

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

DOI: 10.47703/ejeb.v68i4.428



# Evaluating the Feasibility of Sustainable Consumer Behavior Among Generation Z Youth in Almaty

Dinara  
Satybaldiyeva<sup>1\*</sup>

Zhazira  
Tymbayeva<sup>1</sup>

Zhazira  
Kakitayeva<sup>2</sup>

Aigerim  
Kazhuratova<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Satbayev University,  
Almaty, Kazakhstan

<sup>2</sup> Kazakh National University  
named after al-Farabi,  
Almaty, Kazakhstan

## Corresponding author:

\*Satybaldiyeva D. – PhD,  
Associate Professor, Satbayev  
University, Almaty, Kazakhstan.  
Email: [d.satybaldiyeva@satbayev.university](mailto:d.satybaldiyeva@satbayev.university)

## How to cite this article:

Satybaldiyeva, D., Tymbayeva, Zh., Kakitayeva, Zh. & Kazhuratova, A., (2024). Evaluating the Feasibility of Sustainable Consumer Behavior Among Generation Z Youth in Almaty. Eurasian Journal of Economic and Business Studies, 68(4), 5-17.

## Conflict of interest:

author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## ABSTRACT

One of the pressing global challenges today is managing humanity's unlimited needs with limited resources, emphasizing fostering sustainable consumption. This study aims to identify the key factors influencing adopting sustainable consumption behaviors among Generation Z, an active consumer segment, and evaluate the potential for their transition to sustainable consumption. A survey results, highlighted the primary influences and barriers to sustainable consumer behavior. A survey was conducted among 221 participants from Generation Z, aged 18-23, to examine the key motivators and obstacles to adopting sustainable consumer habits. The findings indicate that Generation Z is positive towards essential prerequisites for sustainable consumption. Furthermore, the study reveals that 85% of the surveyed representatives of Generation Z are familiar with sustainable consumption, and 59% believe that consumers play a crucial role in its promotion. At the same time, 67% of respondents sort waste at least sometimes, and 75% save water and energy. It concludes that, with proper support and encouragement, Generation Z could play a pivotal role in promoting and adopting sustainable consumption practices, contributing to broader sustainability goals. These insights guide efforts to promote sustainable consumption for policymakers and educators and inform the development of targeted strategies that resonate with this demographic's unique perspectives. The present study was conducted among participants from the city of Almaty, and further research could focus on other large cities and rural areas of Kazakhstan.

**KEYWORDS:** Generation Z, Green Economy, Environmental Economics, Sustainable Development, conscious consumer, Resource Management, Waste Sorting

**SCSTI:** 06.58.55

**JEL Code:** J13, L67, M31

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** The study was not sponsored

**EJEB**S

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmental problems have intensified, posing significant threats to humanity and ecosystems. Critical issues such as air pollution, water contamination, global warming, ozone depletion, acid precipitation, and soil degradation have emerged as central global concerns. A primary driver of these problems is the overconsumption of natural resources (Tan & Lau, 2016). For example, humanity currently consumes approximately 30% more resources than the Earth can regenerate annually, with this figure steadily increasing over time (Kostadinova, 2016).

A critical solution lies in reshaping consumer behavior to align with sustainable principles. Encouraging sustainable consumption is essential for mitigating environmental damage. Moreover, this alternative approach may help adjust consumer behavior to the current environmental conditions, ensuring that consumption patterns are more sustainable and in harmony with the ecological limitations of the planet. This topic gained global attention at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced, with Goal 12 focusing on “Responsible Consumption and Production”. The UN warns that if the global population reaches 9.8 billion by 2050, sustaining current consumption patterns would require the resources of three Earths.

Consequently, modifying consumer behavior presents a critical opportunity to mitigate the environmental consequences of sluggish economic and social development. A successful shift toward responsible consumption offers several benefits, including enhanced resource efficiency, a comprehensive evaluation of the entire life cycle of economic activities, and the execution of numerous initiatives and agreements aimed at environmental preservation. The consumption of goods and services has contributed to significant changes in lifestyle patterns (Abrar et al., 2021). Berglund and Matti (2006)

underscore the role of consumers in environmental degradation, positioning them as central to the transition toward responsible consumption. Therefore, a key challenge in this shift is to foster the consumption of products with minimal negative environmental impact, reduce overall consumption, and adjust lifestyles accordingly. The age of consumers is another significant factor in this transition. Younger generations tend to consume a broader range of goods and services. Hill and Lee (2012) observed that Generations Y and Z members are among the most active consumers in the apparel sector. For instance, individuals within these cohorts allocate approximately 70% of their income to clothing and decorative items (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). This population size and income increase have led marketers to develop tailored strategies to understand and influence young people's behaviors and consumer characteristics (Dabija & Băbut, 2019).

This paper aims to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, while much of the existing literature examines sustainable consumer behavior across generations, the focus has primarily been on Western contexts. In contrast, the study of sustainable consumption among generations in Central Asia remains underexplored. Like many parts of the world, Central Asia faces pressing environmental challenges, including severe drinking water shortages in some areas, complex household waste management issues, and high levels of air pollution in urban centers. These problems will likely impact centennials most significantly, as they are the generation poised to confront and address these long-term environmental consequences.

Furthermore, research on Generation Z's values and behaviors in Central Asian countries is notably limited. As this generation enters adulthood, they are expected to play a growing role in shaping sustainable practices and influencing societal norms in the region. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection suggests that by 2030, centennials will represent 37% of the country's labor force. Therefore, understanding their attitudes toward

responsible consumption and sustainable consumer behavior is crucial for shaping future strategies and development pathways. Considering their distinctive perspectives and emerging influence, studying their unique attributes and attitudes toward sustainability provides valuable insights into how sustainable consumer behaviors may evolve in Kazakhstan. This foundation is essential for developing targeted policies and educational initiatives tailored to this context.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most conceptual frameworks on sustainable consumption and consumer behavior address the topic through three key dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. Responsible consumption is defined as consumption that maintains a balance across these dimensions while considering the needs of future generations (Luchs et al., 2010). This concept is rooted in the 1987 United Nations Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future*, which first defined “sustainable development” as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Additionally, the Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption offered its definition, emphasizing the use of services and products that meet basic human needs and enhance the quality of life while minimizing the

consumption of natural resources, toxic materials, and emissions, thereby ensuring that the product or service life cycle does not compromise the needs of future generations.

While these concepts have been extensively explored in Western countries, recent years have witnessed growing interest in sustainable consumption in countries such as Malaysia (Rehman et al., 2023), Indonesia, India, and China. These nations have begun to study the behaviors of different age groups about conscious consumption. In much of the literature, the terms “sustainable consumption” and “green consumer behavior” are often used interchangeably to describe environmentally positive consumer actions.

However, as Kostadinova (2016) highlighted, there is a significant distinction between the two. Green consumption refers specifically to products and activities that reduce humanity's negative environmental impact. In contrast, sustainable consumption implies a more comprehensive transformation in consumer paradigms, advocating for a balanced relationship with the environment and equitable resource distribution. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) further categorizes sustainable consumption as encompassing essential human activities necessary for existence. Adopting sustainable consumer behavior in areas outlined in Table 1 facilitates the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**TABLE 1. Categories of sustainable consumer behavior**

Nutrition	Mobility	Housing	Clothing	Education	Health	Leisure
<i>Examples</i>						
Food waste reduction, sustainable diets	Use of environmentally friendly transport, fuels, car sharing	Sustainable building, energy, and water reservation	Preference for ethical clothing, organic fabrics	Teaching sustainable living, promoting sustainability	Healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyles	Sustainable tourism, leisure practices with low resource intensity
<i>Descriptions</i>						
Focus on reducing carbon footprint by	Low-impact transportation that reduces emissions	Building and retrofitting structures for energy	Prioritizing long-lasting and ethically-made	Educational programs that integrate sustainability	Reducing the impact of personal care products on	Promoting travel options that minimize environmental harm and

sourcing food locally and seasonally	and fossil fuel dependency	efficiency and low impact on resources.	clothing to reduce waste.	into various disciplines.	the environment.	support conservation efforts.
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*Note:* compiled by authors

These categories represent the fundamental aspects of an individual's modern lifestyle. However, in practice, many of these sustainable consumption behaviors are particularly characteristic of younger generations. For instance, young people frequently make choices about transportation to school, purchase clothing more often, and actively organize their leisure activities. Therefore, examining sustainable consumption through a generational lens is of significant scientific interest.

According to various sources, the birth years attributed to Generation Z vary. In this article, we adopt Tari's (2011) definition, defining Generation Z as individuals born between 1995 and 2010. Generation Z currently includes over 4 million individuals in Kazakhstan, comprising approximately 23% of the country's population.

Generation Z has been immersed in the Internet, social media, and digital technologies from a young age (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This generation is characterized by high levels of education and reliance on technology, with a strong inclination toward self-expression and fostering social connections (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). As consumers, Generation Z is discerning and places great importance on aligning purchasing decisions with personal values (Goldring & Azab, 2021). They expect brands to not only meet practical needs but also to contribute meaningfully to social causes. Their preferences emphasize efficiency and informed decision-making, focusing on products that support functional and social/environmental objectives.

Understanding Generation Z's sustainable consumer behavior and their intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products is crucial for developing effective sustainability strategies. As a generation receptive to new ideas, with widespread Internet access and a heightened awareness of environmental issues,

Generation Z is poised to play a pivotal role in driving sustainable development in the future, supported by their growing purchasing power (Hume, 2010). Researchers identify this generation as agents of positive change, capable of engaging in responsible consumption, influencing their peers and families, and shaping broader consumer behaviors (Prakash et al., 2018). The influence of Generation Z on consumer behavior and their evolving expectations positions them as critical indicators for future consumer trends and the development of sustainable marketing strategies.

#### *Sustainable consumer behavior*

Sustainable lifestyle actions and consumer behavior are necessary for the future of both individuals and society. There are different ways to make consumer behavior sustainable. Sustainable consumer behavior includes sustainable energy use by individuals and households, low energy consumption, and choosing environmentally friendly products over products that can harm the environment. Minimizing household consumption does not necessarily mean reducing quality of life or poverty. If we look at the consumption habits of people and society, we can say that the current era is an era of consumption. Therefore, people's well-being and happiness are measured by the quantity of products they consume. What matters to people is not the qualitative value of the thing consumed but the quantity used. This situation creates many problems, such as increased energy use, increased waste, pollution, unconscious use of resources, and unnecessary consumption. Without awareness of these problems, it is impossible to prevent them and leave future generations with a livable and sustainable future. Sustainable consumption is usually associated with the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Sustainable

consumption requires the use of natural resources with certain limits, taking into account the needs of future generations. This type of consumption is based on the goal of reducing harm to the environment. The integration of this mode of consumption into our daily lives can be achieved through two main paths: environmentally conscious consumption and reduced consumption. Similarly, Ozgul's (2010) study showed that sustainable consumption behavior is characterized by two main aspects: "saving" and "environmental sensitivity". Various factors, such as rapid population growth, increased awareness of environmental issues, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and depletion of natural resources, contribute to the importance of sustainable consumption on a sustainable basis.

Governments play a crucial role in promoting sustainable consumption by introducing and enforcing policies and regulations for waste reduction, such as setting targets, advancing circular economy practices, and supporting sustainable procurement policies. Individuals, in turn, can adopt sustainable lifestyles by consuming less, choosing products with minimal environmental impact, and reducing carbon emissions in their daily activities.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Consumers and their behavior issues play a significant role in studying sustainable

development. On this occasion, an online survey of the economically active generation in the consumer market was conducted on sustainable consumer behavior. Based on the review of existing literature, the research objectives were established as follows: (1) to examine whether Generation Z is familiar with the concept of sustainable consumption, (2) to evaluate whether there is a tendency to adopt sustainable consumer behavior among members of Generation Z, (3) to identify what challenges do centennials encounter concerning sustainable consumer behavior.

The survey was designed and distributed online using the Google Forms platform. A total of 221 members of Generation Z, aged between 18 and 23, participated in the survey. The study's primary purpose, voluntary participation, and anonymity were explained to the respondents before the survey was conducted. Out of the completed questionnaires, 205 valid responses were identified, and the data were processed using Microsoft Excel.

This research paper employs quantitative, systematic, and comparative research methods. Quantitative methods are widely used in academic marketing research, while systematic methods are prevalent in interdisciplinary research. The systematic method helps identify cause-and-effect relationships and determine their origins.

The demographic composition of the survey is shown in Table 2.

**TABLE 2.** Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage, %
Age	18	76	37
	19	83	40
	20	36	18
	21	3	1
	22	4	2
	23	3	1
Gender	Male	74	36
	Female	131	64
Education	Secondary level	11	5
	Graduation level	186	91
	Post-graduation level or higher	8	4

*Note:* compiled by authors

The study adhered to ethical research principles to ensure participant rights and data integrity. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents at the start of the survey. Respondents were informed of the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any time and their responses' anonymity. Data privacy was maintained, with all responses stored securely and only used for research. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and percentage calculations, were employed to summarize the responses' demographic characteristics and overall patterns.

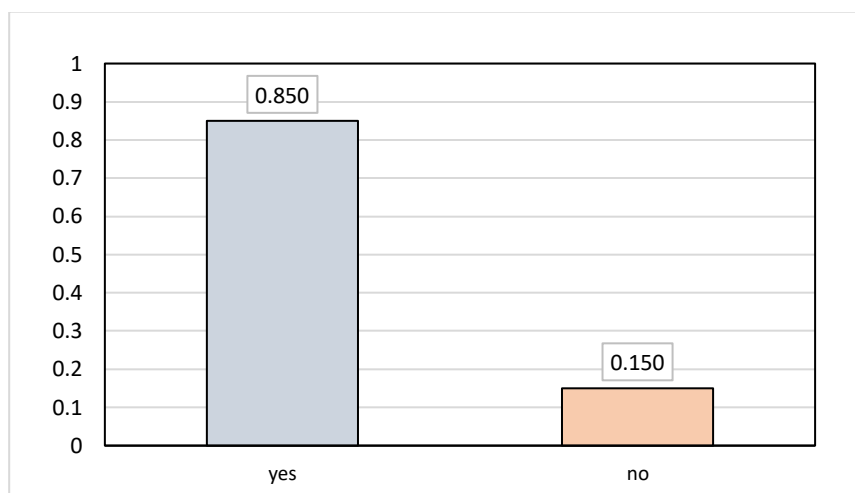
#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The bar chart shows the respondents' level of familiarity with the concept of sustainable/conscious consumption. Based on

the results, 85% of respondents indicated they are familiar with sustainable or conscious consumption. This high percentage suggests a strong awareness of sustainability issues among the surveyed group. 15% of respondents indicated they needed to become more familiar with the concept. At the same time, a smaller proportion shows that some people may not be aware of or engaged with sustainable consumption.

The data obtained reflect prevailing sustainable trends and can form the basis for strategies aimed at further education and involvement in sustainable consumption. Increased awareness and engagement can contribute to the formation of more responsible behavior in society, which, in turn, will support the transition to environmentally balanced consumption and production patterns.

The bar chart illustrates the respondents' familiarity with sustainable or conscious consumption (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1.** Respondents' familiarity with the concept of sustainable/conscious consumption

*Note:* compiled by authors

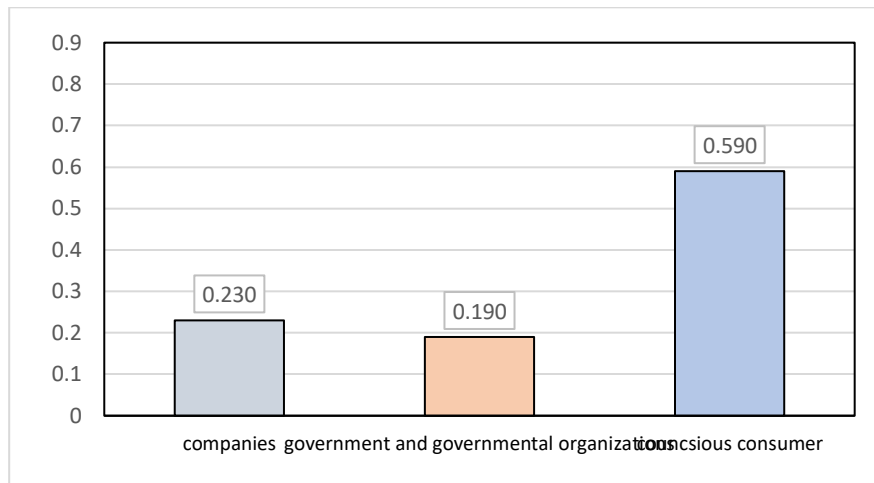
The assertion that most (59%) believe conscious consumers play the most significant role in sustainable consumption underscores individuals' perceived power and responsibility in making sustainable choices. The results align with the “consumer sovereignty” theory, which positions consumers as critical change

agents in sustainability efforts. Thøgersen and Schrader (2012) discuss how consumer awareness and behavior are essential in creating demand for sustainable products, highlighting the impact individual choices can have on market trends. Companies perceived as having a considerable role (23%) are expected

to uphold corporate responsibility. This perspective aligns with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles, as Carroll (1991) outlined, encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. By adopting sustainable

business practices, companies can significantly reduce their environmental footprint and influence consumer behavior through their products and services.

The main roles in the transition to sustainable consumption are shown in Figure 2.



**FIGURE 2.** Roles in the transition to sustainable consumption

*Note:* compiled by authors

The relatively lower emphasis on government (19%) might indicate a perceived need for more adequate policies or enforcement in promoting sustainable practices. This observation echoes critiques suggesting that government actions often do not match the urgency needed to address environmental issues (Seyfang, 2005). However, Spaargaren (2000) points out that effective governmental regulations and incentives are crucial for fostering an environment where sustainable practices can thrive. This distribution of perceived roles highlights the interconnectedness of consumer behavior, corporate responsibility, and governmental policies in advancing sustainable consumption.

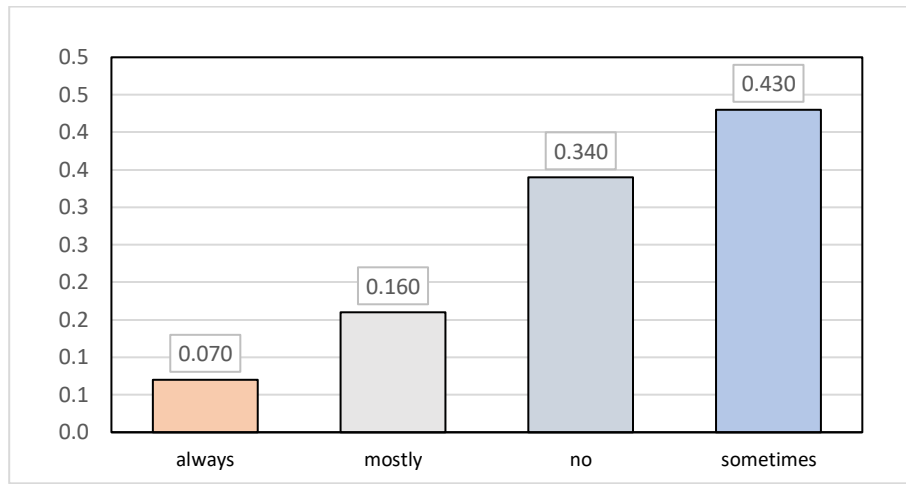
While 67% engage in garbage sorting at least occasionally, only a tiny fraction (7%) consistently sort their waste. This discrepancy indicates an “intention-behavior gap” frequently explored in sustainable behavior literature. Despite favorable attitudes toward

recycling, behaviors often need to align due to numerous barriers (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

The data reveals a varied pattern in waste sorting behavior among respondents (Figure 3).

A notable 34% of respondents do not sort their garbage at all, underscoring a critical need for enhanced awareness and improved facilitation of recycling practices. This behavior gap indicates the challenges in promoting consistent waste management practices. Derksen and Gartrell (1993) emphasize that the availability of convenient recycling facilities and adequate information significantly impacts recycling behavior.

The lack of infrastructure and perceived inconvenience are often cited as significant impediments to regular recycling. These findings highlight the necessity for strategic interventions to increase the consistency of waste sorting practices among individuals.



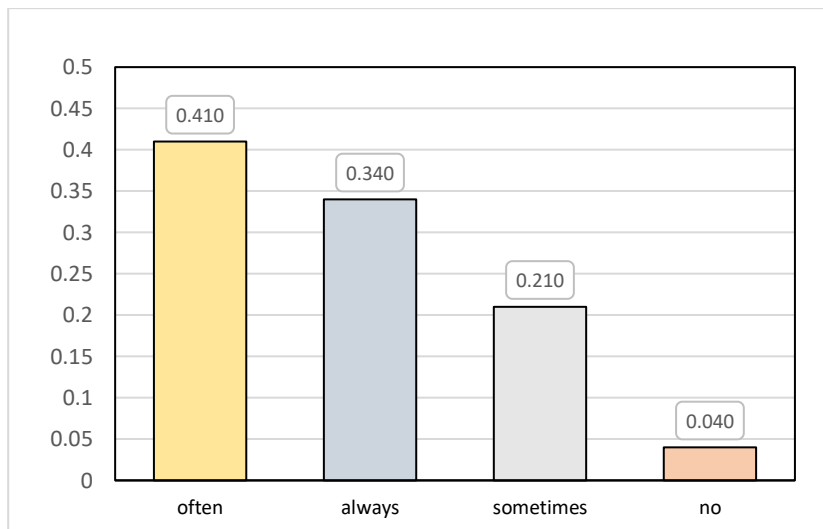
**FIGURE 3.** Respondents' waste sorting behavior

*Note:* compiled by authors

Improving infrastructure, enhancing accessibility, and providing clear information can bridge the gap between environmental intentions and actual behaviors.

A significant majority of respondents (75%) report saving water and energy either frequently or consistently, which is a positive indicator of sustainable behavior in resource conservation. This high level of engagement in

water and energy conservation practices suggests an increasing awareness and adoption of sustainable habits. Various factors often influence such behaviors, including environmental attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control (Stern, 2000). These factors collectively contribute to the likelihood of individuals adopting energy-saving measures and reducing water usage.



**FIGURE 4.** Water and energy conservation practices

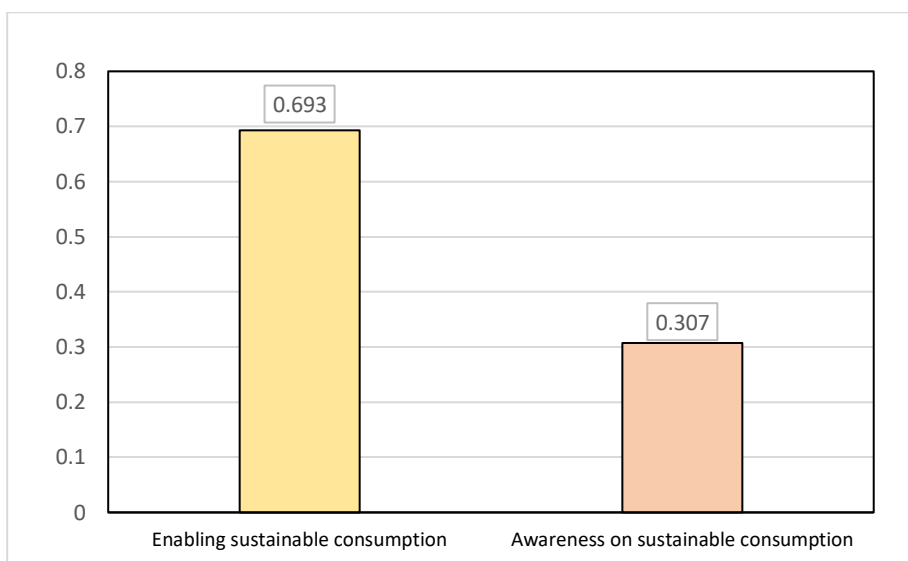
*Note:* compiled by authors



Conversely, a minimal portion of the sample (4%) does not engage in water and energy conservation, highlighting a generally high level of awareness and practice among the population. This widespread engagement implies recognizing the importance of resource conservation for environmental sustainability. Evidence suggests that programs and interventions that provide feedback and incentives can effectively promote conservation behaviors (Abrahamse et al., 2005). These initiatives can enhance motivation and perceived control, thereby encouraging more consistent adoption of conservation practices.

This data indicates that while a majority are already practicing sustainable resource use, there is potential to optimize these behaviors through targeted interventions and educational programs. By understanding the underlying motivations and barriers to conservation behaviors, strategies can be developed to support even higher participation rates in sustainable practices.

The higher percentage of respondents highlighting the importance of enabling sustainable consumption reflects a broader understanding that practical, systemic changes are essential for sustainability (Figure 5).



**FIGURE 5.** Important factors in sustainable consumption

*Note:* compiled by authors

According to Jackson (2005), simply raising awareness is not enough; enabling environments such as access to sustainable products, infrastructure for recycling, and energy-efficient technologies are crucial for making sustainable choices easier for consumers. Enabling sustainable consumption also involves changes at the policy and market levels. Theories of ecological modernization suggest that for sustainable consumption to be realized, there must be a combination of governmental regulation, corporate innovation, and consumer participation (Mol &

Sonnenfeld, 2000). Policies such as subsidies for green products, stricter environmental regulations, and corporate sustainability initiatives are critical in creating an enabling environment.

While awareness is crucial, the lower percentage (31%) indicates that awareness alone may not lead to substantial behavioral change. This aligns with research by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), which argues that awareness is just one component of pro-environmental behavior. Other factors, such as social norms, values, and economic incentives,

often play a more significant role. Theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) emphasize that awareness must be coupled with perceived behavioral control and social norms to change consumer behavior effectively. Thus, while awareness campaigns are necessary, they must be supported by enabling mechanisms that make sustainable choices more accessible and appealing.

The data analysis highlights the critical role of conscious consumers in driving sustainable consumption, although systemic changes by companies and governments are also essential. Waste sorting and resource conservation behaviors show varying levels of commitment, with social media emerging as a powerful tool for promoting sustainability. This suggests that effective sustainable consumption strategies must be multifaceted, combining individual action, corporate responsibility, government policy, and innovative use of social media.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to study the factors influencing the formation of sustainable consumer behavior among the youth of generation Z, and to assess the prospects for their transition to responsible consumption. Special attention was paid to identifying this age group's motivations, barriers, and awareness of sustainable consumption. The uniqueness of this study lies in the study of the characteristics of sustainable consumption among generation Z in Central Asia, which remains a little-studied area in the context of global research. Unlike Western studies, the focus was on specific social and cultural aspects that influence the behavior of young people in Kazakhstan.

The literature review has identified three main areas in which sustainable consumption is key: social, economic, and environmental. Responsible consumption has been characterized as a process that maintains a balance between the present and future needs. The review examined the concepts of “green” and sustainable consumption while emphasizing that sustainable consumption requires more profound changes in consumer

paradigms and society as a whole than a simple preference for environmentally friendly products. Moreover, the literature has focused on the importance of education and awareness for forming sustainable habits, especially among young consumers such as Generation Z, who are seen as agents of positive change in sustainable development.

The study highlights the critical role that sustainable consumer behavior plays in addressing the pressing environmental challenges of our time. With the global population projected to reach nearly 10 billion by 2050, shifting towards responsible consumption is more urgent than ever. Generation Z, characterized by their technological savviness and social awareness, emerges as a pivotal demographic in this transition. Their purchasing power and values-driven consumption patterns make them a key focus for strategies aimed at promoting sustainability.

The findings underscore the importance of fostering awareness and practical changes that enable sustainable choices. While there is a growing recognition of individual responsibility in sustainable consumption, inconsistencies in behaviors such as waste sorting reveal the need for improved infrastructure and clearer guidance.

Ultimately, the article advocates for a comprehensive approach that combines consumer education, corporate responsibility, and supportive government policies. By creating the necessary conditions for sustainable consumption, it is possible to mitigate the environmental impact of modern lifestyles and ensure that future generations can meet their needs without compromising the planet's resources. This approach requires concerted efforts across all sectors of society, with Generation Z positioned at the forefront of this transformative movement.

This study was conducted among the youth of Almaty, which limits its applicability for understanding the characteristics of sustainable consumption in other regions of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Future research may focus on studying youth from other large cities and rural

areas to identify regional differences and characteristics related to sustainable behavior. One of the identified results of this study was the gap between the intention to follow sustainable practices and the actual behavior of young people. Future research may explore this phenomenon in more detail by analyzing the factors that prevent the introduction of sustainable habits, even among knowledgeable and motivated consumers.

#### *Limitations and recommendations*

Although this study encompasses a substantial array of findings derived from

participants in the online survey, the authors acknowledge that the fact that research was conducted in Almaty city may result in certain conclusions not being applicable to the broader demographic of centennials within the nation. Consequently, subsequent research should be directed towards ascertaining whether the responses from a larger sample size of participants will yield analogous results, or if investigations conducted in other major urban centers or smaller municipalities may elicit different outcomes that could generate significant insights.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Writing – original draft: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Zhazira Kakitayeva.

Conceptualization: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Zhazira Kakitayeva, Zhazira Tymbayeva.

Formal analysis and investigation: Dinara Satybaldiyeva.

Development of research methodology: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Zhazira Tymbayeva.

Resources: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Zhazira Kakitayeva, Dinara Satybaldiyeva.

Software and supervisions: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Kakitayeva Zh.

Data collection, analysis and interpretation: Zhazira Kakitayeva.

Visualization: Dinara Satybaldiyeva.

Writing review and editing research: Aigerim Kazhmuratova, Zhazira Kakitayeva, Zhazira Tymbayeva.

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**\*Dinara Satybaldiyeva** – PhD, Associate Professor, Satbayev University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mail: [d.satybaldiyeva@satbayev.university](mailto:d.satybaldiyeva@satbayev.university), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6494-0681>

**Zhazira Tymbayeva** – Cand. Sc. (Econ.), Associate Professor, Satbayev University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: [zh.tymbayeva@satbayev.university](mailto:zh.tymbayeva@satbayev.university), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7705-9874>

**Zhazira Kakitayeva** – PhD candidate, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Email: [kakitayeva@gmail.com](mailto:kakitayeva@gmail.com), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6092-0388>

**Aigerim Kazhuratova** – Cand. Econ. (Sc.), Associate Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Email: [aigerim\\_k71@mail.ru](mailto:aigerim_k71@mail.ru), ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2119-483>