overall for the brand.
6. We generate a text summary of each brand's rating and identify similar brand recommendations using smart algorithms.
7. We collect further information about the brand, including price range, product type, style(s) and retailers.
8. The scoring, summary and further information are reviewed and approved by our Head of Ratings.
9. The approved brand listings are uploaded to the Good On You app and made available for use in Good On You content.
10. Ratings are reviewed periodically and whenever material new information is presented or discovered.

The rating labels

Brands are rated from 1 (We Avoid) to 5 (Great). Overall ratings are derived from an average of the brand's scores for each key area (labour, environment, animals).

Great = These brands score highly in at least two areas and usually have one or more broad-based certifications. They are often built to be sustainable and ethical from the ground up and are very

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transparent.

Good = These brands adopt many positive initiatives and are often leaders on one or more key issues.

It's a Start = These brands are transparent about some important issues and are making good progress on one or more of them.

Not Good Enough = These brands have provided some information in one or more area, but not enough to address key issues or assess impacts across their supply chains.

We Avoid = These brands provide little to no relevant or concrete information. In some cases the brand may make ambiguous claims that look like greenwashing. Consumers have a right to know more.

Data Sources

Our key data sources are:

1. Certifications, accreditations and other standards systems
2. Independent ratings
3. Brand and parent company websites
4. Credible third party reports

The Good On You rating methodology does not consider any information that is not in the public domain, including any private brand communications. Where a brand approaches us with information, we encourage them to publish that information and take account of it only when it is in fact published.

Certifications, accreditations and standards systems

There are a large number of certifications, accreditations, voluntary standards and model codes of conduct ("standards systems") that seek to address all or some of the issues relevant to the clothing, footwear and accessory industries.

Each standards system works in different ways. Some apply to products, some to factories or other facilities and some are designed to be adopted by a brand and applied to all or part of their supply chain. Assurance of compliance varies between standards systems, with different requirements for transparency, auditing or other assurance methods.

Good On You has reviewed each of the standards systems to identify their scope and assurance methodology in order to assess how to score a brand that is certified by or complies with a standards system.

A list of the main certifications, accreditations and standards systems that we consider is below.

Independent rankings

The rating methodology incorporates credible independent rankings of brands where they map to all or a significant subset of the material issues we consider. For example the 2018 Ethical Fashion Report by Baptist World Aid rates 330 brands on material labour issues. Where available the Good On You score for labour is based on the ranking in the Ethical Fashion Report. We continuously review other third party rankings to consider their validity for inclusion in the methodology.



GENERATION Z AND CONSUMPTION

DO YOU LIKE TO SHOP?



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

To participate, complete an online survey at:
<https://tinyurl.com/greenwashingsurvey>

*Supported by the Environmental Studies Department
Contact: diana.bunge@bc.edu*

