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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Thesis Research

# Sustainable Consumerism in the Eyes of the Egyptian Generation Z

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## **Abstract**

Sustainable Consumerism is a topic that is still being explored and developed across nations and countries. With the rising challenges of sustainable development, corporate sustainability maintains its position as being extremely challenging and difficult to achieve. Moreover, the new generation of consumers and the world's future leaders – generation Z – have their characteristics and expectations that are expected to change the whole industrial scene to achieve sustainable development. Meanwhile, Egyptian generation Z remains unexplored and ambiguous. This study aims at studying the behavioral aspects of Egyptian generation Z, their consumerism, ecological consciousness, and corporate expectations. It adopts qualitative methods using in-depth semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of participants representing the intended target segment. The study findings are represented in a framework showing four layers of sustainability: awareness, motivation, action, and advocacy, with implications on the consumer, government, and private sector.

*Keywords:* Corporate sustainability – Generation Z – Consumerism – Sustainability – Developing Countries – Egypt.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Chapter 1: Sustainability and Global Challenges .....	7
Chapter 2: Corporate Sustainability.....	11
2.1 Corporate Sustainability.....	11
2.2 Ecolabels .....	13
2.3 Sustainable Consumerism.....	18
Chapter 3: Generation Z.....	22
3.1 Generation Z .....	22
3.2 Generation Z Persona.....	25
3.3 Generation Z Consumerism .....	27
3.3.a Generation Z USA.....	27
3.3.b Generation Z UK.....	29
3.3.c Generation Z China .....	30
3.3.d Generation Z India .....	31
3.3.e Egyptian Generation Z .....	32
3.3.e Developed VS Developing Countries .....	33
Chapter 4: Research Methodology.....	34
4.1 Research Methodology .....	34
4.2 Sampling .....	34
4.3 Data Collection .....	36
4.4 Data Analysis .....	37
Chapter 5: Egyptian Gen Z and Sustainable Consumerism.....	38
5.1 Findings and Discussion .....	38
5.1.A Awareness .....	38
5.1.B Motivation .....	45
5.1.C Action .....	47
5.1.D Advocacy .....	50
5.2 Summary of Findings.....	53
5.3 Study Implications .....	56

5.3.A Consumer .....	56
5.3.B Government.....	56
5.3.C Corporates .....	57
5.4 Limitations and Future Research .....	57
References.....	58

## **Introduction**

Sustainable development is becoming more important every day in our modern world[1]. The advancement in technology and manufacturing is constantly putting pressure on the resources and thus, constantly triggering new ecological challenges such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and air pollution[2]. While heading towards overpopulation, humanity continues to grow and develop with eagerness for expanding its potential and adapting technology to create an unprecedented wave of modern civilization. Accordingly, the only way for the planet to survive and humanity to thrive is through integrating sustainable development as a key pillar in coexistence. Our era's human activity relies on mass production and industrialization, which negatively impacts nature and its resources. The extensive exploitation of resources not bringing various resources to an end but also create new ecological challenges.

Sustainability – as defined by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development – means meeting the needs from the resources by the living mankind while preserving them to the coming generations[3]. Conceptually, sustainability is achievable through the integration of its three typical pillars: economic, social, and environmental in any strategic framework or action plan[4]. The integration of the three pillars balances the whole process to achieve economic viability with social fairness and the least possible negative impact on the environment. In 2011, Professor Alexander Zehnder developed a new approach for the three pillars of sustainability[4] serving practicality and implementation rather than on-paper concepts. Zehnder's new model stated that the three sustainability pillars are: Technology and innovation, laws and governance, and economics and financial incentives[4]. This model acts as a guide to multidisciplinary projects and processes to develop an action plan for sustainable development. It also highlights the importance of the economic pillar and its viability through encouragement, motivation, and financial incentives to ease the burden of social and environmental compliance and therefore achieving the not-so-easy corporate sustainability. Corporate Sustainability is one of the challenges faced by businesses while implementing the corresponding sustainability strategies and putting them into action. Balancing the business financially is a hurdle due to the hardship of developing the economic sustainability pillar. Typically, sustainability work is directly linked to social and environmental development as a translation of the firm's philanthropic values. Eventually, companies tend to perceive development as a charity act that boosts the company's

reputation and positioning in the eyes of their customers and surrounding communities, which is typically referred to as ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ (CSR). If there is an important element that businesses utilize to influence all their stakeholders; it is CSR, which impacts clients, shareholders, proprietors, investors, collaborators, and communities. The community is one of the vital keywords here, as implementing CSR strategies have to include several factors that will eventually have compelling results to an organization's sustainability, that primarily involve the community and environment in which they operate affecting collaborators, employment opportunities, and administrative and financial matters[5]. Looking further into why people associate themselves with luxury brands, for instance, it is evident that this relation has psychological motives as it boosts their confidence, acts as a status symbol, and creates a sense of belonging to a certain tier. Also, it has been proven that there is a connection between a brand's social responsibility and a consumer's positive feedback through aspects related to affection, cognition, and behavior. A brand's CSR direction can gravitate how far a person sees your brand's credibility, and that ultimately affects buying decisions[5]. However, without a properly integrated framework that encompasses strong financial planning, relying only on non-profit communal projects would not only elevate the consumers’ expectations but it would also drain the organization economically since the corresponding investments would not have tangible returns[4]. This practice, despite being valuable, puts the whole operation into distress because of the high-investment-low-return cycle. Unless the consumer is aware of consumerism, responsible buying, and eco-friendly products, the economic viability of sustainable business will always be at risk.

There is no doubt that consumers are one of the most important pillars of the economy. Consequently, the study focuses on the future generation of consumers which will, eventually, be leading the world in terms of governance, operation, demand, and supply. Despite the controversies in Generation Z’s age definition, they can be described as the population born after 1990[6]. They are global citizens born in the revolutionary age of technology which unites them to share common characteristics cross-countries. Genzers are tech-savvy individuals, digital media consumers, aware citizens, accustomed to having knowledge and information at their fingertips, and have their own set of values and expectations within their communities and ecosystem[7]. Although this generation is highly aware and educated regarding the environmental challenges, they are going to face significant challenges, on top of which are climate change, overpopulation,

and food security[8][9]. These factors will eventually put pressure on the industrial sector and specifically the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) companies to meet this generation's high-quality expectations yet meeting their good corporate citizenship standards[10].

All things considered, the means of achieving corporate sustainability through responsible consumerism is a significant topic to be explored. More specifically, there is a clear gap identified in the literature about Egyptian genzers and their consumerism. Therefore, this research serves as an exploratory study of the Egyptian Generation Z to understand their level of awareness in Sustainability, their perspective of sustainable products, and how much they are willing to pay for them. Also, their expectations from the FMCG companies in terms of values, environmental compliance, and social responsibility. Furthermore, the study would assess the Egyptian genzers' perception of the different Sustainability labels such as the Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance. This research would act as a guideline to understanding the Egyptian Generation Z with their needs and expectations as well as the structure of the Egyptian market and the way it is evolving. Eventually, it would help the private sector corporates peek into their future and develop their social and environmental responsibility platforms according to their future customers' expectations. More specifically, this study is aiming to answer the following question: will the ecological awareness of the Egyptian generation Z reflect on their consumerism echoing a change in the Egyptian market and corporate approach to customer retainment?

## Literature Review

### Chapter 1: Sustainability and Global Challenges

Sustainability means maintaining a particular resource and avoid its depletion or, in other words, the capability to continue living continuously without strain. Sustainability mainly revolves around the increased civilized human population, which is the society, to coexist within components that make up the environment [11]. The coexistence is directed towards an economy that can maintain the world's ever-growing population. When sustainability is mentioned, another word that pops in someone's mind is 'sustainable development.' Sustainable development is based on the UN world commission, which seeks to promote the notion of attaining the present goals and needs without putting to risk the capability of the future generation to meet their own goals and



needs[11]. Sustainable development seeks to explain to human beings that they must take care of the environment so that the environment will, in turn, take care of them as per now and the days to come.

Just like it was stated, in the introductory part of the study that sustainability revolves around the social, environmental, and economic variables; similarly, these three components also form the objectives as in. The first objective is to have an equitable society[12]. An equal society should ensure social justice, peace, and security are provided to all individuals in society regardless of gender, social class, or race. Another aspect of social equity is the eradication of poverty, such that every individual can afford to have a meal by the end of the day. Similarly, social equity is characterized by having favorable human settlements such that the settlement standards are balanced[12]. In so doing, this ensures that everyone lives in a habitable environment. Besides that, it also implies that human rights should be adhered to not to forget labor rights for all individuals regardless of the caliber. The other objective involves having a bearable environment. A bearable environment will ensure that there is environmental justice, such that there are rules and regulations that govern how human beings relate to the environment. In so doing, then we will fulfill human desires without tampering with the natural environmental niche[12]. The environment will, in turn, through agriculture, give enough agricultural products for human consumption. The agricultural produce will also impact positively on the economy contributing to its viability. The third objective is having a viable economy in the aspect that it should be able to finance bearing in mind, it should impact positively on the society and environment. As a result of having limited resources, the economic sector should evade extravagant utilization of raw material. Similarly, it should put into consideration circumstances where raw materials can be recycled and reused be implemented[12]. Using renewable sources of energy is also encouraged to avoid depletion of non-renewable sources of energy. The economy should also be molded in search of a way that it is flexible, and in case change is inevitable, it can swiftly adapt.

The above objectives of sustainable development are goal-oriented and are focused on specific several goals. The study has discussed some of the goals briefly to understand the objectives from a deeper perspective. One of the goals is to eradicate inequality; this goal has several means and ways of ensuring it is attained. First, is to empower women and suppress gender inequality within all countries, races, social classes, or religions, and so on[13]. It will also come

in handy in shunning racism by letting human beings know that they all have a common race, which is humanity, and that none is superior to another. Equity will play an essential role in fighting gender-based violence, religious wars, racism battles, among other social evils, therefore, promoting sustainability.

Another goal is the eradication of poverty, which is slightly linked to inequality when we link it to social class. Poverty is a factor that promotes sustainability since one will not be involved in some activities encouraging environmental degradation in the name of earning a living. Poverty fosters crime as a means of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor to make a living[13]. Crime harms the economy; therefore, hindering sustainability. Poverty eradication can only be achieved through the creation of employment, which has a positive effect on the economy, promoting sustainability.

Similarly, education is featured in the goals of sustainable development. Education is depicted to embrace equity and promote a continuous system of learning, which is inclusive. Therefore, learning institutions should embrace to all gender, race, religion, class, among other factors that hinder inclusivity and equity[13]. Nevertheless, institutions should promote inclusivity and peace among all societies. They should also be driven towards accountability and seeking to provide justice at all levels.

Besides, how can production take place without the use of energy? This adds to the list of goals of having the availability of cheap or affordable energy. The energy should also be renewable if the circumstances allow and be reliable at the same time[13]. A goal slightly tied to energy is water since it even contributes to energy production, such as electricity. The availability of water should be made to promote proper sanitization, and to achieve the same promotion of water management strategies should be secured.

Likewise, there is the goal of having the ultimate solution to food insecurity, which will ensure enough food for everyone. Food security will play a massive role in the eradication of hunger within all spheres of society. Food security will also aid in having desirable nutrition for everyone[13]. Apart from that, the efforts that will be directed towards adequate food security will see to its sustainable farming, improving agriculture. If at all the methods used in agriculture are ecofriendly, the environment is promoted as well.

Health is a relatively another goal of sustainability since the promotion of healthy living that cuts across all ages is highly also a core focus. Health is especially stressed to ensure infant's and children's mortality rate drops to almost zero. To achieve the latter maternal healthcare should be improved to the required standards[13]. Health should also be improved to combat pandemics and diseases such as COVID-19, malaria, Ebola, HIV/AIDs, cancer, among others efficiently. Through technology and innovations, health has been improved to higher levels in the field of medicine. Drugs and vaccines are among the innovations which have made it possible to eliminate some diseases such as smallpox. Scientists are currently using these innovations to find a cure for COVID-19 and improve the health sector for the preservation of human life. The treatment of COVID-19 will also help recover the economy and positively impact on economic sustainability.

Infrastructure and habitation similarly prove to be an essential goal. The development of infrastructure will pave the way to industrialization and advance the remote parts such as the rural areas. Upon opening rural regions that are vast with the agricultural product will ease the transport of farm products improving the product market and agriculture. Improvement in agriculture will also improve the living standards of the farmers and impact positively on the economy. Improved infrastructure enhances habitation; for instance, security lights in an estate will drastically reduce the crime rate. Therefore, the residents will feel and believe to be safer than they were before. New inventions of infrastructure such as internet connectivity, has positively impacted on the global market and trade. Hence, an improvement in trade has boosted several economies, and as a result, economic sustainability is achieved[13].

To conclude, sustainability is interdependent on social, environmental, and economic variables, which make up the three objectives of sustainability. The three variables that make up the objectives should have certain aspects to maximize sustainability; equitable society, bearable environment, and a viable economy, as it was explained earlier. Sustainability is goal-oriented, whereby some of the goals involve poverty eradication, gender equity, and women empowerment, inclusive and equitable education, among others. There also exist challenges that make it difficult such as poor leadership and governance, poverty, environmental degradation, and climate change, among others, which have been listed. The challenges should be addressed with the appropriate solutions to attain sustainability. For instance, poor leadership and governance could be rectified by choosing to elect leaders who have a vision for sustainability and development and will tackle

the challenges wisely or even consult from more experienced leaders that have faced similar problems. When the society takes care of the environment by making it bearable, the environment takes care of the society, ensuring equity and, at the same time, has a positive impact on the economy, making it viable.

## Chapter 2: Corporate Sustainability

### 2.1 Corporate Sustainability

Corporate sustainability has been trending as one of the most important research topics recently[14]. Businesses and corporations are becoming more interested in studying their impact on ecological and social development as part of their sustainability strategy. Generally, researchers have been working to develop various models and frameworks for sustainability management within organizations. Despite the importance of integrating sustainability strategies and processes into the companies' governance and operations to achieve corporate sustainability, it is an ongoing struggle due to the lack of practicality in the corresponding proposed theories[15]. This hurdle holds back the management and executive teams from involving ecological factors in their business action plans. Thus, the continuous hunt for best practices and success stories of incorporating sustainability within a company's behavior, yet, achieving economic viability is becoming a necessity.

In former times, the main focus of any successful managerial board was maximizing the organization's profits to satisfy the owners and shareholders. However, the rise of sustainable development and ecological concern expanded the role of corporations to include environmental and social purposes in their strategy and processes[15]. Moreover, their responsibility has grown to not only satisfy shareholders but also, stakeholders including customers, employees, environment, government, and even competitors. In fact, according to Harvard Business School, corporates with good sustainability performance are more appealing to investors than others with less ecological conscious and ethical behavior. Thus, stockholders take into consideration companies' social and environmental compliance while taking decisions about their fund's allocation[16].

Recently, more companies were able to achieve a balance between being sustainable and economically viable. It is really important to study and understand different experiences and best practices of such firms and be able to pass it on to others. For instance, researchers have explored the success stories of numerous prestigious and remarkable corporations which were referred to, according to the study, as Green Giants[15]. In addition to integrating sustainable practices within the companies' strategy, processes, and value chains, the research revealed that it is equally important to make sure the company reflects the same concepts in their branding and communications. In other words, marketing is as vital as operations in being responsible and sustainable because raising the consumer's awareness about ecological responsibility will increase their loyalty to green products and enhance responsible companies' equity and positioning[15].

Consequently, in a mass-production era, it is crucial to consider the limited resources that we have access to and raise awareness about sustainable consumption as well as green marketing[17]. Corporates and customers must protect the environment and be responsible. Nevertheless, marketers have a great mediating role to communicate, raise awareness, and encourage sustainable behavior. Namely, in 2018, the NGO named Globe Scan published its sustainability survey results. The organization revealed that the first driver pushing companies to become more responsible is their reputation, next, came consumer demand[18]. To explain more, Toyota, General Electric, Walmart, and IKEA are examples of multi-national companies that managed to create a competitive advantage through their CSR activities. These firms succeeded in communicating their social and environmental activities to the consumer and communities among which they exist[19]. As a result, they uplifted their positioning, increased their sales, established their sustainability platform, and situated themselves as good-corporate-citizens.

In that case, corporate sustainability can be described as the adoption of responsible corporate behavior within the company's strategy and processes[20]. Moreover, companies, whether start-ups or big corporations, must be committed to raising consumer awareness, mitigating ecological challenges, and green marketing. However, both corporate and consumer need to be aware of the difference between green marketing and greenwashing. Green marketing is about integrating sustainability concepts into a corporate's system and processes to make a real impact on the environment and communicating it to their consumers. While greenwashing is pretending to be a green company only through marketing campaigns and small green initiatives

that are not integrated within their operations and thus reflecting unsustainable behavior in general. For instance, fast-fashion companies succeeded in convincing their consumers that they are eco-friendly and green through big marketing campaigns tackling their customers' emotions, while the reality is they are the second most harmful industries to the environment in the world after the oil and gas sector. Thus, it is very important to differentiate between the two concepts to avoid the hurdle of mistrust between consumers and corporates, as well as harming the entire green industry, upon finding out about the real practices of the greenwashers.

One form of green marketing and sustainable consumerism is sustainability labeling which is referred to as eco-labeling or sustainability stamps. Ecolabelling is a form of sustainability declaration; companies use public or private auditing authorities to confirm their sustainable behavior and its integration within their systems. Also, they earn the privilege to use the ecolabel on their products as a way to communicate their sustainable conformity to the consumers[21]. Thus, closing the loop of sustainable strategy, ecological behavior, corporate responsibility, sustainable consumerism, and therefore, corporate sustainability and economic viability.

## 2.2 Ecolabels

Sustainability is closely related to sustainable development, which encourages the vast population of human beings to employ means and methods of meeting their needs without endangering the future society to meet their needs as well[22]. Sustainable development promotes the co-existence of human beings living in their ecological niche and safeguarding the environment, which in turn results in having a viable economy. When human beings safeguard the environment, they similarly protect the human generation from many dangers related to environmental degradation[23]. Some of the risks of environmental degradation include but are not limited to global warming, desertification, poverty, among others. There are many ways of achieving sustainability; however, the study focuses on sustainability labels on food products, which promotes sustainable consumption.

Food products are generally produced for consumption, and as a result, when the intended consumer consumes the product, trade must occur. As a result of trade, value is added to the economy, making it viable and contributes sustainable development at large. On the contrary, the production of these consumer goods requires raw materials that are harvested from the

environment whereby the demand is very high, according to the ever-increasing population. As a result of rapid population demand, on the other hand, it is very high, resulting in massive production, which could relatively deplete the available resources if not controlled. Large-scale production at the same time leads to increased pollution due to increased carbon emissions, which pollute the environment putting to risk the future generation[24]. Through sustainable consumption involves the use of products and, in this case, food products sparingly, which will result in reduced waste and, in the long run, reduce the pollution rate. Therefore, sustainable consumption will ensure that the current world population will meet its needs and ensure the survival of the future generation.

Sustainable consumption in food is ensured through the application of many strategies, but our focus on this study is sustainability labels. Sustainability labels are stamped logos on food products such as coffee, chocolate, among other products certifying as sustainable. These eco-friendly labels serve as communication tools to the consumer to sustainability awareness, ensuring that consumers are aware that they should meet their needs without putting at risk those of the future generation. There exist several categories of fair trade which include but are not limited to, Fairtrade, rainforest alliance, carbon index scheme, and animal welfare[25]. These sustainability labels are further grouped into two groups, which are ethical eco-labels and environmental eco-labels. Of the four examples have given Fairtrade and animal welfare fall under ethical eco-labels while on the other hand, rainforest alliance and carbon index schemes fall under environmental eco-labels. The study will lean more towards the Fairtrade and rainforest alliance; thus, it will explore both the ethical and the environmental eco-labels.

Fairtrade eco-labeling, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, falls under the ethical system, which encourages people to be considered before any other consideration[26]. Namely, the people here are the employees and the farmer taking care and working in the production facility or the farm. In so doing, compensation is equal to the output, which also enables both the employee and the farmer to meet their daily needs without strain, thus upgrading their living standards. When a consumer product is certified with a Fairtrade mark means that the producer has adhered to the Fairtrade specifications. Specifications that are complied with by Fairtrade are environmental, economic, and social, which are core components of sustainable development.

Fairtrade can similarly embrace corporate social responsibility hence where it can have a positive impact on society. The food industries can explore corporate social responsibility as they fulfill the agenda of giving back to the society of both their employees and the farmer[27]. Through CSR, the food industry will as well enlighten the society on the importance of sustainable consumption, which ensures resources are not depleted. This will also give the food industry a chance to market their products to the consumers and probably explain why labeled products may tend to have slightly higher prices. The food industry can enlighten society on the health implications of foods that do not promote sustainable consumption, which could result in increased mortality rates. Increased mortality rates are against achieving sustainable development and poor health.



Figure 1- Twinings Fairtrade Tea [28]



Figure 2 - Cadbury Fairtrade Chocolate [29]

Another eco-label is the rainforest alliance, which will represent the environmental category labels. Any product stamped with the rainforest logo certifications confirms that all the required specifications require environmental conservations, employee's needs are meet accordingly and that of the society[30]. Some of the products that are associated with these certifications include but are not limited to furniture, flowers, toilet paper, tea, and coffee such as



Costa Coffee, the popular multinational coffee brand as shown in Figure 3 - Costa Coffee Rainforest Alliance Certification [31]. Since the rainforest alliance involves growing crops under natural conditions, it promotes healthy products without the use of chemicals, which is recommended for sustainable health. Rainforest alliance also ensures that the soils are not acidic since it encourages using organic materials to add fertility to the crops grown; for instance, if it is tea, let humans and dead animals in the soil contribute to that. If any additions are required, a farmer could as well used organic manure, which contributes to healthy tea produce.



Figure 3 - Costa Coffee Rainforest Alliance Certification [31]

Producers that meet rainforest alliance along with the other labels go a long way to promoting sustainable consumption. For example, coffee farmers who are satisfied with the rainforest alliance grow their coffee under natural conditions centrally to the modern methods that have forced farmers to cut down forests just to grow coffee[32]. Farmers who grow their coffee according to rainforest alliance specifications protect water resources, soil erosion, and prevent desertification because of deforestation. These groups of producers similarly ensure that they use locally produced goods that ensure a fair price for the raw materials to farmers. Using locally produced raw materials increases local production with is a positive step towards food security, which is a relative goal of sustainable development[33]. Similarly, locally produced products ensure that imports of consumer products are very minimal, which minimizes the pollution emitted by the transport vessels.

Production heavily relies on energy, which could relatively impact negatively on the environment if it emits a lot of chloral floral carbons (CFCs) or Carbone dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). The chloral floral carbons, when emitted to the atmosphere, harm the environment, which is the ozone layer depletion. The ozone layer protects human beings, which include producers, consumers, employees, and when depleted, it could result in exposing them to the harmful sun rays. The carbon scheme label encourages using energy with fewer emissions, especially renewable sources of energy that protect the environment and the living organisms[34]. Producers are also not to dumped untreated waste products into river sources and large water masses. The dumping untreated industrial waste results in the destruction of water living organisms, which could negatively affect economic activities such as fishing. Producers are highly encouraged to treat waste products and reuse them for other eco-friendly activities or treat them before releasing them to the environment.

### **Barriers to Ecolabels**

Sustainable labels directed towards food products face various challenges that hinder the attainment of sustainable development, thus, jeopardizing the success of the future generation to meet its needs. One of the barriers is high prices associated with such products, which makes consumers opt to purchase alternative products since they meet the consumer's satisfaction equally. The barrier of high prices is backed up with another challenge, which is poverty. Since sustainable labeled products prove to be expensive poverty-stricken societies, opt to buy cheaper products that play zero roles in achieving sustainable development.

Another barrier is low illiteracy levels, especially in the developing countries. A consumer with low illiteracy levels will not differentiate between a labeled product and the rest; therefore, they will most likely refrain from buying the labeled product because of the high price associated with it. Similarly, poor leadership and governance is a barrier to sustainable labels. Poor leadership results in poor laws of governance; hence the legislation will encourage fair trade and sustainability labels of consumer food products[35]. Inadequate financing similarly is a barrier since sustainable production could seem expensive to some factories; therefore, they will less likely switch to sustainable production methods. Sustainable production methods involve limiting the use of the food resource by reducing the waste product and the pollution by emitting less carbon to the

environment. If the barriers are worked on, this will contribute positively to sustainable consumption promoting the wellbeing of the future generation.

Sustainability labels impact positively on the stakeholders since they are geared towards sustainable development. For consumers it provides them with products that contribute to good health; hence the high cost is for the expense of a better product. In respect to the environment, it is conserved so as not to jeopardize the future generation from meeting their needs. It has been noted that eco-labeled products are to be highly-priced, and consumers often refused to pick them. Therefore NGOs, the government, and food industries should create awareness through sensitization to consumers on sustainability labels. Barriers to sustainability labels have been such as poverty, among others, have been highlighted and a possible recommendation that can help deal with the proposed restrictions.

### 2.3 Sustainable Consumerism

Sustainable consumption is fulfilling one's needs using good quality products without compromising ecological health. In other words, products with the least possible emissions of carbon dioxide or other pollutants, least toxicity, mostly natural and with minimal impact on the natural resources and surrounding environment[36]. Green Consumption is another term used to refer to sustainable consumption. It implies the use of 'green' products as a means of meeting our needs, yet, making eco-friendly choices. For example, a sustainable consumer would buy a low-energy light bulb, local food produce, organic fruits, and vegetables with recyclable packaging, and many other examples of sustainable decisions[36]. A consumer with a sustainable mindset would tame and minimize his consumption to focus on the basic and important needs and fulfills them through high-quality ecological goods[37].

Another opinion suggests that sustainable living is adopting an anti-consumption approach rather than consuming responsibly. With this intention, the consumer would use a perspective based on the three acts of rejection, reduction, and reuse[38]. As a matter of fact, it is believed that starting with rejection means refusing to consume in the first place which would let to a minimal act of buying and purchasing. Specifically, avoiding prints is a shape of rejection as well as adopting an only Organic buying behavior, which means that the consumer would not buy any food products unless organically cultivated and processed. The second act is the reduction, which

can be considered a form of anti-consumption. The reduction is a key pillar in any sustainable practice since it mostly brings the consumption rate to the minimum[38]. Activities based on reduction can be adopted in our everyday activities, starting with reducing shower time for achieving water conservation, to carpooling as a means of reducing fuel usage and pollutants' emissions. It represents a form of releasing some of the pressure exerted on the different natural resources as well as the environment. The reducing approach omits consumptions that are not based on real needs and eventually uplifts the efficiency of the individual's consumption patterns. The third and last act of the anti-consumption approach is reusing. Originally, reusing is a key element of sustainable behavior since it results in maximum use of a specific resource or element rather than dumping it and transforming it into waste. For example, using reusable supermarket fabric bags instead of single-use plastic bags is an important form of reusing. Also, preserved food's plastic and glass jars can be reused to store cooking staples and raw material such as raw rice, seeds, and pasta. Thereupon, anti-consumption can be considered a stricter form of green and sustainable consumerism since it is based on a minimal, reliable, and efficient rate of consumption.

In contrast, opponents believe that consumption itself is not a negative act. Nevertheless, the aim is to adhere to the sustainable development path by adopting a sustainable consumption behavior[5]. Given that the essence of life is the continuous thriving and evolving of humanity, it is necessary to grow, develop, and innovate. In other words, consuming is part of mankind's existence, yet, extensive consumption leads to the ecological crisis the planet is facing today[5]. Accordingly, Mihajlovic[5] calls for formulating and enforcing laws in favor of the consumers to monitor corporate behavior and products and reject unfair practice.

While the fact of observing the behavior of sustainable consumers is important, it is equally significant to contemplate the reason behind this behavior. As rational and logical as buying decisions seem to be, it is most likely to be driven by an emotional trigger. Hence, consumers with sustainable behaviors base their decisions when choosing environmentally friendly products on their values and ethics. Shaefer and Crane, explain that conscious individuals would spend effort, time, and money to promote their eagerness to restore nature and care for the ecosystem[36]. As a demonstration, informants expressed that they feel 'better' whenever they make conscious decisions such as buying green detergent, organic food, green paint for renovation, unbleached toilet paper, or less packaging products[36]. Following the same lead, companies with CSR

activities tend to be more appealing to consumers than others with irresponsible or neutral social behavior. That means, socially compliant businesses receive consumers' appreciation and willingness to support and consequently achieve better economic results[37]. Namely, a study on the Portuguese consumers proved that participants were willing to purchase products provided by companies with adequate CSR practices even at a relatively higher price[37]. Furthermore, in 2004, research on European consumers revealed that 46% of consumers take into consideration companies' CSR practices while making their purchasing decisions[38]. Therefore, it is obvious that the sense of ethics and deep values drive consumers towards sustainable products to feel better and support the environment and the surrounding communities.

Despite the similar level of consistency related to the customers' drive to complete their purchases according to their sustainability aspects across several regions, the rates are lower in North America and Europe than in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America[39]. In the emerging markets, the consumers tend to have a more personal correlation with the communities that surround them, as they are much aware of the daily issues and struggles, which makes them more prone to give back and spread goodwill. Regarding purchase decisions, studies have shown that convincing shoppers in developed countries to spend more money on sustainable products is challenging. On the other hand, 23% to 29% of the shoppers in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have the will to spend more in exchange for green products[39].

One of the world's greatest challenges is the increasing population due to the pressure exerted on the resources and livelihoods. Besides, marketing and marketers influence people in a way that increases their consumerism to achieve their targets of growing their businesses, market sizes, and market shares[37]. Despite the elevated level of awareness that developed countries have, their elite socioeconomic classes are the highest in consumption which pushed the environmental activists to fight back the waves of materialism and call for minimalism and consumption reduction[37]. However, activists and environment enthusiasts should not underestimate the cultural and social implications that drive consumer behavior and their urge to buy and catch up with different trends. The complexity of that equation would not be tamed unless all stakeholders unite towards reaching a win-win situation in sustaining businesses as well as moderating consumption to mitigate the foreseen challenges affecting the planet and its resources[37]. As an illustration, research studying sixteen British women with a sustainable

lifestyle explained that despite their continuous search for eco-friendly and sustainable products, they would still buy unsustainable products if it is more functional or economic. Also, the studied target pointed out that various brands claiming the green territory offer unreliable products that turn out to be uneconomic due to their short lifecycle. Consequently, consumers would immediately move to other – non-green – practical and reliable products[38]. At this point, the role of business strategy and innovation is crucial to meet the consumer expectations with the desired quality as well as keeping the resources healthy and intact. There is an obvious gap in the green products available in the market and businesses have a significant potential to grow themselves through filling those gaps as well as educating consumers about them. Achieving a 100% sustainable product is unrealistic, however, offering high-quality products with the least impact of the environment should be the target. Responsible consumers described their ideology with the statement: ‘Shopping with the planet in mind[36].’ Likewise, manufacturers and business managers should adopt a similar ideology of crafting with the planet in mind. To study consumer’s behavior about sustainable products, Nielsen has conducted a detailed survey based on thirty thousand consumers living in sixty different countries[39]. The survey took place between 2013 and 2015 and the variety of countries were part of Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and Asia-pacific. The study measured the factors that may influence their buying decisions such as packaging, environmental concern, health and wellbeing, price, and marketing. The findings of the survey manifest the fact that consumers are eager to show their environmental responsibility through purchasing green products. For instance, the number of respondents who were willing to pay extra money for the green product has risen from 50% in 2013 to 55% in 2014[39]. In addition to this, the finding includes consumers from several backgrounds and different income levels ready to buy sustainable products even at higher prices, which reveals a common interest between multiple respondents. It is undeniable that generation Y has confronted various kinds of economic instability and challenges. Nevertheless, they portray a high level of awareness when it comes to environment conservation. This is reflected by their willingness to pay more for sustainable products. In 2014, 50% of the respondents showed willingness to pay for green products and this percentage reached 73% in 2015. This rise in the percentage of purchasing approval constitutes a similarity with generation Z whose respondents showed a rise from 55% in 2014 to 72% in 2015[39]. The survey also signals to an important factor to be considered by the brands offering sustainable products. This factor is the combination of the quality of product and

its effect on the health and wellbeing of the consumers. Findings show that 57% of respondents invest in a product made by natural organic components and is proven to be healthy at the same time. In 2014, the brands who followed a marketing plan portraying their dedication to the values of their society and nature gained a higher percentage of product sales; 43% of respondents showed interest in social values and 41% manifested their interest in consumer's community[39].

Given these points, marketers would have an opportunity to generate consumer demand for eco-friendly and responsible products according to the growing sustainable consumption patterns. All things considered, the consumer plays the biggest and most important part of achieving sustainable consumption[37]. Their consistent demand for green and ecological products is the essence to drive businesses to meet this demand by adopting a more responsible mindset and integrating sustainability in their processes and products. The urge to supply the market with sustainable products is projected to increase as the population of both generations Y and Z grows. This is due to their high influence as consumer and employee groups, in parallel with their high environmental awareness and concern[18]. With time and persistence, sustainable consumers would either drag companies into the eco-friendly zone or drive them out of business.

## Chapter 3: Generation Z

### 3.1 Generation Z

Humans are the biggest influence on the whole ecosystem due to their needs, activities, development, and evolution. Accordingly, they define the world's economic pattern and the planet's quality of life. The newest population of human beings is called "Generation Z". They are also referred to as "Gen-Z", "Genzers" and "Zoomers". Genzers are the successors of the Millennials and precedents of Generation Alpha[40]. Primarily, it is useful to take a closer look at the various generations and study their differences and progressions. There is no doubt that the born year, as well as political, economic, and cultural events, shape the generation identity and behavior. As shown in Table 1- Generations Comparative Analysis [6][7][41], the behavioral traits of each generation are strongly connected to the surrounding atmosphere and ongoing historical event. Be it a global pandemic, a recession, or a state of war, they are all making the difference in shaping the world and its inhabitants, directly or indirectly.

Table 1- Generations Comparative Analysis [6][7][41]

Generation	Born Year Interval	Historical Events	Behavioral Traits
Traditionalists	1900 – 1945	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World War II</li> <li>• Start of Civil Rights Movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loyalty</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Value Authority</li> <li>• Conservative</li> </ul>
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post War</li> <li>• Dictatorship</li> <li>• Women’s Rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Idealistic</li> <li>• Collectivist</li> <li>• Workaholic</li> </ul>
Generation X	1965 – 1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalism</li> <li>• Democracy Domination</li> <li>• AIDS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Independent Thinkers</li> <li>• Materialistic</li> <li>• Competitive</li> <li>• Self-Reliance</li> </ul>
Generation Y/ Millennials	1981 – 1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Globalization</li> <li>• Prosperity</li> <li>• Technology and Internet Emergence</li> <li>• Terrorism</li> <li>• Swine Flu</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociable</li> <li>• More Confident</li> <li>• Less Independent</li> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Higher tolerance for differences</li> </ul>
Generation Z	1993 – 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Natives</li> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Social Networking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor Communication Skills</li> <li>• Extensive Technology use</li> <li>• Realistic</li> </ul>

Gen Z or Post millennials, like some studies refer to it, is the youngest generation accounting for 32% of the global population 2019[42]. Generation Z is identified as the individuals who are born in the mid-nineties, some studies mark the beginning of this generation to the year 1995, while others consider it in 1997-1998, ending also arguable between 2012 and 2018[10]. The following Table 2 - Gen Z ranges in different pieces of literature [6] shows the different brackets of Gen Z in different kinds of literature.



Table 2 - Gen Z ranges in different pieces of literature [6]

Age range	Author(s)
born 1990 or later	Świerkosz-Hołyś (2016, p. 441); Żarczyńska-Dobiesz and Chomątowska (2014, p. 407); Wiktorowicz and Warwas (2016, p. 22); Wojtaszczyk (2013)
between 1990 and 1999	Half (2015)
between 1991 and 2000	Tulgan (2009, p. 5)
between 1993 and 2012	White (2017)
between 1993 and 2005	Turner (2013, p. 18)
after 1995	Opolska-Bielańska (2016, p. 37) ; Ensari (2017, p. 53) ; Dudek (2017, p. 144)

However, it is agreed that this generation came with the rise of the wide world web, and many globally challenging circumstances and traumatic events. Gen Z experienced so much change in the span of their lifetime[43]; considerably higher than anything the world we know has ever experienced before. In addition to the unlimited potentialities and access they had to the global world, and the rise of multi-cultural and multi-racial countries. Consequently, this generation has little similarities to their predecessors, the baby boomers, and the millennials, and a lot of diversity within their age group's interest and demographics[44]. In contrast, other studies refer to Gen Z as the natural extension of the Millennials due to the similarities they share in perceptions, beliefs, openness, environmental awareness, and sustainability concerns[45][10][42].

Surrounded by danger and Recession, Gen Z does not know the world before 9/11; they grew to the news of war, terrorism, and islamophobia. They have witnessed the worst recession and the lowest employment rates. They have been around for the Arab Spring, Syrian war, Donald Trump, Global warming, environmental threats, and much more disturbing news broadcasted to them instantly with an alarming hypothesis and direct threats to their welfare and future. Moreover, bullying is a serious issue for Gen Z; the constant physical and emotional harm of unescapable cyberbullying is reported to be experienced by more than 50% of all social media users. Both and more, Gen Z has been exposed to rising numbers of suicides, making suicides the third cause of death among their age group, in addition to a traumatic number of school shooting incidents. All with the result, that their life has always been turbulent, unsafe, and unstable[43][10].

More importantly, the unprecedented technological hypes and advancement have made Gen Z the first digital natives functioning simultaneously between the virtual and real-world with grace and ease, gaining content and information from to the web yet contributing to its content as well. Again, the only world they know allows them to attain any information instantly and build online social connections at the press of a button. Thus, they are independent in their knowledge and more than any other preceding generation[6][43].

### 3.2 Generation Z Persona

All of the above factors have shaped the persona of the genzers in ways that continue to unravel with every passing year the consistency of those observations, and more additions are yet to come have developed an unmistakable pattern of what defines a generational cohort. While this generation in specific is hard to group in interests and personalities due to their vast exposure to diversity, multi-cultures, and access to unlimited sources of information, they share common characteristics, values, and ethics[43].

#### **Generation Z shared characteristics**

##### **A. Tech-savvy and Social Media influenced[6][10][41][43]**

Being born amid technological leap, Generation Z is natural users of technology; the first tech natives. They comfortably multitask using new technologies, they navigate many tasks at the same time, they influence the content of social media portals and are highly influenced by them. Whether new trends, political arguments, new experiences, live streaming sessions, or simple ramblings, most of this generation's lives and thoughts are documented day by day and most probably broadcasted. Even more, the lives of their idol celebrities and public figures are also broadcasted and accessible to them, in addition to their houses, attire and fashion sense, holiday destinations, and their family lifestyle, which highly influence the young followers' decisions, both directly and indirectly.

##### **B. Impatient and demanding[7][46][10]**

Generation Z is used to instant gratification, with the comfort of speed access to information and social interaction instant messaging, they are always expecting a fast-paced flow in most aspects of their lives. Gen Z exhibits low attention span that has become within

the brackets of acquired attention deficit disorders. Consequently, they are easily distracted, irritable, restless, impatient, showing low perseverance over a long-term course.

### **C. Sensible**[10][43][46]

Unlike Millennials, Generation Z's parents empowered them to seek independence, follow their curiosity, and accept learning through experimentation and failure and regarding mistakes as opportunities to learn, which resulted in more conscious decision making and awareness of consequences. It has been reported that 50% of Gen Z have been pushed by their parents to work during the summer and through their college education, thus, leading that generation to create a capable self-image and a sense of responsibility and accountability for self and achievement. For many factors combined, this generation does not favor risky choices; teen pregnancy, and drug and tobacco abuse are lowest with genzers than their predecessors. Even more, being a highly informed generation, Gen Z tends to claim control of their lives and decisions honoring their values to a certain extent. Speculations have it that due to economic crisis they also show careful spending and eventually, earning the label "Generation sensible".

### **D. Goal oriental with an entrepreneurial mindset**[10][43][46]

It is said that 62% of Gen Z prefer to start their own business than work in a multi-national organization. They believe more than any other generation in the uniqueness of their being and are eager to show it. Moreover, with all the content that they experience throughout their lives, Gen Z youngsters are typically aware of their skills, talents, preferences, and have clear aspirations and vision to where they want to be.

### **E. Open-minded and Diversity accepting**[46]

Gen Z, as previously mentioned, has been raised in multi-cultural communities and multi-racial families. They have been exposed to a lot of news, opinions, and high ethical standard views in a time where racism and bias are loudly negatively judged. Furthermore, the constant input of parents is heavily challenged and never taken for granted as a given fact like the generations before, making them more open to diversity, more understanding, forgiving, and tolerant of mistakes and differences.

### **F. Ecologically Conscious and Responsible**[10][42][44][46]

Naturally, due to the environmental crises and awareness campaigns that this generation experienced from early childhood as well as the damages they have witnessed caused by irresponsible behavior, this generation is environmentally and socially aware. Also, genzers possess a high sense of responsibility to initiate actions leading to a real change and positive impact. For this reason, this generation is believed to re-shape consumerism and enforce sustainable behavior within their community and surroundings.

### 3.3 Generation Z Consumerism

A focused glimpse of Sustainability and ecological consciousness of Gen Z indicates that their awareness and responsible consumerism is taken after the Millennials. Having their share of struggles with the global challenges resulting from the deterioration of the environmental and social conditions since the era of industrialization in the 80s, Millennials took a leap in sustainable awareness and education that reflected on their behaviors in consumerism[42]. Gen Z, being raised in the 2000s, has taken after the millennials given the fact that they also suffer even more severe impacts on their ecosystem such as global warming and lack of resources. Also, being constantly connected, stories about different corporate ecological behaviors roam around the world in no time. At that point, good corporate citizenship, good or bad, is the real deal. To demonstrate, it has been reported by Elisabeth Best, Sustainability Manager at BSR (Business for Social Responsibility), that both generations Y and Z are generating demand for ecological products[18]. Moreover, she mentioned that it has been revealed that 87% of millennials versus 94% of genzers believe that organizations are required to tackle social and environmental issues. Thus, there is an undeniable rise in the tendency of the young generation towards sustainability and responsible consumerism. Consequently, closely studying Gen Z's consumerism behavior is mandatory for an adequate adaptation of the market and its stakeholders.

In the following sections, different studies about genzers of different countries – both developed and developing – are showcased. The case studies display future consumers' green awareness, behavior, consciousness, concern, and eco-labeling responsiveness.

#### 3.3.a Generation Z USA

American Generation Z's population is nearly 74 million youngsters[42]. The members of this generation have higher environmental awareness and knowledge in comparison with their precedents. Namely, in the USA, a study showed that 92% of Gen Z is environmentally conscious and aware of their ecosystem versus above 50% of Gen X. They grew up with an environmentally conscious mindset, which drove them to aim for a prosperous ecological atmosphere, healthy produce for their diets, green products, and overall better quality of life[42]. The current annual net worth of the green market is \$227 billion, and by 2020, that figure is expected to surpass \$1 trillion per year. According to a market report by the Natural Marketing Institute, data shows that around 30% of American adults assess products before making a buying decision in aspects related to its health, effects on the environment, entity's social justice, and its sustainability value[47]. These numbers aren't directly interpreted that 30% of the purchased food goods are organic or 30% of the cars bought are hybrids, but they do mean that there is a notable group of buyers in the U.S. that considers environmental factors when they're spending money on products. Moreover, the study shows that American genzers can be grouped into three different segments based on their environmental awareness levels. The first group holds a moderate mindset who represent around 7.1% of their generation. Next, are the sustainable believers and sustainable activists who represent 46.9% and 45.9% respectively. It is proven that the level of environmental concern of the U.S. genzers is growing, and thus, the level of consciousness and sustainable behaviors vary accordingly. When asked about their thoughts concerning the qualities of sustainable food, 92.8% of Gen Z respondents said their buying decisions can depend on the efforts to conserve the environment, and the product's features for their wellbeing[42]. This means that a Gen Z consumer's resolution to purchase any sustainable food item can differ and that having a marketing campaign that especially has environmentally aware Gen Z buyers in mind is crucial to driving the purchasing power in the right direction. The reason behind this is that not all the eco-conscious consumers – ranging from activists to believers and moderates – put the same effort when coming to choose sustainable food. The consumer behavior of activists recognized for the environment efforts have shown that they link their choice of food to a healthy eating habits, like choosing foods rich in nutrients and following a healthy diet, rather than other consumers who aren't strict ecological advocates. In fact, the American Gen Z is health driven when it comes to food products choices, meaning that if companies convey the perception of “Health” through their communications, they will be approved among genzers. At the same time, U.S. youngsters do have

concerns about the pricing value, since they are confused about greenwashing and whether the offered product is really “green” or not[42].

### 3.3.b Generation Z UK

The British young generation, like typical global genzers, is a tech-savvy population that is heavily relying on technology, mobile phones, applications, and social media platforms. Despite the global political and economic instability, and specifically the Brexit circumstances in the UK, genzers still have high expectations in terms of career, development, progression, fair pay, training, and cultural acceptance[45]. They are the natural extension of Millennials which means that they continue to ask for high standards, however, their environment, political and economic surroundings seem to lessen their expectations.

Studies about Gen Z in the UK show that youngsters prefer online shopping because of the convenience. In fact, the major advantage of their point of view is the delivery service. Besides, technology and innovation throughout the shopping experience such as voice ordering and scheduled automatic orders are appealing programs to the young generation. Furthermore, it has been proven that the buying decisions of the genzers are strongly influenced by the price and social media. Social media influencers have a great impact on Gen Z’s food choices, purchases, and shopping behavior. They tend to continuously look for inspiration about where to go and what to eat[46]. Moreover, there are strong indications that the young British generation is significantly aware of environmental protection. For instance, the trend of adopting Vegetarian and Vegan diets among this generation is on the rise due to their concern about health issues, animal welfare, and ecological viability. To explain more, a major supermarket published its poll’s results tackling the reasons behind being vegetarian or vegan; animal rights scored 55%, followed by health consciousness 45%, and finally environmental responsibility and concern 38%[46]. Similarly, the British clothing brand ASOS launched their new collection of all-size inclusive, sustainably sourced, and cruelty-free clothing line targeting genzers between sixteen and twenty years old. The October 2019 campaign has massively succeeded because of its perfect resonance with the young generation’s beliefs and values as well as social media engagement, optimized online experience, and high level of communication with the targeted group[48]. Thus, it is obvious that companies

and producers have no options but to claim sustainable behavior to be appealing to their future customers and able to grow their businesses.

### 3.3.c Generation Z China

Despite having one of the world's fastest-growing economies over the past years, China, the top-populated country in the globe, is going through a phase of environmental changes. When compared to other nations, studies have proven that the Chinese aren't mindful shoppers; they are unconscious of the surrounding ecological issues[49]. Nevertheless, the younger population, who form the biggest category of spenders, has become more educated/exposed, hence creating more environmentally friendly choices, which signifies a positive future of sustainability[50]. Looking into the different age classes of the Chinese population, one-third of it is encompassed by people below the age of 24. As a result, progressing this generation's behavior towards a greener environment and creating awareness would be quite a challenge. It has been validated that green-labeling can impact the younger generation's actions and point of view regarding the welfare of the environment. This conclusion comes in line with further proven facts that the country's youth are more accepting of novel approaches and ideas, consequently giving more support to environmental protection campaigns versus the elders[51].

In the Song et al. study, findings prove the efficiency of green stamps in altering a customer's buying behavior and reinforcing their favorable impact to fulfill an environmentally friendly purchase. Despite several investigations that question the potency of eco-labels in changing the consumer's mentality, indications from the Chinese's younger generation proves otherwise. To conclude this point, it has become evident that the communication channels used to promote sustainability stamps, along with the kind of information provided, have a positive impact on how green marketing is perceived[50]. The outlook on the environment is related to a person's everyday habits, beliefs, and routine towards relative products and ideas, while environmental concern is associated with a certain sentiment and devotion to the case. An observation of the same resemblance, says that emotions control environmental concern, when we inevitably react to something, while our cognition is one of the factors that take over when the environmental attitude is in action. The result shows that current studies in the field of environmental awareness prove that a person's behavior has a major indirect role in how their purchase decisions are

influenced[50]. Furthermore, the study shows that ecological consciousness is associated with sustainable behavior. In other words, awareness is not influential enough to push for a behavioral change unless paired with environmental concern. At that point, the young consumers become sustainable consumers and ought to buy green products and preferably, eco-labelled[50].

### 3.3.d Generation Z India

The research on the Indian generation Z is aiming to explore all the elements affecting the buying decision of the young generation. It also focuses on the young population's green products' perception and purchase decision. The study covered a sample of 350 genzers living in Delhi. The region was selected since the researchers were targeting high socioeconomic tiers. The reason behind this group's selection is based on the fact that environmental awareness, concern, and sustainable behavior are directly connected with high educational level and financial prosperity[52].

After studying consumer behavior towards sustainable products, investigators discovered that the consumer's familiarity with the brand plays a significant role in purchasing the green product. For instance, the Indian generation Z has shown a great understanding of the value of preserving our environment and they wanted to positively impact our planet. However, their lack of knowledge of the brands offering green products made them highly unwilling to buy them. Initially, the questionnaire conducted for the Indian population Z shows that they are affected by their community and media in buying the green product offered in the market. This means that being price conscious does not constitute a mandatory factor in their buying attitude. Their willingness to serve the environment and their belief in the importance of the green product encourages them to pay for it. Most of this young generation is strongly interested in constantly buying these valuable products as they are convinced that everyone has their role in saving the environment. This finding sheds the light on the strong existence of awareness among people who are eager to change their behavior for the sake of our planet. The findings also highlight one's sense of concern and relevance to the importance of the individual role in this population. This means when each changes the lifestyle to gradually go green, it will result in collective awareness and better results. They know that recent behavior towards the environment has negatively impacted it and that adjustments in people's behavior are quite necessary at this moment. However,



the study shows a lack of transparency between the sustainable products and the consumer. This is reflected by people's perspective towards the green products hiding some information about their quality and different strategies they follow to save our environment. Within this system, consumers argue that a much clear and detailed picture of the variety of activities done by these green brands would empower their existence in the market. This notion leads us to the fact that there is an actual gap between the vision of sustainable brands and the stand of the consumer accordingly. Consequently, the eco-labeling comes to constitute a worthwhile factor determining the consumer's purchase decision. Ecolabeling is part of the information that the consumer is eager to know about the product. It highlights the validation of the product being environmentally friendly which means a greater chance to be purchased by the consumer. People are reluctant about the products without the ecolabeling as they are uncertain about their positive contribution to the environment. Consumers feel that buying the eco-labeled green product is part of their responsibility towards preserving their environment. On the other hand, consumers who portray a decreased level of environmental awareness may show a different attitude when it comes to buying green products[52].

### 3.3.e Egyptian Generation Z

Based on the previously discussed importance of generation Z and their significance as consumers and future leaders, the corresponding Egyptian generation is to be selected to conduct our study. The future Egyptian consumers and employees currently represent 52% of the population[53]. In other words, 52% of Egyptians are under the age of 25 years old with a gender distribution of roundabout 51% males and 49% females[53]. These numbers emphasize the importance of more in-depth studies of this portion of the population which will shape the future of the Egyptian market and its consumers.

There are not enough studies focused on the Egyptian Gen Z, however, its prospects that they would share various characteristics of the general global gen Z traits. An exploratory survey conducted by the researcher showed that the Egyptian Gen Z is highly influenced by the different social media platforms, depending on their corresponding interests. Accordingly, they show some awareness regarding sustainability keywords such as: "Plastic Waste", "Sea Pollution", and "Recycling". Nevertheless, they do not show a fair level of understanding of the general global

sustainability challenges nor those of Egypt's. Also, the exploratory study showed that some individuals are working on transforming their lifestyle to a more sustainable one by using stainless steel water bottles instead of mineral plastic bottles, installing water filters at home to avoid using water dispensers and their corresponding plastic water containers, replacing the plastic cling film by beeswax covers or silicon adjustable covers, sticking to local produce and seasonable fruits and vegetables, reducing consumption of imported material, carpooling and many more eco-friendly initiatives. This behavior indicates that the future generation of Egyptian consumers will be leaning towards a sustainable consumerism and eventually would catch up with the global generation Z in terms of ecological responsibility.

### 3.3.e Developed VS Developing Countries

Differences have been identified between developed and developing countries, in terms of consumers' perspective of sustainable consumerism and its implications on their lifestyles. Table 3- *Developed VS Developing Countries' Sustainable Consumerism* illustrates the contrasts between the two categories and their corresponding consumer behavior, ideology, and patterns.

*Table 3- Developed VS Developing Countries' Sustainable Consumerism*

Developed Countries	Developing Countries
Sustainability awareness across society's different tiers.	Sustainability awareness is associated with society's highest tiers.
Concerns about green products' pricing value.	Willingness to pay more for green products.
Lack of trust in eco-labels due to greenwashing.	Trust in the eco-labels due to the immaturity of the green market.
High expectations from corporates in terms of environmental compliance.	Minimal expectations from corporates in terms of environmental compliance.
The convenience of adopting responsible behavior due to the availability of products and tools.	The inconvenience of adopting responsible behavior due to green products scarcity and market immaturity
Strong responsiveness to green marketing with signs of mistrust in green branding due to greenwashing.	Strong responsiveness to green marketing and green branding.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Research Methodology

This study is exploratory research aiming for a deep understanding of the Egyptian young generation consumerism and their intensity of ecological awareness. The study adopts qualitative research methods due to their ability to comprehend trends, experiences, and diversity among one or more types of a population[54]. Initially, this qualitative study intends to answer the research question; will the ecological awareness of the Egyptian generation Z reflect on their consumerism echoing a change in the Egyptian market and corporate approach to customer retainment? Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand the level of sustainability consciousness of the young generation in Egypt, their consumerism, and their impression of green products. Qualitative research is the selected technique to run this investigation as an in-depth non-numerical method. Namely, using qualitative methods is common for social studies to extract experiments, insights, and evidence to reveal the inner norms and structures of a specific society[55]. Besides, the subject tackled by this study is considered a virgin topic, which is new and unexplored in the literature. Thus, it is important to study the behavior of the targeted sample in-depth initially, and therefore, resort to the qualitative methods primarily.

The research methodology has been approved by the American University in Cairo's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB committee guarantees the research is handled ethically and with full protection of the participants' rights and privacy, following FDA regulations.

### 4.2 Sampling

Qualitative research is an in-depth method of data collection and insights exploration[56]. Despite the flexibility of the qualitative research methodologies, the sampling process remains one of the corresponding challenges. Since this research is focused on a specific tier of the upper socioeconomic class of the Egyptian generation Z's population, a mixture of convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used to select the research participants. Particularly, convenience sampling includes reaching out to accessible members of the researcher's surrounding community matching the study's sampling criteria. More specifically, the snowball method is one form of

convenience sampling entailing that the research participants help to recruit more subjects for the study from their acquaintances, respecting the targeted traits or characteristics[56]. Both methods were selected due to their convenience and accessibility to the researcher.

The sampling demographic criteria included both males and females from 21 to 29 years old. The upper bracket of the age group were borderline genzers with millennials, who were significant to the study due to their financial independence and ability to make their own purchase decisions. Geographically, the selected participants were inhabitants of greater Cairo, since it represents the capital city and the country's biggest city including most of the targeted socioeconomic class. Equally important, the psychographic profile of the participants consisted of private college students such as the American University in Cairo, the German university in Cairo, and the British university in Egypt. Also, young professionals working for multi-national companies, or remarkable local businesses. This criterion was based on the literature's connotation stating that researchers opt for high socioeconomic tiers for sustainability studies in emerging markets and developing countries due to their high level of education, awareness, and prosperous lifestyle[52].

Fifteen genzers, selected based on the previously mentioned criteria, have been interviewed for this research. The sample size was determined according to the Qualitative study concepts of diversity and data saturation[54]. Diversity was represented in the sample age (21 to 29 years old), educational background, marital status, and working experience as per Table 4 - Participants' Profile. On the other hand, data saturation in qualitative research is more subjective than quantitative methods. Generally, data saturation is achieved whenever the research insights become repetitive and redundant[54].

Moreover, four experts in the sustainability professional field – displayed in Table 4 - Participants' Profile – have been interviewed to get another perspective of the Egyptian market and specifically the Egyptian consumerism of the young generation. Two of the research experts were working in the field of sustainability consultancy and environmental assessment. The other experts were e-business owners selling green products in the Egyptian market online such as bamboo toothbrushes, stainless steel straws, organic cotton baby garments, and wooden baby toys.

Table 4 - Participants' Profile

Gender	Code	Name	Age	Scope
<b>Experts Profile</b>				
M	E01	AB		Founder and CEO of a leading Sustainability Consultancy Firm
F	E02	MG		Communications Director of a leading Sustainability Consultancy Firm
F	E03	FS		Sustainable Baby Garments
F	E04	AA		Sustainable/green products
<b>Gen Z Participants</b>				
M	P01	MA	24	Engineering Student - GUC
M	P02	OH	26	Corporate Employee – Oil and Gas Sector
F	P03	RD	26	Married - Corporate Employee – FMCG
F	P04	RK	29	Full-time young Mother
M	P05	MH	21	Architecture Student – GUC
F	P06	FA	25	Senior Editor – Online Fashion Magazine
F	P07	SA	25	Financial Consultancy Services
F	P08	MH	21	Business Student - AUC
M	P09	BS	29	Banker
M	P10	OA	26	Political Science Instructor – BUE
F	P11	MT	21	Business Student – AUC
M	P12	MA	27	Engineer – Corporate Employee – Oil and Gas Sector
F	P13	FS	24	
F	P14	DA	24	Start-up Founder – Retail Sector
M	P15	OK	27	Family Business – FMCG

### 4.3 Data Collection

In this study, the research process was run in the forms of one-to-one online interviews using Zoom or facetime applications, according to the participant's convenience. Upon establishing a connection with the participants, they received a verbal brief from the researcher

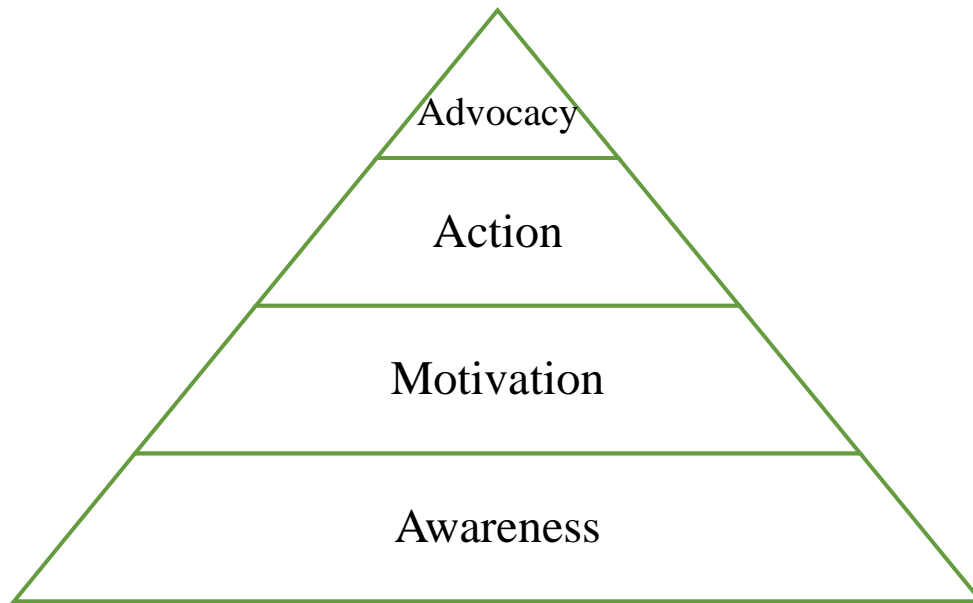
about the study objectives and types of questions as well as the consent form that guarantees their rights and privacy protection. Eventually, an appointment was set for the interview, also, the application preference. The interview was in a semi-structured form to flow in the conversations with the participants and extract the most possible insights. A questionnaire has been developed based on the literature review and the previous studies of the generation consumerism in other countries. It served as a guiding tool through the conversation to cover different layers of the participants' personalities, beliefs, consumerism, as well as environmental concern and buying behavior.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Thematic network analysis was the methodology selected to analyze the research data. The thematic concept is clustering the research findings in themes, then, finding their interconnections, similarities, and contrasts[55]. Thus, developing a framework to organize the data findings and thread the results of the research neatly. The research results and findings were also compared with the literature to present an inclusive view of the information displayed.

Based on the information transcribed from the interviews and the thematic network analysis process, a concrete framework has been developed to present the research finding. This framework, as shown in Figure 4 - Sustainable Consumerism Framework, consisted of four main consecutive categories: Awareness, Motivation, Action, and Advocacy. The framework is represented in a pyramid form since the number of contributors and interactors with each layer decrease as we dig deeper into the concept and ideology. This framework presents four layers of sustainable consumerism and green product awareness, where the Awareness category discusses the different ideologies in the consumer's mind and behavior about sustainability, ecological challenges, responsible behavior, green products, and corresponding ecolabels. Motivation is the following category exhibiting the beliefs of the Egyptian genzers, their environmental values, and their expectations from corporates and manufacturers in terms of sustainability. Next, the research explains the Actions taken by young consumers to become more responsible, their buying behavior, and their experience with sustainable products. Finally, the study sheds light on a thin yet potential layer of consumers; the Advocates. In this category, the motives, drives, and

experiences with the young ecological advocates are demonstrated. Also, the media influence and peer pressure contribution to this category are explored.



*Figure 4 - Sustainable Consumerism Framework*

## Chapter 5: Egyptian Gen Z and Sustainable Consumerism

### 5.1 Findings and Discussion

Results and findings of the young Egyptian genzers and their consumerism review are displayed in this section per the previously mentioned framework. The four layers of the framework are presented in detail as a contribution to studying and documenting the journey of the Egyptian youngsters with sustainability and responsible consumption. Their ideologies, contrasting thoughts, expectations as well as values are supporting evidence of the research's hypotheses and findings.

#### 5.1.A Awareness

*“Going green is linked to plastic, big time. In other words, people perceive that sustainability means the elimination of plastic and that they do not understand the true meaning of sustainability.” – SA, Female, 25 years old.*

According to the young generation responses, there is a clear awareness of the true meaning of sustainability. More than half of the respondents described Sustainability as continuity and permanence of natural resources. This definition maps with the United Nations’ definition of sustainability, mentioned in the literature review[11], with the only addition of including the generations to come. Moreover, the mindfulness of the concept of sustainability is directly linked with the educational background and the culture of the youngsters. In other words, most of the participants showing high awareness of the ideology of consciousness and sustainability studies in the American University in Cairo, whereby sustainability is not only a concern of theirs but also a lifestyle and an integrated concept within their community culture. *“Our AUC community is very well aware of the concept of Sustainability because it is everywhere around us here.” – MH, Female, 21 years old.* This proves that sustainability when treated as a holistic approach and embedded within the day-to-day behavior, it becomes a part of how the community behaves and consumes regardless of their scope, study, department, or interest.

On the other hand, other respondents associated sustainability with green behavior, waste reduction, environment preservation, and recycling. *“I hear about Sustainability from my surrounding community lately, but I believe it is a trend or a hype. People don’t understand the essence of sustainability, and others are claiming to be sustainable while they’re not!” – BS, Male, 29 years old.* While becoming popular recently, some people believe that sustainability is one of the trending waves that people use to become “cooler” or fancier. The concept is regarded as remarkable and it indicates an uplifted profile of the adopting person. However, due to the lack of awareness within the Egyptian community and the absence of sustainability standardization and indicators, people tend to claim their consciousness despite their obvious contradicting behavior or lack of understanding. Nevertheless, when spotted in specific acts or behaviors, community members notice the behavioral pattern of becoming more responsible towards the environment and its resources. *“Sustainability acts are starting to be more popular around us, I even do some initiatives, and for example, I bought a tote Bag for groceries instead of plastic bags, when to my surprise the guy at the supermarket told me that a lot of people do the same because they do not*



want to use plastic.” – FA, Female, 25 years old. Likewise, despite the difference in the socio-economic class, individuals with exposure to high SECs observe their responsible behavior and aspire to the foreseen elevated lifestyle. Accordingly, people with elevated educational backgrounds positively influence the behavior of others around them.

Although the level of alertness is increasing, as per the study respondents, there are still gaps in acting towards responsible living. *“People are becoming more aware, but only a minority is acting consciously. In Egypt, the sustainable movement is slowly growing.”* – RK, Female, 29 years old. Awareness is taking a slow growth pace since the concept is acquired through global advancement and international exposure through the internet and social media. However, a real impact cannot be seen due to the absence of a national movement or structured curriculums leading to sustainable living. Namely, Dr. Abdelhamid Beshara, founder, and CEO of Masader firm for Sustainability consultancy services explained that the new generation in their twenties shows better understanding and performance in ecological consciousness and concern, because of their extensive exposure to social media, movies, influencers, and modern educational curriculums in private schools and colleges. *“It is a global trend, and our young generation are becoming global citizens with their technology savviness and exposure to the whole world through their phones and gadgets.”* – says Dr. Beshara.

In line with Dr. Beshara’s words, genzers of Egypt expressed that their main sources of information about sustainability and consciousness are social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube videos, Twitter tweets, and Facebook articles. They showed a high interest in learning more about responsibility and conscious behavior through online digital media channels. Moreover, most of them affirmed their willingness to follow credible platforms providing them with beneficial sustainability content, if they cross any. However, some of them mentioned that they prefer short video content, infographics, and a concise presentation of the provided data. These findings resonate with the literature describing the influence of technology and social media platforms on gen Z and their characteristics[6][10][41][43], and also, their impatience and high expectations[7][46][10]. Besides, some of them rely on information provided in their academic curriculums and others on the knowledge they acquire from their jobs. Social media exposure allows its users to wander the world and expand their knowledge through their handheld screens. Consequently, the young population would perceive the world problems, challenges, and

experiences as theirs. In that sense, it was important to explore the alertness of the genzers towards their own country's sustainability problems.

Four main Egyptian Sustainability challenges dominated the responses of the study participants: lack of awareness, water Scarcity, waste management, and poor education systems. However, the lack of awareness was the common factor in almost all feedbacks. *"We have a huge problem due to lack of awareness and consumer mindset. For example, we reside in one of the top-class compounds on the Egyptian North Coast, yet people leave the beach showers open with no regrets about the running water they are leaving behind!"* – RD, Female, 26 years old. The participant explained her frustration towards people's carelessness, despite their high educational background and prosperous lifestyle. This segment is most probably aware of the importance of water as a natural resource; however, they lack concern and consciousness about the surrounding environment. In contrast, other groups acquired attention and concern about the water problem in Egypt, due to their exposure to the national news and more specifically the Egyptian – Ethiopian debate about the latter's dam. Egypt is concerned about its share of the Nile water which is foreseen to be negatively impacted by the construction of the Ethiopian dam. While Ethiopia aims for electricity, Egypt seeks water security, and the conflict is ongoing. *"The Water problem is in my concern because I see it, I've seen the Nile changing and its water level lowering, I am following the political conflict of Egypt and Ethiopia, and all the talk made me realize that we have a major water problem."* – RK, Female, 29 years old.

Various other sustainability problems have been mentioned during the interview as perceived by the participants such as food production and overpopulation, child labor, lack of recycling which also falls under the waste management umbrella, unsustainable construction, and excessive use of plastic products. Moreover, when asked, they said to believe that Egypt should treat its environmental challenges as emergency issues, despite the country's endurance of other political and economic challenges. *"People link sustainability to the environment, plastic and recycling, nevertheless, they don't understand that social problems, education, and healthcare systems are also parts of the country's sustainability"* – BS, Male, 29 years old. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the importance of governmental regulations and systems to promote Egypt's sustainability platform and mitigate the country's challenges. Also, interviewees stated

that the country's regulations exist somewhere, however, there is no reinforcement or follow up on their execution.

At that point, it was essential to define responsibility and accountability for the young generation. It was agreed that the country requires awareness and education, as well as rules and regulations to control people's behavior and adjust it. Nevertheless, there are multiple stakeholders sharing responsibility and accountability. A group of respondents agreed that only the government is to be held responsible and accountable for this change and the country's development. *"The Government should be responsible to solve our ecological issues through raising awareness and educating people. I am 22 and I have not learned any of the sustainability topics at school. Also, most importantly they [the authorities] should be implementing laws and regulations."* – MH, Male, 22 years old. Another group mentioned that they believe in a collective effort, and that change needs to be driven from within the society including the private sector and citizens together with the authorities. Also, some views perceived the government as the project manager who needs all other stakeholders to attain success, however, he drives the project and is held accountable for its success or failure. Whereas others consider it an equal shared responsibility between the government, private sector, and consumers. *"First of all, the government; must develop policies, laws, and regulations and enforce their application. Also, they need to provide incentives and set penalties for different forms of violations. Secondly, in the private sector, they should put some focus on radical societal problems and invest in development. I mean generally, we would need collective efforts; however, the government should lead the change."* – OH, Male, 26 years.

In the past few years, the Egyptian government has been working on the country's vision 2030[57] following the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals' framework, which has been published in May 2016. But it seems that there is a clear gap in the communication channel between the government and the citizens since none of the interviewees have mentioned a clue about it. A minority is aware of the logo of the vision 2030 campaign; however, they do not recognize its core message. Consequently, the Egyptian government not only needs to enforce regulatory rules to bring their 2030 vision to life but also work extensively on raising population awareness through integrating this vision in all aspects of life. For instance, education curriculums, private sector regulations for manufacturing and compliance, facilities, services, and amenities. The compliance with environmental and social standards should become visible and tangible so

that people sense its essence and start living by them. Experts' opinions were supportive of the young generation's view of perceiving the government as the main driver behind rising consumer awareness. One of the participating experts in the study, owning a business selling green products online, explained that the government should convey to Egyptians that unsustainable practice is only going to harm their living and make their children suffer. Also, they should offer incentives to encourage green businesses and corporations to adopt responsible approaches through their operations and supply chains. Both citizens and businesses should be encouraged to move towards more sustainable living, and awareness is just the start.

Now, discussing businesses and corporate citizenship in Egypt, experts' reviews were studied as a peek on the Egyptian corporate scene. Experts explained that the corporate representatives in Egypt do not understand the essence of sustainability. They claim that responsibility, in the private sector's eyes, is all about CSR and branding while they only use it for marketing purposes. It was added that companies do not understand resource efficiency or business impact. For example, social initiatives are the go-to approach for all businesses because of the economic situation and the country's situation. However, the environment for them is summarized in waste management. Whereas the only way to regulate the private sector's behavior and compliance is through the government's interference and regulations reinforcement. Dr. Beshara explained that sustainability reporting, the most popular acts of sustainability for the companies operating in Egypt, is just a process. However, CO<sub>2</sub> reports are the ones that mean real commitment since they are forced on reducing their footprint, and therefore they integrate into their processes the reduction of water, electricity, energy, waste, and packaging. Nevertheless, sustainability reporting is a much more common practice than CO<sub>2</sub> reporting, which entails the superficiality of the corporates and their aim for propaganda. He added that big corporations in Egypt focus on marketing and communication, social development, and CSR platforms. They do not hire sustainability expertise and therefore, there is no technical expertise to radically solve their problems. Also, they also introduce a lot of nice projects, but with no real impact on community challenges. In contrast, other experts indicated that there is a small segment possessing an adequate level of awareness. This segment is represented by a group of exporters working with international companies as clients, who impose criteria to meet sustainability compliance. At that point, compliance provides them with the benefit of economic rewards by selling their products in international markets.

Another perspective of an expert owning green product business in Egypt indicates that there is a gap in consumer awareness about sustainable products. A business owner of a sustainable baby clothing in Egypt mentioned that her customers show interest in the baby apparel in general as well as their packaging concept, which harmonize with the young generation's expression of interest in sustainable packaging. The baby clothes business owner explained that the only clients engaging with her sustainability aspect are the expatriates living in the country. Furthermore, she stated that the factories working with her were in complete shock of her concept, and manufacturing process. *“Our business is based on reused packaging, non-plastic, best quality cotton with the least possible chemicals. Also, we focus on textile waste reduction. The whole sustainable production process surprised our manufacturers and put them in a state of confusion.”* – FS, Baby Clothing Apparel business owner.

Conversely, another expert participant in the study stated that the people of Egypt are starting to be aware. From her experience, the bamboo toothbrushes, and stainless-steel straws business owner, revealed that the first few days after she launched her online business were overwhelming. Customers flooded them with orders, and they struggled to keep up with the ordering momentum. However, later, the cliental behavior changed from being driven by the sustainability ideology to being driven by social pressure and the global trend. *“First few days, I was overwhelmed by the number of placed orders. And then sales slowed down and instead of being based on awareness, it was more of based on trend and “coolness.”* – AA, Green Products business owner. While some consumers lacked awareness about the Egyptian ecological challenges, they still showed concern towards the environment and Biodiversity, even though in some cases they are inapplicable to the Egyptian ecosystem. *“When people order stainless straws, especially young customers, they often say “I want to save the turtles,” which is considerate and conscious, but driven by global sustainability trends, indicating unawareness of our local challenges.”* – resumes AA.

As previously mentioned, green products are one of the pillars leading to corporate sustainability and environmental compliance. Making conscious buying decisions promote sustainable consumption and therefore supports ecological viability. The young generation showed familiarity with the concept of green products, however, some of them were confused in green product classification and standardization. *“Green products can be described as anything that*

*helps the environment from the sustainability perspective such as renewable energy, PV panels, and so on.*” – RD, Female, 26 years. While most participants stated that there is a clear shortage of green products in the Egyptian market, few others expressed relief because, recently, they have access to responsible goods through online eco-shops. *“Whenever I get the chance, I buy green products. I love the idea that we can have access to such products through Instagram.”* – FA, Female, 25 years. Comparatively, the expert’s perspective stated that people consume green products without knowing. For example, the frog [Rainforest Alliance label] on Costa Coffee’s cup is noticeable, yet people do not recognize it or know its indication. Thus, experts believe that consumers need awareness about sustainability logos and stamps, and if they learn about their essence and contribution to the ecosystem, they would be encouraged and driven to make responsible purchases.

Moving to the next level of green product awareness, respondents were asked about their understanding of ecolabels. The findings revealed negligible knowledge or awareness of the young generation about eco-labeled products and sustainability stamps. They expressed that they are not familiar with the concept, or the ways certification bodies work. Besides, when pointed out, the young participants failed to recognize the Rainforest Alliance logo on the Costa cup, even though, they are all customers of Costa Coffee and are well acquainted with the brand. However, few respondents explained that they noticed sustainability stamps while traveling abroad on some products, namely *“Starbucks Fairtrade Brownie,”* however, they do not understand what it meant. They only associated it with *“doing well”* and *“fairness,”* which made them feel good when buying the product. It is also important to point out that most of the participants, eventually, inquired about eco-labels and their means of operation, as well as their relationship with the environment and social responsibility. Notably, the young participants showed high engagement and eagerness to learn and understand about sustainability stamps, regardless of a few skeptical interviewees who were confused about whether to trust this process or not.

### 5.1.B Motivation

In this section, the research’s findings reveal the factors which motivate young consumers to become more sustainable and conscious. It also explores their values, beliefs, and feelings in association with positive behavioral patterns as well as good corporate citizenship. Besides, it

comprehends the magnitude of social influence's impact on the young generation's purchase decisions.

Participants explained that the more they learn about sustainability, the more they get involved and concerned about becoming a better inhabitant to the ecosystem. Accordingly, they explained that they would appreciate a platform that educates them about being more sustainable, adopting more responsible habits, understanding their footprint and their impact on the environment, and introducing them to sustainable products and tools which they can use to make their life easier and more convenient. *"I would like to learn about rational ways to be more sustainable, about green products and their availability, behavioral impacts, ecological challenges and their effects on our lives"* – MH, Female, 22 years old. Nonetheless, other respondents showed interest in learning more about corporate behavior, compliance processes, values, and practices. They claim that consumers and corporates can motivate each other if they communicate transparently and work together towards a better environment. But on the negative side, opponents disagreed with the fact that corporates would go out of their way to become more responsible unless controlled by regulations and authorities.

Another compelling opinion of the respondents clarified that standardization and transparency are the factors that would make them trust corporates. *"There is nothing wrong with communicating downfalls, it makes us believe in the company even more because there is no such thing being the perfectly behaving company!"* – FS, Female, 23 years old. Similarly, participants expressed their willingness to trust an eco-label if it communicates the corporates' journey to becoming more sustainable and eco-friendlier. Surprisingly, the young generation is mindful of the sustainable transformation, that it is a process and it takes time and effort to generate achievements. Responses about responsible corporate citizenship were positive and appreciative, *"I 100% feel good about companies who put effort into sustainability, at least they care!"* – SA, Female, 25 years old. Egyptian corporates as well as multinational operating in Egypt show great potential in establishing good relationships with their consumers as well as initiating new market opportunities to fill the gap in the green products market.

Values and beliefs are the strongest drives pushing a person to take a specific action in their lives. As communicated in the literature, when triggered, emotions impulse consumers to act or react. In other words, environmental awareness when paired with emotional concern, consumers

tend to make conscious buying decisions to mitigate environmental challenges or simply feel better about themselves. The research participants explained that green product purchases induce self-appreciation and value. The ethical behavior motivates the young generation to take more responsible actions to do better to oneself before positively affecting the ecosystem. Moreover, it is believed that with the right awareness and collective effort, individuals who adopt a more conscious lifestyle would have a positive impact on ecological restoration. *“Sustainable behavior and way of living would make a difference, for example, the way the planet recovered in the global quarantine because of the COVID19 pandemic proved how impactful our lifestyles are!”* – OH, Male, 26 years old.

Another key point to motivation is the products available in the market and their corresponding prices. Participants stated that green product scarcity in the Egyptian market is holding them back from adopting a more responsible behavior. However, if available and in good quality, the youngsters would immediately expand their product portfolio to include green products. Moreover, most of the respondents expressed that they understand the complexity of producing green products, in addition to the limited demand, makes them more expensive than conventional products available in the market. Nonetheless, they revealed that companies should adopt innovative solutions and use their marketing creativity to increase the market demand on this type of product and reduce the corresponding costs. From their perspective, and in harmony with the global concerns discussed in the literature [39], producers should target prices that match the normal products’ market prices. *“They should be around the same ranges of normal products. I understand they are more expensive because of the complex operation. However, they should make them closer to average prices.”* – RD, female, 26 years old.

Lastly, social influence proved efficiency in spreading motivation across the young generation and help them move towards responsible consumption patterns. Most of the participants mentioned that product recommendations from their trusted circles or online reviews about specific products would encourage them to try these goods and evaluate them themselves. This affirms the influential forms this generation endures as well as the importance of communication as a marketing tool to reach out to them.

#### 5.1.C Action



The results of the research show that when it comes to applications and changes in patterns and behaviors, most of the interviewees are enthusiastic and exhibit promising intentions to apply. All of our respondents have changed at least one to a few habits towards sustainability and operate from an aware and conscious mindset: they are also looking to continue expanding the scope of sustainable living in their lives and apply it in many other aspects. However, the consistent concern and main factor that holds them back from applying this is the lack of availability of sustainable products and practices, and the difficulty and inconveniences they would have to endure to fully commit to a sustainable lifestyle in Egypt. When asked about her sustainable practices, MH, 21 said *“I have initiated many practices in my life, however, I couldn’t sustain any of them. For example, I use stainless-steel water bottles, yet I do not know where to refill it! We don’t have a motivating infrastructure in Egypt to encourage sustainable living.”*

Exhibiting a typical global Gen Z behavior this sample has all shown a clear priority to convenience. Even though aware, most respondents have shown resistance to going out of their way to sustain these changes and the environment, they can spare extra expenses within reason and budget, but more than half wouldn’t compromise quality especially when it comes to health-related products, as health enthusiasts, they are aware of the implication of such move and are not willing to risk the consequences. Dr. Beshara commented on this explaining *“People think about their benefit more than the total wellness of the environment.”* Accordingly, it is important to reveal that Convenience is one of the key factors not only affecting the young generation’s purchase decision, but also their lifestyle and identity. The literature explained the value of convenience as per gen Z citizens globally; despite having ecological awareness and environmental concern, they still favor convenience and practicality in their daily lives[46]. From the same perspective, one of the experts owning a green products business in Egypt shared her experience. She stated that through her interactions with the small customers, they prefer convenience over everything. Be it in the packaging, delivery, and handiness of the products, convenience is the key component of the purchasing experience.

As a result, branding has shown to be a major factor affecting their purchasing decision, especially if accredited by a source trusted to them or tried before by a friend or a family member. The brand would also be negatively impacted if associated with unethical or unsustainable practices with the condition of the presence of an available and convenient substitute. One of the

respondents shared her experience with “Lush” – one of the popular British cosmetics brands that possess a global presence. The participant explained *“Lush offer good quality products that are convenient and safe, but what is amazing about that brand is their packaging concept. They have gone above and beyond with creativity and introduced the concept of naked-products where you can buy your soap in small paper bags; no boxes, no plastic wrap, just a paper bag!”* Similarly, most respondents agreed that sustainable packaging is an attractive element during their shopping experience. Aside from being unique and creative, it also makes them feel ethical about their purchases and, eventually, consumerism, similar to global genzers [36]. Thus, corporates can benefit from this insight and start developing new concepts and ideas for sustainable and environmental packaging. They can also benefit from limited customers’ expectations since they barely find such products in the Egyptian market.

The most popular practices sited during the interviews were plastic and water-related, matching the results of the awareness; replacing plastic utensils and resources with durable ones, moving from plastic bottle to reusable eco-friendly bottles, using a personal backpack and tote bags in supermarkets, switching to bamboo toothbrushes if and when available, consciously looking for sustainable packaging, and eco-friendly way for waste disposal. Many interviewees have been donating unwanted food to stray animals and cloths to NGOs while recycling disposable materials at home. *“I reduced junk food because the corresponding industries have completely unsustainable supply chains with tons of waste because of their mass production.”* – BS, male, 29 years old. Henceforth, despite the insignificance in the proportion of the population in Egypt, a segment of the young generation shows an understanding of sustainability challenges, in-depth. The latter insight, also, highlights the potential future for the local and small businesses. Some participants stated that they constantly look for local small businesses and aim to buy their products. Not only because of the footprint reduction and economic vitality, but also because local businesses induce a healthy environment, reduce unemployment, and encourage sustainable ecosystems. All respondents confirmed that they have changed at least one of their habits to become more sustainable. This entails that the wave of change has already started for the young generation, however, it is taking a slower pace due to the lack of available tools and products. Besides, the government’s role is absent which does not provide a fertile environment for sustainability growth, on the contrary, it makes the change more challenging.

Also, on the water preservation front, the participant shows active concern for water scarcity and are reducing their water consumption daily. There are other changes of behavior mentioned like printing on both sides of a paper, recycling paper, using bikes for transportation whenever possible. *“Our driver followed our lead; he asked about the reasons we behaved like that and after we explained that we're trying to reduce our harmful print on the environment, he started to change his behavior too!”* – OH, male, 26 years old. Normally, trends are set by celebrities, designer houses, public figures, and so on. Eventually, customers aspire the trendy life and follow their leads. In particular, the young participant explained that their driver, who aspired their life and looked up to his employers, was curious to understand the sustainable behavior which did not seem familiar. As a result, aspiration and awareness inspired the driver to change his behavior and adopt a new habit induced by responsibility. By the same token, marketing plays a big role in communicating with the targeted customers. An expert participant explained that there is a different strategy for every population segment. In other words, the way of communication differs from a socioeconomic class to the other. The expert added that the way to approach the population's top tier is through branding, trendsetting, and creativity. However, aspiration would be the trigger to the middle class followed by cost reduction ideas to communicate with any population's C class. Consequently, if the right communication strategy is utilized, awareness would be raised, and thus, consumerism is optimized.

The sustainability experts in the participants put a lot of weight on the importance of corporate responsibility to benefit from the exciting circle of green consumers, use them as a base and build stronger and bigger platforms, expanding from an exciting unfulfilled potential point. They continue saying, building communication, reaching them through their emotional ports is the way to grab their attention. Serving them with the convenience that they expect and through their needs would promote a beneficial flow of their products off-shelves. More importantly, focusing on generation z, a sense of community is highly recommended. Experts believe that if companies build on the existing communities, and expand them, they would influence more community members and attract them to join the responsible consumerism movement.

#### 5.1.D Advocacy

When we discuss people's behavior about sustainability, it is quite interesting to study their advocates' perspective and not only the aware segment. Every individual could make a massive difference impacting positive behavior when advocacy takes place, as word of mouth constitutes a key factor shaping consumer's perspective and attitude, respectively. Some interviewees stated that they are in a transitional phase, meaning that they are becoming more responsible about shedding light on sustainability. Some others expressed their aspiration for representing the sustainable living and encouraging their communities to tag along. Ultimately, there are trigger points within the Egyptian environment that either boosts environmental advocacy or bring it down.

The young genzers showed enthusiasm for ecological lifestyle transformations. They agreed that there would not be any way around moving towards conscious life patterns and behaviors. However, they pointed out to challenges that face any Egyptian sustainability enthusiast. *"I try, but it is not that easy or convenient to sustain a sustainable lifestyle in Egypt"* – OK, Male, 27 years old. Notably, the difficulties lie in the small details of Egyptians' day-to-day lives. As an example, people tend to buy water plastic bottles through their day because there is no availability of good quality filtered water to refill their sustainable bottles instead. Also, participants mentioned that even though they segregate their waste to prepare it for recycling, there are inconsistent and non-reliable companies of waste collection. In that case, as mentioned by the participants, we lose hope and go back to conventional methods of waste dumping in landfills. As a result, some respondents preferred to make a slow switch to more sustainable behavior, where they can acquire new conscious habits based on their convenience and applicability. *"I am getting there. I am being smart about buying things, I am not an advocate though."* – MH, Male, 22 years old.

In this context, respondents highlighted the fact that advocacy comes from friends more than family, which means generation Z and even Alpha, *"My son is very aware because of his school. They educate them heavily about sustainability and he always checks whether we match the school behavioral pattern at home or not."* – RK, Female, 29 years old. This fact does not only prove the importance of education in shaping the generation's mindset and behavior, but it also highlights the influence of young children on their parents. Another perspective entails that family and especially older members represent most of the Egyptian population, from the upper bracket

age of the millennials and older. With some exceptions, generation X represents a big hurdle in the way of the young generation's sustainability transformation. Their consumption patterns are different, given the fact that they are not used to integrate conscious decisions in their purchasing process, which maps the literature's same situation described in the relationship of the Chinese gen Z and their preceding generation[51]. Furthermore, advocacy is tightly linked to the context or situation; some people do not bring up the topic of the environment unless someone asked or brought it up to avoid sarcasm, bullying, or emotional pressure. Besides, most of the interviewees were skeptical about promoting green products voluntarily. As a consequence, the purchase of a green product is yet to be considered a common practice “ *I am a bit skeptical to volunteer and talk about that because I feel people are unaware and not interested*” – MH, Female, 21 years.

It is claimed that the society in Egypt does not encourage sustainability to the extent of creating a strong platform for it. Accordingly, big companies that are credible enough to raise awareness about the environment are not embracing this strategy as they are more profit-oriented “*I don't think companies will do well unless they receive incentives. They are capitalists and they care more about their profitability*” – BS, Male, 29 years. Considering this point of view, it is possible to identify some lack of trust in the business companies within a specific segment of the young generation. In addition to this, the interview findings showed the existence of a significant gap in communicating the business values to their customers. The youngsters communicated that they usually are not aware of different brands' values unless there is a specific scandal that caught the community's attention. However, some respondents indicated that in case they learned that a brand's behavior is not matching with their values, they would immediately stop buying their products. “*Normally, I'm not aware of the company's behaviors and values. But if I knew, I would act accordingly. For example: if I find out that the company dumps its waste in the Nile river then it is a big NO for me.*” – RD, Female, 26 years. Thus, some segments are ready to boycott brands and products due to their unmatching values; they would look for more compliant alternatives. These insights indicate the potential of the green products market as well as the appreciation of the young generation to the ethical behaving companies and sustainable brands. They also point out a category of consumers who are willing to go beyond being sustainable and reject harmful companies and their products.

In contrast, some interviewees were highly considerate of the values of the companies although they do not have sufficient information about it. They mentioned the necessity of the product versus the values of the company, *“Depends on the product. For example, the fashion industry is a mess and harmful, yet we do not stop shopping for clothes.”* – FA, Female, 25 years. This shows that the consumers select the necessity and their preference for the product over its contribution to the environment. Likewise, the Indian generation Z tends to understand the impact of unsustainable products on the environment and prefer buying eco-friendly products, however, the lack of availability of green products and their corresponding high prices does not give them the luxury of choosing[52].

As for using eco-labeled goods, most interviewees showed an almost absent knowledge towards them. They suggested that they might have bought eco-labeled products abroad, probably without knowing. Nevertheless, they all agreed to the total absence of eco-labeled products from the Egyptian market. On the other hand, the minority that purchased eco-labeled products from abroad had more details on the green product and showed more awareness *“All of the green products that I use are from abroad except my toothbrushes and stainless straws”* – SA, Female, 25 years.

Finally, it was noticed that the Egyptian gen z advocates lean towards healthier lifestyles when it comes to food choices. More specifically, two of the participants mentioned that they are vegans because it is better for their health as well as for the environment and animal welfare. Despite being a minority, the vegan community in Egypt is catching momentum and is slowly expanding. Similarly, the Egyptian gen Z environmental activists follow the same footsteps as their fellow American and British youngsters, who described vegan life as a resort to better health status and a sense of responsibility towards animals and the environment[42][46].

## 5.2 Summary of Findings

Sustainability has become one of the most important topics of our modern era due to the environmental challenges and nature degradation that the world is experiencing which also impacted people’s habitats and quality of lives. These changes induced the sustainable consumerism movements among the world’s youngest generations, the so-called Generation Z. Basically, genzers were classified based on common characteristics developed mainly by the

emergence of technology and digital platforms, in addition to the economic and environmental fluctuations.

Likewise, corporate sustainability and the private sector's ecological compliance have attracted the world's focus. The impact of their production processes and supply chains on the people and the environment has imposed mandatory actions in an attempt to save the planet's ecosystem. This movement generated a new generation of products called green products. To elaborate more, green products or eco-friendly products are described to be sustainably manufactured goods, or products promoting sustainable life, with minimal impact on the environment and resources. These products drew the attention of the young generations, especially in the developed world, as a means to consume sustainably and put pressure on the private sector to become more responsible. Consequently, third party organizations came into action to standardize and certify the operational processes as well as producers of the green products through eco-labeling their merchandise. In their turn, multiple eco-labels have emerged in the market creating diversity in the sustainability standards and their corresponding stamps such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance.

If Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, or any other sustainability label is put into consideration by all producers that deal with food products will give their employees and the farmer who produces the farm products equal compensation to their input. Decent income that meets their efforts of production will, in turn, improve the living standards of both the employees and the farmer. Improved living standards will eradicate poverty and improve infrastructure, which are both goals towards sustainable development. Similarly, awareness of sustainability labels should be made known to consumers. These consumer labels are not known even to consumers that could have the good intention of promoting sustainable consumption. Therefore, consumers end up not buying eco-labeled products when doing their shopping; thus, mass awareness and sensitization to consumers on eco-labeled products should be carried out. In so doing, consumers will be able to pick sustainability labeled goods when shopping[58]. Consumer organizations, which include Non-Governmental Organizations, The Government, and the food industry, should work together to sensitize consumers on certified products highly. The government should also ensure legislation of laws that govern fair trade to ensure sustainable development.

The young generations, gen Z, have shown interest in buying eco-labeled green products in the developed countries, followed by the developing young communities. These youngsters show a leap in awareness about sustainable development and responsible consumerism. In the developed countries, the environmental movements put pressure on both governments and the private sector to move towards corporate sustainability. Thus, the green movement created a whole new market for green and certified products, which is massively expanding. Consequently, the developing countries caught the trend and started to adopt more responsible behavior driven by environmental awareness paired with ecological concern.

In this study, the Egyptian genzers were closely examined through qualitative research to reveal their orientation and perspective towards green products and sustainable consumption. The results were structured in a framework conveying four layers of sustainability behavior; Awareness, Motivation, Action, and Advocacy. Like the global genzers, the Egyptian young population showed a remarkably significant level of awareness developed by their exposure to digital media platforms as well as their experiences with their own economic and ecological challenges. Moreover, a clear gap in communication between the authorities and citizens has been spotted, in light with the absence of the government's role in leading the sustainability change through environmental regulations and action plans enforcement. Furthermore, the Egyptian genzers showed minimal awareness about green products, due to their minimal availability in the Egyptian market, besides being mostly accessible only through online e-commerce retailers. On the other hand, the young generation showed a complete absence of awareness about sustainable certifications and eco-labeled products because of their complete absence from the Egyptian market. However, participants expressed their enthusiasm and appreciation for green initiatives and corporate sustainability. Despite the immaturity of young consumers regarding sustainable products, they showed high interest and willingness to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and conscious buying if they have access to products and tools. They communicated that convenience is the key factor in any purchase decision with a clear constraint of not compromising their health and wellbeing. Finally, the future of the Egyptian consumers seems to catch up with the global movement of sustainable development with eagerness to have access to green products and a clear welcoming attitude towards eco-labeling. In that sense, corporates would not have a choice but to transform their operations to become more responsible as well as introducing a new generation of local Egyptian green products. With the right marketing and communication, as well as



governmental support, both the Egyptian consumers and the commercial sector would flourish in a sustainable environment. Without a doubt, this movement would lead the country towards a better future and a more sustainable living.

### 5.3 Study Implications

#### 5.3.A Consumer

Consumers would encourage corporates to expand their green product portfolio as well as enhance their operation and processes to become more sustainable by increasing their demand for eco-friendly goods. Moreover, using their common digital media channels with their preferred brands to convey their feedback and inquiry of green products will motivate corporates to become greener. If they exert pressure on the authorities, they will drive the movement of ecological consciousness where the government would enforce the regulations and laws to guarantee environmental compliance across the country's different layers. Furthermore, advocate consumers have the chance to expand the movement through their social media networks by communicating ways of becoming more responsible as well as highlighting green products and highlighting their providers. Also, sharing information on their social media accounts about sustainability would help to raise awareness and induce sustainable consumerism.

#### 5.3.B Government

The Egyptian government needs to improve its ways of communicating with their citizens through the most used digital platforms and social media channels. The study spotted a gap in awareness about the country's 2030 vision of achieving sustainable development even though it has been published since 2015. It is important to raise awareness and integrate responsible behavior within the government's different sectors. This will help to enforce the existing policies and regulations. Besides, enforcing the ecological compatibility in the private sector will impact consumer behavior and the country's ecosystem positively.

Ideally, the ministry of education and higher education would benefit from integrating sustainability concepts into their curriculums to teach students at a young age. Consequently,

students will develop their knowledge and sustainable living across all phases of education, which will eventually turn into a mindset and lifestyle.

### 5.3.C Corporates

The private sector has a great potential of repositioning itself as green companies if they use green marketing tools and use their media channels to promote sustainable living. The young consumers are eager to learn about sustainability and they appreciate companies with ecological mindsets and value chains. Adopting green marketing methods will not only improve the organizations' internal systems and operations but also, give them room to expand their product ranges and claim new market segments. As a result, they will boost their reputation, establish better relationships with their customers, increase consumer loyalty both internally and externally, and enhance their corporate citizenship.

### 5.4 Limitations and Future Research

While this study is among the earliest to study the highest socioeconomic tiers of Egyptian Gen Z's consumerism and sustainability behaviors, its work has some limitations. First, the research was based on qualitative methods as means to profoundly understand the young Egyptian generation and collect insights indicating the ways they reflect and behave. However, the sample number and its corresponding pool of selection are limited to the extended surrounding community of the researcher, and thus, it is not an adequate representation of the young generation. Also, the sampling of the esteemed participants was limited to a single geographic location, greater Cairo, which disregards a significant portion of the generation belonging to the same selected socio-economic-class living in other cities such as Alexandria, Delta, Assiut, and others.

Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use quantitative methods with representative sample numbers, that one may validate the content proposed by this study. Furthermore, researchers may aim to widen the pool of selection to include more geographical locations, educational backgrounds, different school systems, and various psychographics. Finally, it might be interesting to examine the young school students of the Z generation to study their awareness level and commitment to the environment. Accordingly, the results might reflect the

impact of educational entities on raising sustainability consciousness and eventually draw an indication about the future Egyptian citizens, consumers, and leaders.

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