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Good But Expensive: Gen-Z's Extent Of Decisions On Sustainable Fashion Clothes

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Abstract
The fashion industry is one of the most polluting sectors globally, with its production process consuming vast resources and generating significant waste, exerting immense pressure on the environment. Eco-friendly fashion clothing, which utilises renewable materials, reduces pollution, and promotes sustainable production methods, has emerged as a crucial solution to this issue. Despite the appealing concept of eco-friendly fashion clothing, its market penetration remains low; however, hopes may come from younger generations, such as Gen-Z. Considering Gen-Z is becoming the mainstream buyers of fast fashion, it is essential to study how to trigger their sustainable consumption behaviour (SCB) to contribute to societal sustainability. This study applies a quantitative survey (n=1,310) to collect data from Chinese Gen-Z (18 to 30 years old) to understand to what extent their SCB can be comprehensively triggered. By testing the modified framework based on the root of VBN (value-belief-norm) theory, this paper finds that VBN theory remains sufficient for interpreting how Gen-Z's SCB can be triggered. But in the meantime, it looks like social norm (SN) plays the most significant role in generating the SCB in a direct way (beta=0.712); in addition, individuals' trust towards a brand, including loyalty, can also directly generate SCB (beta=0.496). Thus, to comprehensively support Gen-Z trigger and maintain SCB, suggestions (on behalf of sustainable brands) are made from multi-dimensional perspectives.
Keywords: *Sustainable consumption behaviour (SCB); Gen-Z; sustainability; value-belief-norm (VBN) theory*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable fashion, without doubt, is flourishing globally and becoming the new trend to redefine the standard of fashion (Nerurkar, 2016; Dabas & Whang, 2022). Opposite to the traditional concept of fast fashion, the biggest challenge to promoting sustainable fashion products is the price. Nevertheless, sustainable fashion brands cannot be price taker and let the market determine their selling prices. To maintain certain levels of profit, despite cost control and improvement in efficient operations, those brands need to consider the buyers' side, such as understanding consumers and effective marketing (Hong et al, 2024). As the current and future mainstream consumer group of fashion clothes, particularly Gen-Z, understanding their motivations for sustainable fashion consumption is surely the right path for those brands' long-term development.

China, as the world's largest region of clothing and textile products, attracts hundreds of thousands of players to compete and promote. Therefore, deserves a study on how targeted consumers are attracted by sustainable fashion. According to data from Daxue Consulting (2023), the market share of sustainable fashion has grown, reaching 8.32% of the total fashion market by the end of 2022, up from 2.49% in 2019. In the meantime, Gen-Z (1995-2009) represents a significantly large proportion of China's population: 265 million of 1.4 billion (Statista, 2024). From a long-term perspective, each year, millions of new generations are born and growing up, who will probably be the new power of sustainable product/clothes buying. Hence, it is necessary to study the extent to which young generations, especially Gen-Z, are motivated to purchase sustainable fashion clothing.

In this study, sustainable fashion clothes are defined as products from environmentally friendly materials and recycled textiles, and their quality standards meet the requirements of the national and international textile industry associations. For example, the GB (national standard) TC209: Code for Evaluation of

Green Textile Products, issued by the National Textile Standardisation Technical Committee, was co-drafted by the China Textile Industry Federation (National Public Service Platform for Standards Information, 2025). And the NSF/ANSI 336 standard issued by SCS Global Services (2025). In this study, the authors have conducted in-depth interviews with four (4) practitioners whose product brands satisfy both standards. Their knowledge and professional as well as practical experience in the sustainable fashion industry are part of the source of reference to shape the quantitative aspect of this study.

Previous studies also inspire the focus of the present study to some extent. Highly cited research (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Mukendi et al., 2020; Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016) has revealed that environmentally friendly concerns and positive social norms (SN) are two fundamental reasons that drive sustainable fashion consumption. More empirical studies (Saricam & Okur, 2019; Kumar & Mohan, 2021; Lambert, 2019) demonstrated that most sustainable consumption decisions can be recognised as a type of planned behaviour, an intentional behaviour. Hence, these scholars employed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Value-Belief-Norm (VBN), and Norm Activation Model (NAM) theories to guide their investigations. On the foundations of these theories, more specific drivers of consumption and/or consumption intention have been explored, including (but not limited to) education, income, trust, value of green consumption, recyclables, and cost-effectiveness (Dayun, 2022; Istiasih, 2023; Nicolau, 2015). These factors are summarised as a term, sustainable consumption behaviour (SCB), and studies on SCB of fast fashion and sustainable fashion are becoming a 'hot topic' in academia, particularly during and after the disruptions in the fast fashion industry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Wu et al, 2023).

However, very few studies concentrated on Gen-Z consumers' SCB in China from the perspective of SCB, especially a systematic study on buyers' purchase intentions. To fill such knowledge gaps, the authors have adapted a theoretical framework to investigate the factors that could influence shoppers' intentions toward sustainable fashion clothes (SFC), among China's Gen-Z population. The framework is primarily based on the root of VBN theory, but SN and trust variables were also applied for a more comprehensive, accurate, and predictive theoretical hypothesis. This study aims to use quantitative survey data collected (survey, n = 1,310) to test the drafted framework in predicting Gen-Z's sustainable fashion purchase intention and to identify the most influential factors that trigger such intention.

With the adoption of classical VBN theory, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of literature on SFC. Additionally, the proposed framework may be more accurate in that it not only explains Gen-Z's SCB behaviour but also has theoretical significance for future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Relevant Studies

This sub-section presents various relevant studies on the topic and summarises the arguments for framework construction, for example, why the author applies VBN theories, and why trust is an important variable. The first step is to articulate the definition and attributes of sustainable products as well as sustainable clothes.

Based on the definition from European Consumer Centre France (2024), sustainable products (also known as eco-friendly products) refer to the products that have a "*lower impact on the environment throughout life cycle, i.e., from the raw materials used in their manufacturing, to their design, transport to the end-user, their length of use and their capacity to be recycled*". Likewise, the Institute of Sustainability Studies (2023) believes sustainable products are goods that are produced, transported, and disposed of in an eco-friendly manner or with a lower environmental impact. Scholars, such as Pencarelli et al (2019), define sustainable products as the sum of non-profit and for-profit products that obtain value in the fields of environment, public health, and social welfare throughout the entire commercial cycle. Those are parts of the representative definitions of sustainable products. For sustainable clothing, do the clothes meet the characteristics of the above definitions?

Definitely, the definitions of sustainable consumption behaviour need to be briefly but explicitly discussed. Gomes et al (2022) believe SCB refers to an intentional consumption behaviour, or is recognised as a planned behaviour, in that individuals prefer or only consume sustainable products. In

addition, Hein (2022) claims that SCB is also known as responsible consumption, and buyers prefer to purchase products that could minimise the environmental and social impacts. Webb, Mohr & Harris (2008) stated that SCB buyers are the group who will contribute to long-term social and environmental benefits; they will not only buy sustainable goods, but also be willing to donate or sell end-of-life sustainable goods to qualified channels. Ulusoy's (2016) study found that responsible consumption is a behaviour where buyers continue to choose sustainable products, even when the prices are significantly higher than conventional products, based on their maximised affordability.

As mentioned previously, TPB and NAM theories are widely applied in studying consumers' sustainable buying behaviours and have contributed numerous volumes of research findings. In these studies, VBN gained growing interest in this field, which is recognised as the third mainstream theory to predict green purchase behaviour (Gomes et al, 2022). For example, Yang et al (2024) successfully used the VBN theory to estimate the extent to which Chinese consumers would be willing to purchase second-hand clothes. It is not to say that TPB and NAM are 'out of date' in studying SFC purchase behaviour; it is just to say that VBN theory could provide a new perspective of analysis to some extent, which is relatively new in this particular field. Compared with TPB and NAM, VBN theory concentrates more on 'environmentalism' related factors, such as ecological worldviews, pro-social incentives, self-interest motivations, and personal norms, assuming that these essential components are strongly associated with individuals' green buying behaviour (Yang et al, 2024; Hein, 2022; Kim et al, 2016). Therefore, this theory is selected as an attempt to construct the framework.

However, other variables should be added to make the drafted framework more predictive to address Gen-Z's SCB and intentions. As claimed by Kim et al (2016), social norms (SN) such as the view of environmental pollution can be considered one of the significant reasons for Gen-Z to purchase sustainable fashion clothes made from second-hand textiles, recyclable materials, and eco-friendly materials. Akther et al (2024) also argued that young consumers should contribute to reducing soil and water pollution. Furthermore, Lundblad & Davies (2016)'s team also demonstrated that individuals with a green consciousness related to SN will intrinsically be motivated to reduce the frequency of buying and primarily concentrate on sustainable consumption. Another study (Chan and Wong, 2012) reported that individuals with strong environmental protection consciousness tend to purchase products from sustainable brands or brands committed to sustainability.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This sub-section discusses the use of VBN theory to address the research question in this study.

Stern et al (1999, the founders of VBN theory, define and interpret the theory. They believe the theory can explain individuals' social movements, including but not limited to SCB/responsible consumption, sustainable production, social welfare creation, and any movements/actions of environmental protection. The VBN theory comprises Value Theory, Brief Cognition (awareness of consequence and ascription of responsibility), and Norm Theory (Figure 1). It provides a basic but logical framework for estimating individuals' or groups' behavioural change, where eventually, this new behaviour becomes their social norm/pattern, from psychological decision-making to physical actions. This theory is demonstrated as applicable to the fields of psychology, sociology, environmentalism, sustainability, and economics (Whitley et al, 2018).

The present study focuses on consumer behaviour, sustainability, and responsible consumption, applying the VBN theory.

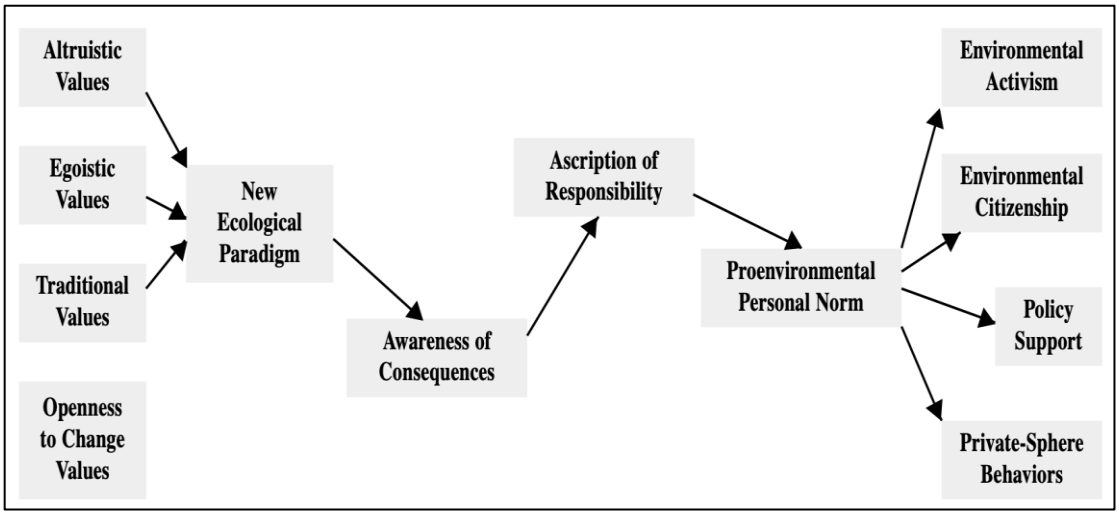

Figure 1: VBN Theory
Source: Adapted from Stern et al (1999)

The first assumption of this theory is that people's ecological paradigm (EP) will be changed or at least impacted in accordance with a variety of values, such as altruistic, egoistic, traditional, and openness to change values. Those perceived values would impact or reshape an individual's overall value with a new or changed ecological paradigm. Then, it moves to the next step, which is the cognition theory. The individual will evaluate and be aware of the consequences of such changes, and decide whether they are willing to take such responsibilities (ascription of responsibility). After assessing the benefits, risks, and threats and deciding that they are ready (also known as pro-movement action), this means they have clearly understood what responsibility and possible outcome they will get if their intention becomes actual action. According to the study conducted by Linde et al (2016), cognition theory is consisted of "awareness of consequences" and "ascription of responsibility" parts, if they believe the expected consequences would bring more benefits to them, then they will take the opportunity and embrace the consequences, and bear what they will lose after the choice is made, it will then trigger the corresponding behaviours. This argument does not claim that all of them will become sustainable or ethical buyers; in contrast, there are two possible outcomes: they will either become ethical buyers or conventional buyers, 'business as usual', still buy non-sustainable products.

After a while, when the new behaviour becomes a 'habit' or 'habitus', the behaviour can be recognised as either a personal norm or even a social norm, if more and more groups' behaviours are changed. Then, they will show these characteristics: environmental activism, environmental citizenship, policy support and private-sphere behaviours. As stated by Stern et al (1999) and Steg, Dreijerink & Abrahamse (2005), the private sphere does not mean they become to a community or a group in the real world; actually, those people who share similar values and behaviour do not even interact with each other, nor do they know they have the same tag: for example, sustainable buyers. However, as examined by Hiratsuka, Perlaviciute & Steg (2018), at present, the private-sphere behaviours can be understood as when the same kind of people know there is such a group (either online or offline), they would deliberately gather up, welcome the same people to join, but isolate others. For example, some of them established a WeChat group to share sustainable consumption experience, knowledge and brands. So, the group would have a barrier: if you are not a sustainable buyer, then this is not the right place for you to come. In the meantime, private-sphere behaviours will also occur in this group; they will concentrate on discussing responsible consumption-related topics, but not always discuss such matters in other WeChat groups.

Therefore, this theory may guide the present study from value change to behaviour change and eventually to a long-term behaviour. However, the original model is developed to predict and interpret 'broader' individuals' behaviour change towards environmentalism, not specific to responsible consumption, nor in sustainable fashion consumption. Hence, more specific and relevant literature is needed to propose adapted hypotheses and design primary research questions.

Hypothesis Development

Antecedents of Values

The VBN theory explained that values (or the new ecological paradigm, hereinafter NEP) toward environmentalism are created or changed by different values. In other words, the readily perceived values and the newly captured values will be combined to create or reshape the new ecological paradigm. As demonstrated by Nguyen & Dekhili (2024), external altruistic values and openness to change values can positively drive an eco-friendly ecological paradigm in terms of SCB. For example, individuals who are willing to listen to different voices instead of 'standing still', the perceived altruistic values will strongly and positively support the eco-friendly paradigm. Furthermore, if one is born with altruistic values or educated in altruistic values, it will be much easier to create an eco-friendly ecological paradigm.

Hence, the first two hypotheses are formed:

H1: Altruistic value (AV) is positively associated with Gen-Z's new ecological paradigm (NEP)

H2: Openness to change value (OCV) is positively associated with Gen-Z's new ecological paradigm.

However, traditional values depend on how friendly they are towards environmentalism. The more favourable they are towards eco-friendly behaviour, the more it will contribute to the corresponding ecological paradigm and vice versa (Han et al, 2018; Han, Hwang, and Lee, 2017). Based on these two references conducted in the Chinese consumers' context, the third hypothesis is formed:

H3: Traditional value (TV) is positively associated with Gen-Z's new ecological paradigm

The last value from VBN theory is openness to change value (OCV); theoretically, it aligns with NEP. Practically, Ahmad et al (2020) found that if an individual or a group of people is willing to embrace changes, their NEP could be easily influenced. For example, when young generations accept and embrace sustainable consumption as the 'right value', then there are possibilities for them to make homologous behavioural changes. In addition, as demonstrated by Channa et al (2022), even though new ethical buyers cannot always afford sustainable clothes, they can reduce the frequency of consumption and try to extend the product life cycle for the sustainable products they have already purchased. Nevertheless, Jose & Sia (2022) mentioned that personal income is a critical controllable variable and impacts actual consumption behaviour: even their OCV made them change their mind, their actual affordability would still limit their behavioural change. But if we ignore the income issue and only focus on personal value, the 4th hypothesis is formed:

H4: OCV is positively associated with Gen-Z's new ecological paradigm

The original VBN model explained that when a particular NEP is formed, the next round of individuals' psychological state should be interpreted by Belief theories. As interpreted by Stern (1999), at this stage, individuals evaluate whether the intended behavioural change would bring more benefits to them or not (awareness of consequences), and also whether they are willing to bear the subsequent responsibilities. On one hand, if individuals care too much about their personal interests, such as not wanting to waste money on sustainable goods, then there may be no SCF behaviours triggered (Kim, Oh & Jung, 2015). However, if individuals are willing to accept the consequences, or the 'cost' of behavioural change; in the meanwhile, they willing to contribute as much as they can instead of merely obtain personal interests through a particular behavioural change, then the positive behaviour can be triggered such as SCF (Choi, Jang & Kandampully, 2015; Sreen, Chatterjee & Sadarangani, 2021). For instance, once an individual starts to believe the SCB practices would not only benefits to them, such as healthy materials (Chi, 2022), but also contribute to the wider public, such as reduce environmental impacts (Kim, Hall and Kim, 2020) and eliminate wastes (Part et al, 2022), then the actual SCF could be triggered. Hence, the next two hypotheses are formed:

H5: NEP is positively associated with awareness of consequences (AC) in SCB

H6: AC is positively associated with the ascription of responsibility (AR) in SCB

In addition, recent research, such as Saleem, Eagle & Low (2021), Hamid & Bano (2021), and Rossanty & Nasution (2025), found that educational level plays a significant role in strengthening the relationship between AC and AR. In their arguments, the highly educated people are more likely to think from an overall perspective: their decisions are made not just for the consideration of "cost effective" and "price", but also determined by functionality, comfort, physical safety, quality and environmental protection

conditions. For example, Rossanty & Nasution (2025)'s research directly demonstrates that many highly educated consumers purchase sustainable goods, significantly driven by the belief of "contribute to social and environmental good". Furthermore, Hamid & Bano (2021) found that higher educational qualifications are associated with higher income and stronger affordability; hence, consuming sustainable goods would put less pressure.

In accordance with the above arguments, the 7th hypothesis is formed:

H7: Gen-Z's educational level plays a mediating role in the AC and AR correlation relationship

And in accordance with the VBN level, AR is the direct trigger of Personal Norm, so the 8th hypothesis is:

H8: AR is positively associated with Personal Norm (PN)

Personal Norm (PN), in accordance with the VBN theory, is another important and direct antecedent of environmentally friendly behaviours, such as SCB. Research by Han, Hwang, and Lee (2017) found that once a behaviour becomes an individual's life standard (PN), this individual will use this standard to guide their daily behaviours. They found that students who are educated to be 'ethical consumers' and believe in it, the new value/paradigm would possibly become their lifelong norm. Likewise, Majeed, Kim & Kim (2023) found that PN determines individuals' actual behaviour; they define PN as a psychological status that one individual is intrinsically motivated to behave in a certain way. Zarei et al (2024) claimed that PN in the context of SCB is that one individual is morally obligated to perform a particular action or response in an eco-friendly manner. For example, once the norm is formed and ingrained, even with limited income, they would still purchase the sustainable products. Hence, the 8th hypothesis is formed:

H9: PN is positively associated with SCB (sustainable consumption buying)

The above hypotheses are formed in accordance with the VBN theory, although more factors have a direct relationship with SCB. As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, the authors intend to include SN (social norm) and trust as two other important variables.

SN refers to a group or social group that shares values/beliefs regarding the particular response to an event or a situation. Berger (2019) found that individuals' behaviour can be easily influenced by social norms when they seek to be a part of this group and be recognised by the group members. Nawi et al (2023) found that fashion consumers' shopping habits are motivated by both hedonic (pleasure-driven) and utilitarian (task-driven). Chi (2022) also verified that SN directly contributes to behavioural domains, and this influential level is even greater than other extrinsic motivators. He further indicated that at present, SCB is already an SN in more and more social groups, though people may not buy sustainable products, they know this is the right way and would "orally" influence others. Çoker et al (2022) stated that SN works directly and consistently to form and consolidate a particular behaviour, because this norm surrounds the individual at all times and could imperceptibly trigger a change in the individual's behaviour. Therefore, the 9th hypothesis is formed:

H10: SN is positively associated with SCB

Then, the authors explore the trust variable. In the present study, trust refers to the "green trust" (GT). The concept of green trust is referred from Chen (2010): "*individuals' willingness to depend on a product or service based on their belief or expectations resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and environmental performance*." For example, if individual buyers believe in and are loyal to a brand, and when the brand is committed to selling sustainable products and calling those local buyers to make the choice, then the SCB could be generated. Amin & Tarun (2021) have conducted practical research and demonstrated that consumers' SCB is generated by the brand influences, which means they are buying the 'brands' instead of products; in other words, they purchase sustainable products not because "the products are sustainable". Sh. Ahmad, Rosli & Quoquab (2022) also indicated that if loyal buyers deeply trust a brand and the brand is promoting its products, then the SCB can be generated. However, whether those loyal consumers will purchase the sustainable products from other brands remains unknown. Based on the above findings and this knowledge gap, the next two hypotheses are set:

H11: GT is positively associated with SCB

H12: Brand loyalty cannot generate Gen-Z's SCB to other brands
Proposed Framework

By summarising all the above, the present study develops a draft framework to interpret and predict the extent of Chinese Gen-Z's decisions on sustainable fashion clothes, as shown in Figure 2.

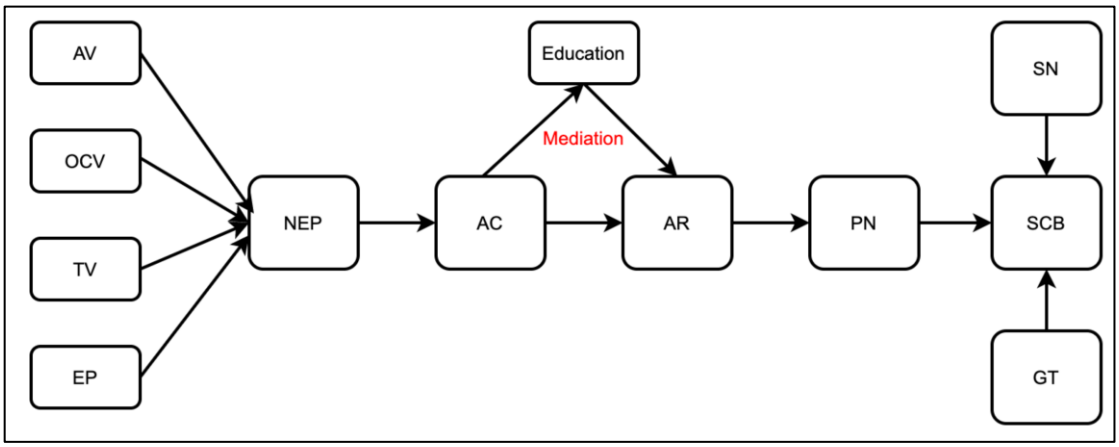

Figure 2: The Proposed Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Designs

This is a typical cross-sectional study where the survey was designed on the root of the Proposed Framework, modified from VBN theory and other relevant prior studies, with a quantitative approach. The following sections discuss the details employed in this study.

Population and Sampling

As mentioned earlier, the population of this research is the Chinese Gen-Z (born in1995-2005). To ensure this cross-sectional research could target the areas/population as widely as possible, an online survey distribution method was conducted via e-mail, WeChat, and QQ, covering the areas of Shandong, Hebei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Xi'an. Data were collected from January to early March 2025. More than 2,000 copies were sent along with the Consent Form, and 1,310 (n of sample size) were returned: Answered all questions in the survey, and with their signature on the consent form. The original survey and consent form were in Chinese, since not all respondents can read and write in English. After the data were collected, they were translated into English.

Survey Design

When the valid questionnaire copies were returned, the responses were numerically coded into data and transferred to SPSS 24.0 for analysis. The survey contains sections A and B. A represents a general profile of respondents relevant to the proposed framework, such as gender, age group, educational level (e.g., mediated effect), and other demographic information of respondents. Section B is designed with 5-level Likert scale items: 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

In terms of ethical considerations, the consent form and attached participant information sheet were distributed to each potential participant.

Multivariate Normality Examination

It is crucial to check the multivariate normality of the dataset before running statistical data analysis and selecting specific analytical tools. For example, under the assumption of a multivariate normal distribution, parameter estimation methods such as maximum likelihood estimation possess excellent statistical properties (e.g., unbiasedness and validity). If the data do not satisfy the assumption of multivariate normality, the estimation results may be inaccurate.

The SPSS analysis results show a multivariate normality test with p-values: Mardia's multivariate skewness ($z = 1722.14$) and kurtosis ($z = 25.44$). All are lower than 0.05, which means the data's non-normality. Hence, the original plan of linear regression may not be sufficient to interpret the SCB of

Gen-Z, so a more appropriate tool is selected, which is structural equation modelling (SEM). However, to test the mediating effect (H7), linear regression models are still used.

Presentation of Findings

Demographic Information

Table 1: Generic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	**Number of Respondents (n)**	**Percentage of Respondents (%)**
Male	674	51.45
Female	636	48.55
Total	**1,310**	**100.00**
Age 18-22	449	34.27
Age 23-25	362	27.63
Age 26-30	499	38.10
Total	**1,310**	**100.00**
High school and below	442	33.74
Bachelor (and in progress)	629	48.02
Postgraduate & higher (and in progress)	239	18.24
Total	**1,310**	**100.00**
East region	470	35.88
West region	122	9.31
North region	270	20.61
South region	448	34.20
Total	**1,310**	**100.00**

Table 1 shows the generic profile of respondents. The distribution of gender is relatively even, providing a foundation for gender-neutral analysis. Respondents with bachelor's degrees (and in progress) occupied the largest proportion of the sample, indicating that young people are advancing in their education. The high school and below sample accounted for 33.74% of the sample, but a few of them, such as those aged from 18 to 19, were still in high school; not all of them quit further study after graduation. Further evidence can be seen from the next variable, 34.72% of respondents were aged between 18 and 22. Of the four classified regions (i.e., East, West, North, and South), East and South samples are the biggest constituent parts. There are two interpretations to demonstrate the sampling is not significantly biased: First, East and South China are economically advanced than the other two regions, so theoretically there are more sustainable buyers. Second, one of the authors of the present study is in South China, which explains why the snowball sampling method was used to distribute the questionnaire primarily in this region.

Reliability and Validity

Before running the SEM analysis, validity and reliability tests were conducted to assess the internal consistency of items and composite reliability. The results are presented in Table 2 and passed the relevant tests, indicating suitability for statistical analysis such as SEM.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Test

Variables	**Item**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**Composite Reliability (rho_a)**
AV	1	.910	.911
OCV	1	.909	.912
TV	1	.906	.907
EP	1	.918	.927

NEP	1	.920	.936
AC	1	.905	.896
AR	1	.933	.825
Education	1	.899	.879
PN	1	.913	.902
SN	1	.892	.919
GT	1	.911	.922
SCB	1	.824	.814

Note: The ordinary variable Education has been treated by the dimensionless method, which means it can be recognised as a 5-Likert scale variable

Results of SEM and Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing & Results by SEM

Hypothesis		**Beta**	**t value**	**p value**
H1	AV→NEP	0.506	2.071*	.01
H2	OCV→NEP	0.393	4.093**	.00
H3	TV→NEP	0.465	5.287**	.00
H4	BP→NEP	0.504	6.442*	.01
H5	NEP→AC	0.822	7.195**	.00
H6	AC→AR	0.342	3.219*	.03
H8	AR→PN	0.630	6.363**	.00
H9	PN→SCB	0.494	3.560*	.02
H10	SN→SCB	0.712	5.212**	.00
H11	GT→SCB	0.496	7.599*	.01

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

The hypotheses (except H7) were tested, and every statistical path has passed the 'p' examination with statistical significance because none of their p-values have exceeded 0.05. Additionally, all 11 hypotheses have been proven to be true, and the Beta values are all positive, meaning that all of the models' correlation relationships are positive. Among them, the variables NEP and AC show the strongest correlation, indicating that the new ecological paradigm will significantly impact individuals' awareness of the consequences of psychological activities. In addition, a beta value of 0.712 implies that social norm works strongest in generating SCB than the other two independent variables compared with PN and GT. Those are valuable evidence for the authors to make recommendations.

Table 4: Mediating Effect of Education in H7

Term	Total effect	A	b	a*b intermediary effect value
AC=>Education=>AR	0.671**	0.018**	9.872**	0.462

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

The test of H7 is to see whether the latent variable "education" has a mediating effect between AC and AR. Based on regression models, it is believed that "education" has a mid-level mediating effect (0.462) between AC and AR. It means that the higher the education level a person has, the greater the possibility it will promote their ethical AR's psychological state.

DISCUSSION

With VBN theory and two independent variables (SN and GT), the present study has investigated which variables the SCB will be most triggered by, particularly in the context of Chinese Gen-Z in sustainable fashion. Although Prior studies such as Taylor et al (2021) and Smith et al (2020) have conducted similar

research on Gen-Z, they did not focus on Chinese people. By testing those hypotheses, it is believed that VBN theory is still sufficient to explain how Gen-Z's SCB can be triggered. Meanwhile, it looks like social norm (SN) plays the most significant role in generating the SCB in a direct way (beta=0.712); in addition, individuals' trust towards a brand, including loyalty, can also directly generate SCB (beta=0.496). Thus, to comprehensively let Gen-Z trigger and maintain SCB, suggestions should be made from multi-dimensional perspectives.

Nevertheless, one question that is worth considering is the first step: obtaining values before the NEP is formed. For example, what if individuals do not wish to open for changes (OCV)? Whether the corresponding NEP will still be captured remains unknown. As one research (Smith, 2020) has indicated, stubborn individuals tend to avoid changes unless they strongly realise or foresee the 'benefits' it would bring with less risk, which is hard to trigger SCB in price-sensitive consumers, regardless of age group. In fact, considering the income of young generations may not always be well-off, the financial factor is a significant barrier to triggering and maintaining SCB, as well as for egoistic individuals.

Traditional values may be altered by eco-friendly social values and brands' positioning. Beliefs, norms, and eventually behaviors can be changed accordingly. Sustainable brands or brands seeking to reposition themselves need to contribute to changing consumer values, to lead their SCBs.

The first recommendation is for the brands to play the role of educator and enhance consumers' environmental awareness. Brands should fully leverage social media and digital platforms to disseminate sustainable fashion concepts in ways that resonate with young people. Through short videos, livestreaming activities, interactive games, and other formats, they can popularize environmental knowledge among young consumers, enhancing their awareness and understanding of sustainable fashion. Yang et al (2024) also found that practical implications emphasize the use of social media and influencers to support the growth of the second-hand fashion industry as a sustainable alternative to fast fashion. Additionally, collaborations with educational institutions can integrate sustainable fashion concepts into relevant curricula, fostering environmental consciousness among the young generations.

Education is only a part of a comprehensive strategy. Brands need to survive through product sales by attracting consumers to buy, hence the recommendation is to design and balance fashionable and eco-friendly products. Sustainable fashion products must strike a balance between environmental friendliness and style. Designers should stay attuned to fashion trends, skillfully combining eco-friendly materials with fashionable elements to create products that align with young people's aesthetics while embodying environmental values (Lee and Kim, 2020). This is straightforward with knowledge collaboration among fashion designers within their community of practice using information and communication technology (Bhalla, Bahar, and Kanapathy, 2023). Furthermore, modular design can be adopted to extend product lifespans and enhance sustainability. While in product promotion, designing and implementing innovative marketing strategies are crucial. Utilising social media and KOL (Key Opinion Leader) marketing is an effective way to attract young people (Harris et al, 2021). Brands can collaborate with influencers and bloggers in the environmental field to spread sustainable fashion concepts through their influence. Additionally, hosting eco-themed fashion events and design competitions can increase brand exposure and user engagement.

However, considering the high cost of sustainable materials and/or the recycling process, as well as young consumers' level of willingness to pay, reasonable pricing and cost control matter for brands. High prices are one of the main barriers preventing young people from purchasing sustainable fashion products. Brands should reduce costs by optimising supply chains and adopting large-scale production methods, making products more affordable (Green et al, 2021). At the same time, new business models such as rentals and second-hand trading can be introduced to lower the purchasing threshold for young consumers.

Last but not least, sustainable fashion brands should strengthen brand collaborations and cross-brand partnerships. Partnering with other well-known brands or designers to launch co-branded sustainable fashion products can quickly enhance brand visibility and product appeal (Brown and Wilson, 2022). Such cross-industry collaborations not only attract more young consumers but also reduce research and production costs through the integration of resources.

CONCLUSION

As the future of a nation, the young generations always play the role of "hope". In the contemporary world, sustainability is a commonly recognised value for more individuals, social groups, organisations, and producers/brands. Considering Gen-Z is becoming the mainstream buyers of fast fashion, it is crucial to understand how to trigger their SCB to contribute to societal sustainability. By testing the modified framework based on the root of VBN theory, this study finds that VBN theory remains sufficient to interpret how Gen-Z's SCB can be triggered. But in the meantime, it looks like social norm (SN) plays the most significant role in generating the SCB in a direct way (beta=0.712); in addition, individuals' trust towards a brand, including loyalty, can also directly generate SCB (beta=0.496). Thus, to comprehensively let Gen-Z trigger and maintain SCB, suggestions should be made from multi-dimensional perspectives.

The recommendations are based on the research findings. First, brands should fully leverage social media and digital platforms to promote sustainable fashion concepts in ways that resonate with young people. Second, designers should stay attuned to fashion trends, skillfully integrating eco-friendly materials with stylish elements to create products that align with young consumers' aesthetic trends while embodying environmental values. Third, brands should reduce costs by optimizing supply chains and adopting large-scale production methods, making their products more affordable. Finally, strengthening collaborations with other brands to launch co-branded sustainable fashion products can quickly enhance brand visibility and product appeal.

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