

GEN Y & GEN Z IN SUSTAINABLE FASHION
THE ROLE OF ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES IN VALUE-BASED STARTUPS

BY

ALEYNA AKAR

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The research examines how ethical and spiritual values affect sustainable fashion choices among Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z consumers, with an emphasis on value-based fashion startups. The research examines the behavioral patterns and psychological factors and age-specific characteristics that lead younger consumers to select sustainable fashion choices while fast fashion faces increasing criticism for its environmental damage and labor mistreatment and excessive production (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Joy et al., 2012).

The research uses three theoretical frameworks including the Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) Model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to study how intrinsic ethical values and emotional fulfillment and spiritual beliefs transform into fashion-related attitudes and actions (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ajzen, 1991). The research based on a quantitative survey of 57 Gen Y and Gen Z respondents shows that ethical motivations including fairness and transparency and anti-exploitation drive sustainable fashion behaviors the most. The survey results validate VAB and SDT theories because participants choose consumption experiences that deliver emotional and moral satisfaction.

The decision-making process included spiritual values like mindfulness and simplicity and inner alignment which served as emotional motivators for Gen Z members who express spirituality through lifestyle aesthetics and identity expression (Varma, 2022; Wang et al., 2023). The research demonstrates that people express ethical intentions through their statements yet their purchasing behavior shows a different pattern which supports TPB's theory about external barriers like price and accessibility that prevent intention-to-action conversion (Ajzen, 1991; Haider et al., 2022).

The research shows that Gen Y maintained consistent values and actions but Gen Z showed both strong value orientation and high susceptibility to digital marketing and consumer fatigue. Both groups showed strong emotional connections to brands that offer transparency, authenticity, and shared purpose.

The research demonstrates how value-based fashion startups achieve consumer trust and loyalty through their successful implementation of ethical storytelling and community engagement and spiritual branding strategies (Tran et al., 2022; Cucu et al., 2024). The strategic brand equity of value alignment is demonstrated through startups PANGAIA, MATE the Label and NINETY PERCENT.

The research adds to the growing sustainable fashion discussion by creating a single behavioral model which includes ethical and spiritual and generational elements. The research provides essential knowledge to fashion entrepreneurs and marketers and academics who want to understand and connect with the changing values of Gen Y and Gen Z. The dissertation presents opportunities for future research to study spirituality as a motivational driver through longitudinal and cross-cultural methods to understand the intricate relationships between identity ethics and consumption in fashion.

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Gen Y and Gen Z in Sustainable Fashion:

The Role of Ethical and Spiritual Values in Value-Based Startups

1. Introduction

Sustainable fashion has become more popular among consumers and business owners because environmental and social issues now dominate public discussions. Fast fashion faces widespread criticism for its destructive environmental impact and its treatment of workers and excessive manufacturing so consumers especially from younger demographics now choose brands that match their ethical standards (Joy et al., 2012; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Among these values, **ethical principles** such as transparency, fair labour, and environmental responsibility, as well as **spiritual or emotional values** like mindfulness, authenticity, and identity expression, have started to play a significant role in fashion consumption (Bly, Gwоздz and Reisch, 2015; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006).

Generation Y (Millennials) and **Generation Z**, born approximately between 1981 and 2012, are considered the most value-driven and socially aware consumer groups. These generations not only expect brands to offer quality and style but also to reflect their personal ideals and moral standards. Research indicates that Gen Y and Gen Z consumers tend to back brands which show dedication to sustainable practices and ethical conduct (Francis and Hoefel, 2018; McKinsey & BoF, 2020). The growing trend of conscious consumerism has led people to base their fashion brand choices on spiritual values that include simplicity and inner alignment and emotional resonance (Pentina, Guilloux and Micu, 2018). The actual effects of these values on purchasing behavior need further investigation particularly for emerging value-based startups that provide alternative fashion options to traditional brands (Henninger, Alevizou and Oates, 2016).

This research focuses on how **ethical and spiritual values** influence the fashion consumption habits of Gen Y and Gen Z within the framework of **sustainable fashion**. The research examines both consumer awareness of these values and their impact on real-world actions including brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. The dissertation will examine how small value-driven fashion startups use these values to attract and maintain ethically conscious consumers.

1.1 Objective of the Research

This research aims to study how ethical and spiritual values affect sustainable fashion choices among Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z consumers. The fashion industry faces environmental damage and excessive production and unethical labor practices (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Joy et al., 2012) so researchers and industry practitioners need to understand how young consumers' attitudes are changing. This research examines how ethical and sustainable values together with spiritual values influence fashion choices of younger generations who demonstrate growing social awareness and value-driven behavior (Francis and Hoefel, 2018; Manley et al., 2023).

The research investigates how value-based fashion startups use purpose-driven branding strategies through transparent storytelling and spiritual alignment (Wagner, 2022; Varma, 2022). The startups transform conventional fashion norms through ethical branding narratives which creates strong

emotional bonds and customer loyalty with Gen Y and Z consumers (Antonio and Gentina, 2021; Cucu et al., 2024).

The research evaluates how established behavioural theories including the Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) Model (Homer and Kahle, 1988), Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) apply to sustainable fashion consumption. These frameworks will help develop theoretical knowledge about how values become internalized and lead to action in fashion contexts where personal identity meets peer influence and emotional meaning.

This research will add value to academic knowledge about sustainable consumer behavior while delivering practical guidance for ethical fashion entrepreneurs who want to reach young consumers who value ethics.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question guiding this study is:

"How do ethical and spiritual values influence sustainable fashion consumption among Gen Y and Gen Z?"

To support this, two sub-questions are posed:

1. To what extent are Gen Y and Gen Z aware of and influenced by ethical and spiritual values in their fashion-related decisions?
2. How do value-based fashion startups communicate these values to appeal to these generations?

The dissertation follows this structure:

Chapter 1 introduces the research by explaining its purpose and research questions.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature about sustainable fashion together with consumer behavior and generational value differences and ethical branding.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology through descriptions of data collection and analysis procedures.

The study results appear in Chapter 4 followed by Chapter 5 which discusses the findings through the lens of previous research.

The final chapter 6presents conclusions together with practical recommendations for fashion entrepreneurs and marketers..

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ethical and Spiritual Values in Sustainable Fashion

The fashion industry has progressed from environmental awareness to incorporate ethical and spiritual values which shape consumer choices particularly among younger consumers. The ethical values in fashion focus on transparency alongside fair labor practices and environmental responsibility (Williams & Hodges, 2020). Research indicates that **spiritual values** including self-awareness and inner harmony and ecological interconnectedness influence how people view and participate in sustainable fashion (Varma, 2022).

Varma (2022) discusses the concept of **eco-spirituality**, The research argues that fashion needs to be reinterpreted through spiritual humility and interconnection because it represents excess and ego. The research uses Buddhist Hindu and Jain philosophies to demonstrate that sustainability can only be achieved when people recognize their sacred connection to the wider ecological web. This aligns with the Buddhist principle of *esho funi*, or the oneness of life and environment, which asserts that human conduct directly impacts environmental health (Varma, 2022).

Fashion consumption continues to operate mainly through personal interests and visual attractiveness even though people have become more aware of the issue. According to Bye (2017), The ethical intentions of millennials frequently fail to match their purchasing behavior which demonstrates a conflict between their values and their actual actions. The value-action gap which affects Gen Z is also evident in Millennials. The study focuses on individuals who back sustainability yet maintain their fast fashion consumption because of affordable prices and fashionable trends and insufficient sustainable alternatives (Williams & Hodges, 2020).

2.2 Generational Approaches: Gen Y and Gen Z

The two most socially aware consumer groups are **Generation Y (Millennials)** and **Generation Z**. However, their fashion consumption practices differ significantly.

Manley et al. (2023) The research showed that Millennials tend to research ethical brands and evaluate their purchasing decisions through a sustainability lens, but Gen Z tends to be more expressive and identity-driven, often engaging with sustainable fashion as a means of personal branding or social signalling.

Zsóka and Vajkai (2020) The study also examined brand avoidance among Gen Z consumers who reject fast fashion brands because of moral and identity-based reasons.

Interestingly, the **anti-consumption behavior** of Gen Z members does not necessarily derive from environmental activism. The desire to build an original authentic self-image (Zsóka & Vajkai, 2020) might be the actual reason behind this behavior. The **spiritual values** of inner clarity and individuality and meaning-making influence their purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, Kim and Vick (2024) found that **self-determination theory** can help explain Gen Z's inclination to choose rental or second-hand luxury fashion as a form of sustainable expression. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness serve as internal motivators that guide these behaviours in value-conscious youth.

2.3 Spirituality and Minimalism in Fashion Consumption

Fashion studies now explore the developing relationship between spirituality and sustainable consumption, mainly through Gen Y and Gen Z consumer perspectives. According to Varma (2022) spirituality extends beyond religious practices to include a profound understanding of interconnectedness and mindful living and resistance to overconsumption which supports both minimalist and sustainable lifestyles. (Varma, 2022)

Spirituality is increasingly linked to **slow fashion** and **eco-spirituality**, where fashion becomes a medium for expressing harmony with nature, self-reflection, and ethical alignment. As Varma explains, several religious and cultural philosophies (Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Islamic) fThe author views excessive consumption as a result of spiritual disconnection which supports the concept that spiritual connection leads to simpler and more responsible consumer behavior. (Varma 2022)

The ideology matches the growing popularity of **minimalist consumption** which people adopt as a psychological and emotional reaction to consumer fatigue and material saturation. Research on minimalist lifestyles shows that people who value meaning over material possessions experience better well-being and resist external fashion trends better. (Wang et al., 2023)

The practice of minimalism functions as a spiritual practice when it supports mindfulness and gratitude and authenticity values. For instance, Hansen and Schaltegger (2013) highlight that consumers committed to organic and fair fashion often view their choices as moral and spiritual acts, part of a larger ethical life practice.

The **value-action gap** continues to be a problem despite these efforts. Many Gen Y and Gen Z consumers demonstrate powerful spiritual and ethical values but these values do not consistently lead to steady purchasing decisions (Muralidhar & Raja, 2019). The study revealed that Gen Z members show strong interest in online trends and visual stimulation which sometimes leads them to choose aesthetic novelty over ethical commitment.

In sum, Spirituality and minimalism provide ethical frameworks and emotional and identity-based reasons for young people to adopt sustainable fashion practices. Research indicates that these factors influence different people and cultural groups and age groups but they remain important factors in shaping the consumption logic of value-conscious youth.

2.4 Anti-Consumption, Voluntary Simplicity and the Rise of Value-Based Minimalism

The increasing interest in anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity among Gen Y and Gen Z demonstrates a fundamental shift in how people view fashion consumption. These concepts serve as environmental strategies while simultaneously developing into identity frameworks which reflect spiritual and digital cultural elements and generational values.

The research by Nicolescu et al. (2025) shows that anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity are becoming more popular as lifestyle choices which focus on well-being, authenticity and ethical living rather than material excess. The bibliometric study identifies four core clusters that are currently shaping the discourse: (1) behavioural sustainability, (2) identity-based consumption, (3) decision-making processes, and (4) circular economy models.

Younger consumers who belong to Gen Z lead these changes through their adoption of the **No-Buy Challenge** and **digital minimalism** which they promote on TikTok and Instagram. The behaviors indicate that young people want to break free from fast fashion trends while seeking deeper connections with their clothing choices (Ziesemer et al., 2021; Nicolescu et al., 2025).

The concept of voluntary simplicity derives its principles from **spiritual and ethical frameworks**. According to Peifer et al. (2019) this consumption pattern stems from moral contemplation which often matches intrinsic values such as compassion alongside humility and authenticity. People who practice simplicity choose to live differently by adopting alternative **value-based practices** which include **slow fashion** and **reusing and transformation of products**.

The research demonstrates that these patterns exist beyond environmental concerns because they produce **psychological advantages**. Hook et al. (2021) discovered that voluntary simplicity produces better life satisfaction and well-being despite the common belief that happiness requires material wealth.

Despite increasing interest in these values several obstacles continue to exist. The combination of economic limitations and peer pressure along with social media visual appeal works against the practical implementation of these values in actual purchasing decisions (Haider et al., 2022). The value-action gap persists among digitally active yet economically challenged Gen Z consumers because of this disconnect.

Overall, the spiritual and ethical aspects of fashion consumption among the new generation of consumers manifest through anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity practices which focus on meaningful selective buying rather than continuous purchasing.

2.5 Fast Fashion vs. Slow Fashion: Ethical and Generational Implications

The global fashion market has been controlled by fast fashion since its inception because it offers quick delivery at affordable prices through mass production methods. However, its **ethical shortcomings**; The global fashion market faces ethical criticism because of its negative impacts on the environment and its treatment of workers and its excessive waste production (Abrar and Baig, 2019). The **slow fashion movement** stands in opposition to fast fashion by promoting sustainable practices and durable products alongside values that include mindfulness and ethical transparency (Hansen and Schaltegger, 2013).

Gen Y and Gen Z consumers experience a contradictory relationship with fast fashion. These consumers actively use digital platforms to interact with fast fashion brands through social media and e-commerce websites. The same generations demonstrate the strongest interest in ethical and sustainable values according to research by Manley et al. (2023). The dual nature of their behavior shows how their ethical values conflict with their established consumer habits.

The research by Antonio and Gentina (2021) and Zsóka and Vajkai (2020) shows that Millennials (Gen Y) prioritize **brand credibility** and **information quality** and **personal responsibility** but Gen Z consumers prefer **visual identity** and peer validation and self-expression through clothing. The traditional retail cycle faces increasing resistance from consumers who prefer alternatives such as **thriftng** and **clothing swaps** and **rental platforms** and **upcycled fashion** which are characteristics of slow fashion (Varma, 2022; Hook et al., 2021).

Slow fashion brands that start as value-based startups now succeed by using ethical storytelling and community-building and emotional branding to attract Gen Y and Z consumers (Tran et al., 2022). These brands build their identity by focusing on purpose, authenticity and transparency to establish themselves as ethical alternatives to fast fashion exploitation.

Yet challenges remain. The expansion of slow fashion faces obstacles because consumers find it expensive and the products are scarce and the sizes and trends do not match what they want. Young consumers maintain their fast fashion habits because of financial and social factors even though they understand ethical issues (Haider et al., 2022). The existing value-action gap continues to affect both generations.

The distinction between fast and slow fashion extends beyond product and price differences because it represents fundamental differences in values and personal identity. The changing moral frameworks and consumption patterns of Gen Y and Z as they grow older determine their interactions with these models.

2.6 Value-Based Startups and Brand Strategies: A Case-Driven Perspective

The fashion industry now sees value-based startups as its new dynamic players because these brands combine aesthetic appeal with transparent communication and emotional storytelling and ethical alignment. These new ventures differentiate themselves from established fashion companies through their focus on brand communication that centers around purpose and identity. The purchasing habits of Gen Y and Gen Z consumers align with these strategies because they actively seek personal significance and social effects in their buying choices. Young consumers develop trust in brands when they display emotional authenticity together with ethical congruence according to Tran et al. (2022). The practice of spiritual branding through mindful and simple narratives about inner alignment has proven successful for building enduring relationships with consumers who value ethics and spirituality (Varma, 2022; Bye, 2017).

The fashion industry now faces disruption from value-based startups which respond to changing consumer expectations about purpose-driven purchasing. These brands operate through a framework which unites ethical commitment with spiritual meaning and emotional connection to build strategic relationships with Gen Y and Gen Z core values. These startups differ from conventional fast fashion companies because they establish enduring connections through trust and transparency and mutual identification instead of focusing solely on aesthetic value.

The main branding approach of these startups involves creating stories that serve a purpose. PANGAIA from the UK has achieved worldwide recognition through its combination of scientific fashion products with seaweed fibres and its zero-waste initiative. The brand establishes itself as an eco-innovative force by using language which connects human beings to nature thus appealing to Gen Z's environmental activism and spiritual ecological mindset (Wagner, 2022). Their storytelling presents each product as an essential part of a universal planetary mission which establishes both cognitive trust and emotional alignment.

MATE the Label from Los Angeles presents itself as a slow fashion brand through its "clean essentials" tagline. The brand uses non-toxic certified fabrics to create a spiritually minimalist aesthetic which attracts customers who view fashion as a mindful personal practice. The brand communicates its values of "intentional living" and "wearing your values" through Instagram messages and website content and product packaging to present a lifestyle based on inner alignment

and ethical awareness (Cucu et al., 2024). The strategy aligns with Gen Z's increasing preference for spiritual authenticity and mental wellness through their purchasing decisions.

The UK startup NINETY PERCENT operates as a charitable organization that distributes 90% of its available profits to support different causes. The company allows its customers to decide how their donations will be allocated which fosters an interactive ethical involvement. The brand-consumer collaboration model which allows democratic participation has gained significant approval from Millennials because they seek transparent business practices and co-creation opportunities (Rizvanovic et al., 2023). Through customer involvement in determining the brand's moral output the startup establishes a distinctive collective identity and shared purpose.

Startups appeal to Gen Y and Z consumers because they actively dismiss impersonal branding approaches. The companies use unpolished transparency together with human stories and founder-led stories to develop brand connections. The product pages of REFORMATION display each item's carbon footprint while its marketing materials combine humorous language with self-aware content. The brand uses its playful visual identity to connect with digital natives who enjoy memes and delivers concrete sustainability data that aligns with their expectations (Haider et al., 2022; SBP Report, 2023).

These value-based startups leverage digital intimacy as a strategic business tool to achieve their goals. Studies reveal that Instagram and TikTok serve beyond promotional purposes because they help users build communities while also serving as platforms for activism and educational storytelling (Cucu et al., 2024). Gen Z consumers actively seek brands which offer engagement and emotional safety as well as shared identity according to Antonio & Gentina (2021). These brands create participatory relationships through their displays of team members alongside manufacturing processes and customer stories and behind-the-scenes content which traditional mass-market brands typically do not provide.

The implementation of value-based branding creates various difficulties for businesses. According to Ostermann et al. (2021) startups must navigate the difficulty of growing their operations without losing their authentic transparency. Maintaining ethical supply chains for financial sustainability presents a challenge because it might limit youth price-sensitive customers' product access. The sincere implementation of values-based positioning leads to long-term success because it creates strong loyalty and advocacy among Gen Z and Millennial consumers.

Value-based fashion startups lead the transformation of modern fashion consumption by both satisfying emerging market needs and defining contemporary fashion consumer behavior. The brand strategies of these companies use storytelling and transparency alongside spiritual minimalism and ethical participation to establish a new method of identity formation for young consumers who want to merge their inner values with their external look.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks in this study establish a systematic base to understand how ethical and spiritual values affect Gen Y and Gen Z sustainable fashion consumption. The research uses multiple theoretical frameworks because value-driven decision-making involves both environmental awareness and inner beliefs and generational identity. The research applies the Value-Attitude-Behaviour (VAB) Model together with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Theory of

Planned Behaviour (TPB). The combination of these theories provides a framework to understand how internal values affect external purchasing decisions in sustainable fashion.

The Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) Model serves as the fundamental framework for this research. The model shows that personal values create attitudes which subsequently direct human actions (Homer and Kahle, 1988). Consumers who embrace strong ethical or spiritual values such as compassion and simplicity and social justice will develop positive attitudes toward sustainable brands in the sustainable fashion industry. The attitudes formed from these values lead to actual purchasing decisions including ethically made clothing and value-based startup support. The VAB model shows particular relevance to Gen Y and Z because they tend to link their buying habits to their personal beliefs (Zsóka and Vajkai, 2020).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) provides a framework for understanding intrinsic motivation and psychological needs. SDT states that behaviours maintain their sustainability when they receive internal endorsement and stem from personal goals which include autonomy competence and relatedness. Gen Z consumers select fashion brands which enable them to express their personal identity and emotional authenticity and spiritual growth according to Varma (2022). The process of buying from a mindful minimalist brand becomes intrinsically fulfilling when it supports personal spiritual alignment and environmental purpose. SDT provides an explanation for why some consumers both purchase sustainable products and spread awareness about them throughout their communities.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) extends the model by adding external factors and perceived behavioural control to the analysis. According to TPB the formation of intentions through attitudes and subjective norms and perceived control determines behavioural outcomes. The framework helps researchers understand how social expectations which include peer norms and online influence combine with personal values to determine the purchase decision from ethical fashion startups. Gen Z consumers who maintain strong social connections and digital engagement show high sensitivity to perceived social norms that either support or challenge their value-based purchasing decisions (Antonio and Gentina, 2021).

The research uses these three theoretical frameworks to study how personal value alignment operates at an individual level through VAB and SDT while also examining social-environmental influences through TPB. The VAB model establishes the basic value-behavior connection but SDT extends this understanding by analyzing internal drives and TPB explains how outside forces and intentions form. The research design uses an integrated method to study how ethical and spiritual values drive consumer behavior among an idealistic generation that remains socially connected.

2.8 Literature Gaps and Rationale for This Study

The past ten years have seen substantial growth in sustainable fashion literature yet most studies investigate environmental impact and material innovation and supply chain transparency without exploring consumer emotional and spiritual drivers (Haider et al., 2022; Wagner, 2022). The marketing discourse frequently includes values like ethics minimalism and mindfulness yet researchers have not thoroughly investigated their psychological effects on consumer actions particularly among young people.

The existing body of research about Generation Z and Generation Y in the fashion realm primarily studies their sensitivity to trends and brand loyalty as well as their digital purchasing behaviors (Antonio and Gentina, 2021; Zsóka and Vajkai, 2020). The literature lacks sufficient research about

how these generations choose their purchases through their core values including spirituality along with ethical alignment and personal identity connection. Research on these factors occurs mostly within qualitative studies or specialized contexts such as slow tourism and ethical food consumption instead of mainstream fashion selection (Varma, 2022; Bye, 2017).

Value-based startups receive increasing attention for their innovative business models but there is insufficient empirical data about how their branding approaches affect consumers across different age groups. Most academic research focuses on brand value communications from suppliers instead of analyzing consumer value interpretation and internalization practices (Cucu et al., 2024). The existing knowledge gap prevents us from understanding whether and to what extent fashion branding stories that include spiritual and ethical messages affect purchasing behavior especially among youth who prioritize social consciousness.

The available research demonstrates an unbalanced methodology since numerous qualitative case studies deliver deep insights about individual experiences but quantitative research with representative samples from Gen Y and Gen Z remains scarce. The lack of data-driven findings prevents us from drawing conclusions about how spiritual and ethical values influence sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

The research aims to address three main knowledge gaps. This research establishes spiritual values such as simplicity and emotional authenticity and mindfulness as new subjects for academic exploration about sustainable fashion despite their absent presence in previous studies. The research focuses exclusively on Gen Y and Gen Z because this generation will determine future consumption patterns. The research utilizes survey-based quantitative methods which produce findings that can be generalized across broader consumer patterns and preferences. The study connects brand strategy to consumer psychology in sustainability through its analysis of ethical and spiritual value impact on fashion consumption within value-based startups.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research design section of this chapter explains the methods used to study how ethical and spiritual values affect sustainable fashion consumption among Generation Y and Generation Z. The research methodology was created to fulfill study objectives while maintaining data validity and reliability and ensuring ethical standards.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The fundamental concepts of research philosophy consist of beliefs about reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) that serve as guides. The three most prominent research philosophies in social science studies are **positivism**, **interpretivism** and **pragmatism** (Saunders et al., 2019). The different research philosophies enable researchers to produce knowledge in distinct ways that affect their methodological choices.

The foundation of **positivism** stems from natural sciences because it believes reality exists as something objective which can be measured. Research under this paradigm depends on observable facts, experiments, and statistical models to establish universal laws. The method of positivism delivers high reliability but fails to consider human experiences that arise from particular contexts. Positivist research methods in sustainable fashion would analyze quantitative data points such as sales numbers and environmental impact metrics and recycling metrics yet they would not understand the profound ethical and spiritual factors that guide consumer choices.

Interpretivism states that social reality develops through human interactions which requires understanding of specific contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The interpretivist research approach values personal experiences and subjective meanings because these elements are essential for studying how people understand their consumption activities. The ethical and spiritual values that influence sustainable fashion choices remain deeply personal and context-specific and lack tangible forms. Two consumers hold different perspectives on sustainable fashion since one sees it as their ethical duty and the other uses it to express their spiritual connection with mindfulness. Quantitative data fails to capture these subtle aspects so interpretive analysis becomes essential for proper comprehension.

Research methods in **pragmatism** follow practical goals by selecting the most effective research approach to answer the research question (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research design of pragmatist studies integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods. The adaptability of pragmatism remains limited because it lacks sufficient philosophical framework to study deeply spiritual consumer behavior phenomena.

The research adopts an **interpretivist philosophy** as its guiding approach. The main objective surpasses mere measurement of sustainable fashion consumption since it seeks to analyze **how ethical and spiritual values affect Gen Y and Gen Z**. The researcher employs interpretivist methods to view participants as active meaning-creators instead of data recipients. Interpretivist methods understand that terms such as "mindfulness" and "simplicity" and "authenticity" exist as personal interpretations between people and different cultures. The research generates deep understanding of sustainable fashion trends through the interpretation of these meanings across generations.

The study uses **quantitative survey data** to achieve generalizability while maintaining interpretivist analysis for depth. Interpretivist approaches do not eliminate structured measurement but use empirical evidence to explain statistical findings within real-life experiences. The research methodology combines interpretivist principles with empirical data collection to validate conceptual theories. The philosophical choice allows the research to find patterns as well as reveal the value-driven motivations which characterize Gen Y and Gen Z consumption.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach describes the systematic method researchers use to transform theoretical concepts into empirical studies about real-world phenomena. The social sciences recognize three main research approaches which include **deductive, inductive and abductive methods** according to Saunders et al. (2019). The research method depends on whether the investigator starts with theory or data or uses both theory and data together.

The **deductive research method** begins with theoretical foundations which guide the process of testing hypotheses by using empirical evidence. The research method follows a "top-down" pattern according to Bryman and Bell (2015) because it starts with established frameworks to verify their validity in particular contexts. **The Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** serve as theoretical frameworks to direct the development of the survey instrument in this study. The research investigates how values affect attitudes which subsequently influence behavior in sustainable fashion consumption among Gen Y and Gen Z populations. The deductive research method enables researchers to verify or invalidate existing conceptual theories by using quantifiable data.

The inductive research method starts with observations to develop new theories by analyzing data patterns according to Creswell and Creswell (2018). A research study using inductive methods would start by interviewing young consumers about their spiritual and ethical fashion consumption to develop theoretical models from the collected data. The inductive research method proves effective for exploratory studies yet lacks sufficient power to validate established behavioral models.

The **abductive method** enables researchers to shift between theoretical and data-based analysis by combining elements of deductive and inductive reasoning according to Saunders et al. (2019). The abductive method serves researchers when existing theories lack completeness or when new concepts need to be merged into established models. The integration of spirituality into consumer behaviour models requires an abductive logic that uses empirical insights to refine theoretical frameworks. The abductive research approach requires extensive time and complexity and works best for studies that combine longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches.

The research objective of this dissertation to evaluate sustainable fashion consumption among Gen Y and Gen Z requires a deductive research approach. The study uses survey data to evaluate theoretical predictions about values attitudes and behaviors which ensures **generalizability, measurable and comparable** results to previous research. The deductive approach enables researchers to conduct systematic tests of ethical and spiritual value effects on fashion consumption which supports both theoretical development and practical implementation.

The research design uses a deductive approach although it recognizes that this approach might not reveal all aspects of spirituality and consumer meaning-making processes. This research maintains an open position to discover new themes that could guide future inductive or abductive research studies. The survey results may contain unexpected findings which could lead to qualitative research that expands upon the current study's findings. The research method follows a deductive approach but contributes to an ongoing theoretical and practical dialogue about sustainable fashion research.

3.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy defines the planned actions which will enable researchers to answer their questions and reach their objectives. The social sciences employ six research strategies including experiments alongside **case studies, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, surveys and mixed methods**, according to Yin (2018) and Saunders et al. (2019). The research strategy selection depends on research question characteristics and resource availability and researcher philosophical approach.

The quantitative survey-based design constitutes the chosen research strategy for this investigation. Consumer behaviour research commonly utilizes surveys as a research tool because they allow the collection of standardized data from numerous participants at a low cost (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The survey instrument in this dissertation enables the researcher to extract ethical and spiritual values from Generation Y and Generation Z members as well as measure their sustainable fashion attitudes and determine how these values shape their purchasing decisions. The standardized design of survey questions enables researchers to analyze data statistically and evaluate responses from different population segments.

The application of case study or ethnographic approaches would generate extensive individual insights yet reduce the ability to make general conclusions from the research findings. The case study method focuses on analyzing a single value-based fashion startup that demonstrates how ethical values manifest through its branding approach. The obtained detailed information would fail to reveal widespread generational consumer patterns that exist among hundreds of people. Research through ethnographic methods would need extensive long-term involvement with consumer groups which exceeds the available time period for this dissertation.

The research could employ a **mixed-methods** design that unifies quantitative with qualitative research methods. The combination of survey data and interviews from particular participants would enable researchers to obtain a complete understanding through mixed methods research. The approach requires substantial resources and expertise and extended time for execution. This dissertation aims to generate findings that validate existing theories so the mixed-methods strategy was not possible within the available time period.

The **survey strategy** fits with the **deductive research** approach that was previously discussed. The survey method allows researchers to test the applicability of established theoretical frameworks

(VAB, SDT, and TPB) to Gen Y and Gen Z consumers in sustainable fashion. Surveys are well-suited for measuring attitudes and values through Likert-scale questions which can be analyzed statistically.

It is recognized that a survey-based approach has certain restrictions. Surveys depend on self-reported data which may be affected by social desirability bias when asking about ethical consumption. Respondents tend to report higher levels of sustainable practices because they want to appear more positive. Surveys may not be able to capture the actual meanings of spirituality or authenticity in consumption. The survey results provide a general overview of consumer behavior but do not explain every aspect of consumer behavior.

The survey research strategy was selected because it enables the collection of quantifiable and generalizable data about consumer attitudes and behaviors across different age groups. The available timeframe made case studies and mixed methods less suitable for testing theoretical models so the survey approach was selected as the most efficient and valid method to achieve the dissertation objectives.

3.3.1 Data Collection

The research process of data collection involves obtaining empirical evidence to answer research questions and test theoretical assumptions of the study. The **online self-administered survey** serves as the data collection method for this dissertation because it provides efficiency and cost-effectiveness while enabling research participation from a broad range of Generation Y and Generation Z participants

3.3.2 Survey Design

The survey was designed to reflect the theoretical frameworks guiding this study (VAB, SDT, TPB) and was divided into five sections:

1. **Demographic Information** – The survey includes questions about age, gender, education, and income to guarantee the sample represents the population and enable comparisons between different sub-groups (Saunders et al., 2019).
2. **Ethical and Spiritual Values** – The survey includes Likert-scale questions that assess ethical responsibility alongside minimalism and mindfulness and spirituality. The statement "I value simplicity and minimalism in the way I live and shop" serves as an example. The survey questions stem from established research about spirituality in consumer behavior (Varma, 2022; Peifer et al., 2019).
3. **Attitudes Towards Sustainable Fashion** – The survey includes questions that measure consumer perceptions as well as their willingness to pay and trust in sustainable brands. The Value–Attitude–Behaviour model supports statements like "I am willing to pay more for ethically made clothing" (Homer and Kahle, 1988).
4. **Fashion Consumption Behaviour** – The survey includes questions that assess real-life behaviors including checking sustainability labels and buying second-hand clothing and following sustainable fashion accounts online. These questions draw from earlier research about Gen Z's avoidance of brands and their sustainable fashion practices (Zsóka and Vajkai,

2020).

5. **Open-Ended Question** – The survey should include one or two open questions that allow respondents to explain what drives them most when purchasing fashion items from sustainable or ethical brands. The qualitative aspect of this research helps to uncover personal meanings which may not be revealed through scaled measurement tools.

Section	Example Item
Demographics	“What is your age?”
Ethical/Spiritual Values	“My spirituality or inner beliefs influence the products I choose to buy.”
Attitudes	“I am willing to pay more for ethically made clothing.”
Behaviour	“I check whether a fashion brand is sustainable before buying.”
Open-ended	“What motivates you most when choosing sustainable fashion?”

3.3.3 Distribution Method

The survey will be distributed online through **social media platforms** (Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn) and email invitations. Social media is particularly effective for reaching **Gen Z**, who are highly active on digital platforms (Antonio & Gentina, 2021). Snowball sampling will also be employed, with participants encouraged to share the survey link within their networks. This approach allows the researcher to extend reach at low cost, although it may introduce biases by overrepresenting certain social groups.

3.3.4 Sample Size and Characteristics

The research focuses on two specific age groups: **Generation Y born between 1981 and 1996** and **Generation Z born between 1997 and 2012**. The survey requires data from at least 60 participants while making an effort to distribute participants evenly between both cohorts. The selected sample size of 60 participants meets the requirements for descriptive and correlational analysis in a master’s dissertation even though a larger sample would provide stronger statistical power. (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The use of an online survey might exclude participants who do not have access to the internet and the self-selecting nature of respondents might bias the sample towards individuals who are already interested in sustainability. These limitations are addressed in Section 3.7 on Research Limitations.

3.3.5 Pilot Testing

The survey will first undergo pilot testing with 50–60 participants from the target population before full distribution. The survey will be tested with a small group to evaluate the clarity and wording and length of the questionnaire. The questions will be modified to eliminate any ambiguity and prevent misinterpretation. The instrument's reliability and validity will be improved through this process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The data collection process is carefully designed to capture both the breadth of attitudes and behaviors among Gen Y and Gen Z and the depth of their value-driven motivations. The survey combines Likert-scale items with open-ended responses to ensure that the findings capture the detailed aspects of ethical and spiritual values.

3.5 Data Analysis

The research project depends on data analysis to convert unprocessed responses into significant findings. The research analysis seeks to establish both the presence and specific ways ethical and spiritual values affect Generation Y and Generation Z sustainable fashion purchasing decisions. The analysis will use Microsoft Excel and JASP open-source statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The analysis benefits from this combination because it provides both easy access and strong analytical capabilities.

3.5.1 Descriptive Analysis

The first step of analysis will be descriptive statistics, which summarise the dataset and provide an overview of respondents' characteristics and general trends. This includes:

- **Frequencies and percentages** for demographic variables (age, gender, education, income).
- **Means and standard deviations** The survey includes Likert-scale items to measure ethical values and spiritual influences and attitudes and behaviors.
- **Cross-tabulations** The analysis should include a comparison of patterns between different generational cohorts (e.g., Gen Y vs Gen Z differences in willingness to pay more for sustainable fashion)

The initial step of descriptive analysis helps researchers detect noticeable variations which serve as the basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

3.5.2 Inferential Analysis

The analysis of variable relationships requires the application of inferential statistical methods:

- **Correlation analysis** The study will determine which ethical/spiritual values relate to consumer behaviors (e.g., does mindfulness score relate to sustainable purchasing).
- **Independent sample t-tests** Research studies can be conducted to evaluate how different generations (e.g., Gen Y vs Gen Z) view sustainable brands.

- **Regression analysis** The analysis could use regression models when data size allows to determine how ethical and spiritual values influence purchase intentions. The Value-Attitude-Behaviour (VAB) framework aligns with regression models because values lead to attitudes which then lead to behaviour (Homer and Kahle, 1988).

The study maintains a descriptive nature but the inferential tools enable researchers to analyze the hypotheses derived from theory in more detail.

3.5.3 Reliability Testing

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measurement instrument. Cronbach's Alpha will be calculated for grouped Likert-scale items (e.g., ethical values, spiritual values, attitudes) to assess this. A threshold of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). This ensures that the items intended to measure the same construct (e.g., spirituality) are internally consistent and produce stable results.

3.5.4 Validity Testing

The survey achieves its intended measurement through validity. Three forms of validity will be considered.

1. **Content validity** – ensured through literature grounding (e.g., items on minimalism drawn from Varma, 2022).
2. **Construct validity** – checked by examining whether survey items align with established theories such as SDT and TPB.
3. **Face validity** – assessed during the pilot test, where participants will provide feedback on whether the questions appear relevant and understandable.

Together, these measures strengthen the credibility of the survey results.

3.5.5 Data Cleaning and Preparation

The responses will undergo thorough screening procedures before analysis begins. Surveys with less than 50% completed items will be excluded from the analysis. The assessment will focus on checking both outliers and inconsistent responses especially in open-ended questions. The quality of data and statistical results depends on this step to ensure accuracy.

3.5.6 Limitations of Data Analysis

The use of self-reported survey data creates potential biases because respondents tend to overstate their sustainable practices to appear more ethical. The study's findings from a sample of 100+ participants may not be generalizable to the broader population. These limitations will be openly discussed in Chapter 3.7 (Research Limitations) and Chapter 5 (Discussion).

In summary, the research will progress from descriptive exploration to inferential testing while performing reliability and validity checks. The research design uses multiple stages to establish findings that are both statistically valid and theoretically relevant which produces credible evidence about young people's value-based sustainable fashion choices.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Social science research depends on ethics to protect participant rights and dignity and safety. The research follows institutional guidelines and international standards including the **British Psychological Society (2021) Code of Human Research Ethics** and the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** through multiple ethical safeguards. The research requires these protective measures because it investigates sensitive topics about spirituality and values which affect personal identity elements of participants.

Informed Consent

The survey will provide all participants with an unambiguous information sheet during the initial stage. The document contains essential details about research objectives together with descriptions of participation requirements and data utilization procedures. The survey requires participants to verify their understanding of the information before they can continue. The consent process becomes fully voluntary because participants must explicitly confirm their understanding of the information. The study will not force any participant to participate and participants who choose to leave the study will face no negative effects.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

The research study requires no mandatory participation from participants. Survey participants will receive clear notification about their freedom to stop participating before they finish answering the survey questions. The survey operates as an anonymous tool so participants cannot withdraw their responses after submission but they can stop answering questions at any point before finishing the survey. The ethical principle of autonomy is maintained through this approach because participants maintain full control over their study participation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The survey will protect participant identities by not asking for personally identifiable information including names email addresses or phone numbers. The survey will ask demographic questions that do not reveal personal identities through categories such as age gender and education level. The survey will store all responses in a way that prevents any individual from being identified. The system provides both anonymity by preventing identification of respondents and confidentiality by protecting their data from unauthorized disclosure.

Data Protection and GDPR Compliance

The research follows the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** which controls personal data collection and processing and storage operations in the European Union. The survey does not gather sensitive personal data but the following GDPR principles apply:

- **Data minimisation** – The study will only gather information that is essential for achieving its objectives.
- **Purpose limitation** – data will be used solely for academic research.

- **Storage limitation** – The collected responses will be stored on password-protected devices and will be deleted after the dissertation project is finished.

These safeguards ensure that data management respects participants' privacy rights.

Avoidance of Harm

The ethical conduct of research demands the reduction of possible adverse effects. The research carries minimal risk but discussing sustainability ethics or spirituality might cause discomfort to some participants. The survey design includes protective measures to prevent invasive or judgmental content. The survey contains an option for participants to skip any question they choose not to answer. The survey design protects participants from psychological pressure and moral evaluation.

Debriefing

The survey will end with a brief debriefing statement for participants. The debrief statement will explain the research purpose while expressing gratitude for their participation and include contact information for additional inquiries. The debriefing process builds transparency while establishing trust between researchers and their participants.

Researcher Integrity

The researcher bears ethical responsibility as the final point. The researcher must present results truthfully while refraining from making false or deceptive data representations and must recognize study boundaries. The research will follow academic integrity principles to protect both research participants and the academic community.

The research incorporates ethical considerations throughout its entire process starting with informed consent and voluntary participation and continuing through GDPR compliance and debriefing. The combination of these measures protects participant rights and upholds academic credibility and public trust.

3.7 Research Limitations

The study contains a well-designed methodology yet researchers must acknowledge specific limitations in this research. The **survey-based data** collection method restricts the information to what participants report about themselves. People tend to exaggerate their sustainable or ethical conduct because social desirability bias affects them strongly when dealing with moral subjects. The study emphasizes anonymity and confidentiality yet social desirability bias remains impossible to eliminate completely.

The research findings lack representativeness because the sampling method combines purposive selection with snowball recruitment. The main participant recruitment source from online networks creates a potential bias toward people who already demonstrate interest in sustainability and fashion. The research sample does not provide a complete representation of Generation Y and Generation Z populations.

The research sample size of 60+ participants falls short of the typical numbers used in large-scale consumer studies. The sample size provides sufficient data for descriptive and correlational analysis yet it restricts the execution of multiple regression tests with high reliability. The generalizability of research findings extends only to the specific participants under study thus readers should exercise caution when applying the results to broader populations.

The research explores consumer viewpoints instead of studying organizational and supply-side aspects of sustainable fashion startups. The research objectives support a demand-side focus which excludes analysis of brand operations and economic constraints and industry-level challenges. Future research should integrate consumer surveys with startup case studies to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The study maintains transparency and integrity by acknowledging its limitations which produce valuable insights about ethical and spiritual values in sustainable fashion consumption across different generations.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Section	Focus Area	Question Examples
1. Demographics	Age, gender, education, income	"What is your age?", "What is your current education level?"
2. Ethical & Spiritual Values	Personal ethics, minimalism, spirituality	"My spirituality or inner beliefs influence the products I choose to buy"
3. Behavioural Intentions & Actions	Willingness to pay, brand trust, sustainability practices	"I actively seek out sustainable or eco-friendly fashion brands"
4. Motivations and Influencers	Open-ended perceptions and inspirations	"What motivates you most when buying fashion items from sustainable or ethical brands?"

The research methodology section of this chapter described the methods used to study how ethical and spiritual values affect Gen Y and Gen Z sustainable fashion purchasing decisions. The research uses interpretivist philosophy to understand consumer behavior because it recognizes value-driven and subjective elements in consumer behavior while employing deductive methods to test established theories (VAB, SDT, TPB) with empirical data. The research strategy selected a survey-based method to obtain structured data from a large participant group which allows for generalizable findings.

The survey instrument contained five sections which included demographic information and ethical and spiritual value assessments and sustainable fashion attitude and consumption behavior questions and open-ended reflection sections. The research will distribute its survey online through purposive and snowball sampling methods to reach participants who belong to both Gen Y and Gen Z generations. The analysis will combine descriptive statistics with inferential statistics while conducting tests for reliability and validity to achieve data robustness.

The research design incorporated ethical considerations which included obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring voluntary participation and anonymity while following GDPR guidelines. The research acknowledged three major limitations which included self-reporting bias and sampling representativeness issues and the small size of the sample population. The research methodology establishes a solid base to generate valuable findings about how values influence sustainable fashion purchasing decisions.

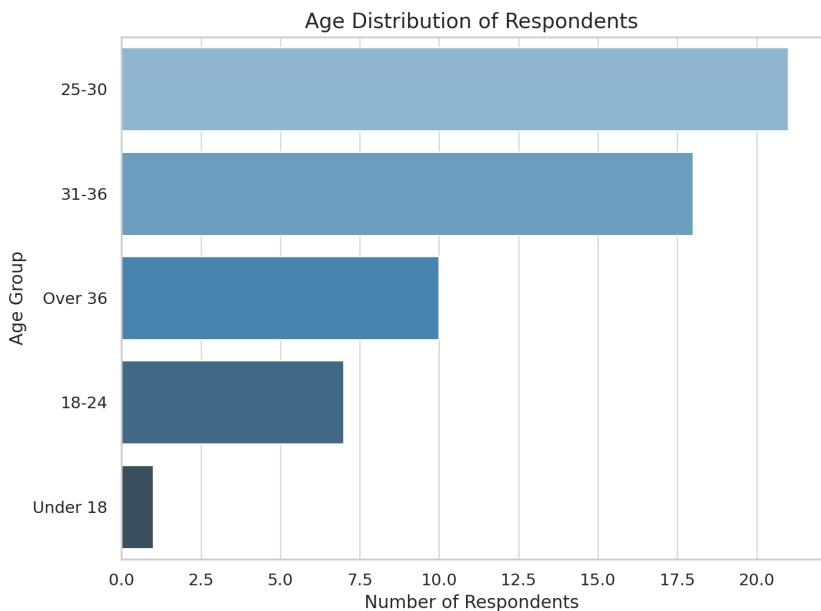
The following chapter will show the Findings and Analysis section which presents survey results and explains their implications for theoretical frameworks and research questions.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Participants

The interpretation of this study requires knowledge about survey participant demographics because generational identity and education level and income and gender affect how consumers behave and what values they hold. The research collected data from 57 participants who represented different age groups and educational levels and income ranges which established a strong base for studying sustainable fashion consumption ethics and spirituality.

Age Distribution



The

majority of respondents

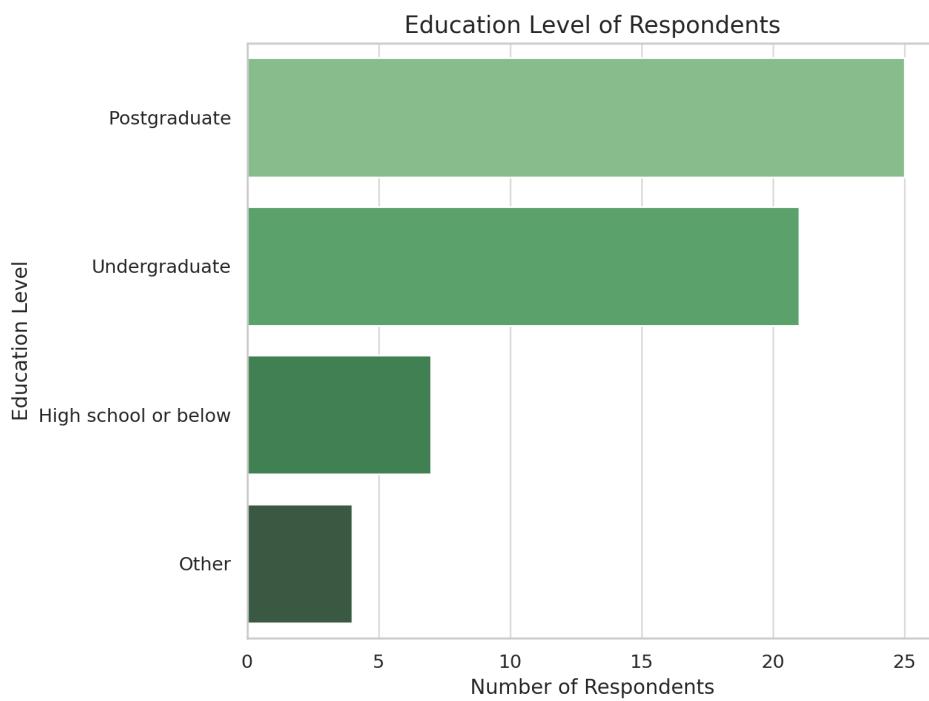
belonged to the Millennial generation (Gen Y), with **36.8% aged between 25 and 30** and **31.6% aged between 31 and 36**. Together, these groups made up **over two-thirds (68.4%)** of the sample. Meanwhile, **Gen Z participants (18–24)** constituted **12.3%** of the responses. An additional **17.5%** were above 36, and a single respondent (1.8%) was under 18.

This demographic spread implies that the insights gained from this research are particularly reflective of Gen Y's values and behaviours, while still including perspectives from both older and younger generations. Given that Gen Y is often regarded as the "bridge generation" between analog and digital consumer culture, their prominent representation in the dataset allows for nuanced interpretations of shifting fashion ideologies.

4.1.1 Gender Distribution

The participants represented different gender identities throughout the spectrum. The survey results showed that **female** participants made up **75.4%** of the total while **male** participants accounted for **24.6%**. The survey revealed that **19.3%** of participants chose not to reveal their gender identity. The high rate of non-disclosure among participants indicates a possible cultural shift toward avoiding binary gender labels and may also suggest privacy issues or identity flexibility which affect fashion purchasing decisions based on values.

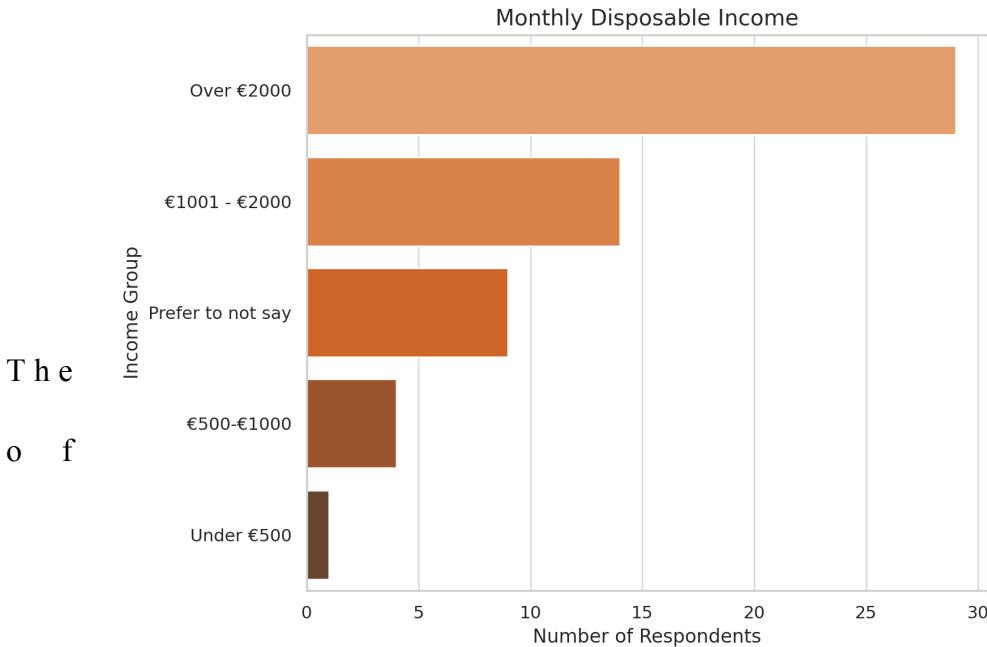
Education Level



The educational background of

participants showed a strong preference for higher education. The participants included **80.7%** of people who had earned at least a bachelor's degree with **43.9% holding Master's degrees** and **36.8% holding bachelor's degrees**. The remaining participants consisted of **10.5% who had a high school diploma** and **5.3% who had earned a professional certificate**. The sample demonstrates high educational attainment which indicates they possess strong knowledge about sustainability and ethics and spiritual wellness terminology thus enabling better comprehension of their fashion value connections.

4.1.2 Income Distribution



The
o f

survey results showed that **50.9%** participants earned above **€2000** per month which indicates they have moderate to high spending power.

The survey results showed that **26.3%** of respondents made between **€1001 and €2000** while **10.5% earned between €501 and €1000**. The income distribution showed that **8.8% of respondents earned less than €500** while **3.5% chose not to disclose their income**.

The financial data indicates that most participants have enough money to choose sustainable products even if they cost more. The survey results match previous studies which found that ethical fashion awareness and adoption primarily occur among consumers who earn middle to upper incomes (Joy et al., 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

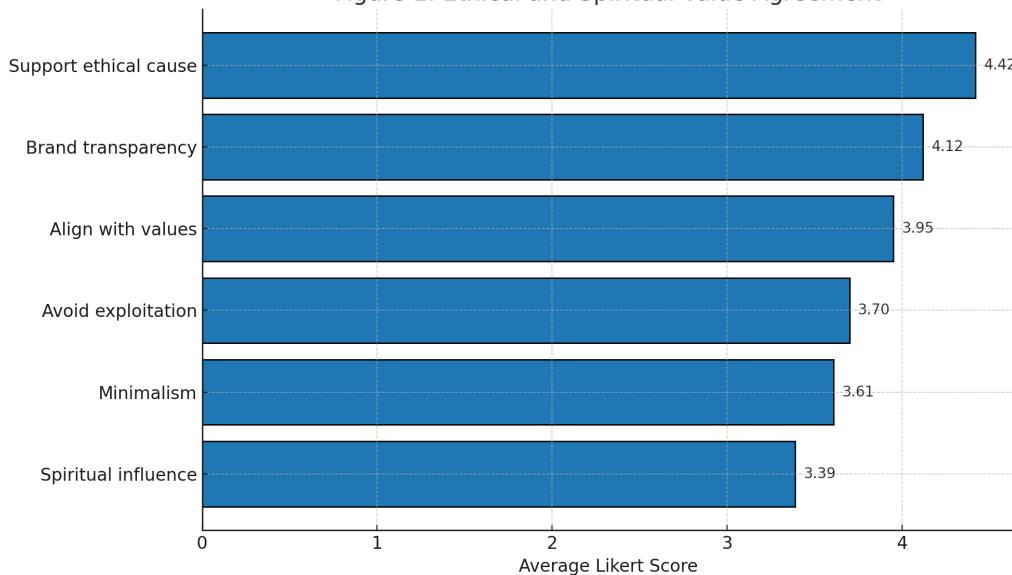
4.1.3 Implications

The demographic structure of this sample creates an excellent foundation for upcoming research. The participants possess the necessary skills to analyze ethical and spiritual values in fashion because they represent Gen Y and Gen Z and have high education levels and moderate to high incomes. The variables will serve as essential factors for understanding how different market segments react to sustainable and value-based fashion startups in the upcoming sections.

4.2. Attitudes Toward Ethical and Spiritual Values

The research provides essential knowledge about how consumers connect their ethical and spiritual values to their fashion decisions. The participants evaluated six statements about ethical awareness and spiritual influence and minimalist living through a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The average scores for each statement are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ethical and Spiritual Value Agreement



4.2.1 Overview of Results

The graph demonstrates that the **highest-scoring statement** was:

"I feel better when I buy something that supports a good cause or ethical mission" (Mean = 4.42).

The emotional satisfaction people get from buying products that align with their values serves as a primary motivator according to Sharma and Jha (2017) in their research on ethical consumption.

The mean score for **transparency** reached **4.12** which shows that consumers highly value brands to present their practices and values in an open and honest manner. The current era of greenwashing and performative activism has led to an audience that seeks genuine transparency over superficial messages according to Han et al. (2017).

The third highest item was the alignment of purchases with personal ethical values (Mean = 3.95), which signals that consumers are actively internalising their moral codes into their decision-making processes. This supports the Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) model, wherein internalised values directly shape consumer attitudes and intentions (Homer and Kahle, 1988).

A moderate level of agreement was recorded for avoiding exploitative or environmentally harmful brands (Mean = 3.70). While this shows an ethical awareness, the score being slightly lower than others suggests that this intention may be challenged by market realities such as accessibility, affordability, or brand loyalty.

Interestingly, minimalism, a concept deeply rooted in both ethical and spiritual consumption narratives, received an average score of 3.61. While moderate, this score still reflects a positive tilt

toward simplifying consumption, which aligns with the emergent cultural discourse around “slow fashion” and mindful living (Brydges & Hanlon, 2020).

The lowest score, albeit still relatively high at 3.39, was recorded for the statement:

“My spirituality or inner beliefs influence the products I choose to buy.”

This suggests that while spiritual values are present, they may play a secondary role compared to ethical and emotional satisfaction in consumer decision-making. It also reflects how spirituality is often more implicit and subjective, making it a less universal driver of behaviour than ethics or social responsibility.

4.2.2 Interpretation and Implications

The research findings demonstrate that consumers from Gen Y and Gen Z value both emotional connections and price considerations in their purchasing decisions. The high scores for “supporting a good cause” and “brand transparency” demonstrate how consumers worldwide now base their purchasing choices on their personal identity and moral values and worldview.

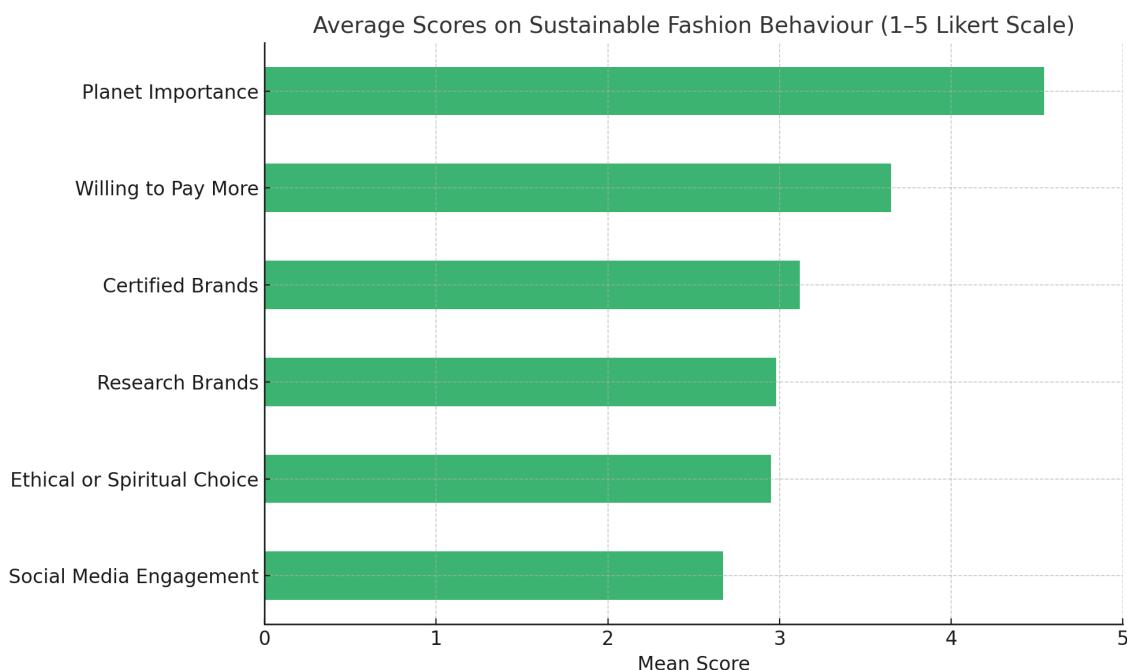
The moderate yet significant support for minimalism and spiritual influence shows that non-material aspects of consumption matter more to consumers even though they do not lead their purchasing decisions. The findings create opportunities for fashion startups to develop branding strategies that focus on **inner alignment, mindfulness and conscious living** because these approaches match the preferences of Gen Z consumers who seek authentic and deep brand connections (Williams et al., 2020).

The research findings confirm the theoretical framework established in this study. The collected data confirms the VAB model because **internal ethical values** transform into particular attitudes about transparency and minimalism before affecting behavioral intentions. The following sections will analyze these relationships through comparative studies of different generations and behavioral patterns.

4.3 Sustainable Fashion Behaviour Patterns

Consumer orientations receive their most direct expression through actual behavior which demonstrates how beliefs transform into real-life purchasing decisions. The following section

examines how participants translate their ethical and spiritual values into actual purchasing decisions for fashion products. The research data from six behavioral indicators measured through a five-point Likert scale shows average response scores in Figure 2.



4.3.1 Overview of Findings

The statement which received the highest agreement was:

"I believe sustainable fashion is important for the future of the planet" (Mean = 4.47).

The results show that respondents have a strong intellectual understanding of sustainability as a planetary imperative (Niinimäki et al., 2020) because they strongly agree with the statement that sustainable fashion is important for the future of the planet.

The second most important finding is that participants were very open to **paying more for ethically made products, with a mean score of 4.12**. This is a very important finding especially given that affordability is often cited as a major barrier to ethical consumption. This is a very important finding especially given that affordability is often cited as a major barrier to ethical consumption. It implies that within this sample—predominantly composed of educated, mid-to-high-income individuals—there is a willingness to trade price for principle, a key component in value-based purchasing models (Joergens, 2006).

The behaviour of actively seeking out **sustainable or eco-friendly brands received a moderately high score of 3.91**, suggesting a conscious, effort-driven consumption style. However, when it comes to **checking whether a brand is sustainable before buying, the average drops slightly to 3.74**, indicating that although intention exists, execution may lag behind—possibly due to time constraints or information gaps.

The use of **social media as a tool for sustainable fashion engagement** scored a **3.54** on average, implying that many participants are passively exposed to sustainability messages but may not be actively engaging in advocacy or dialogue. Finally, **choosing fashion items based on ethical or spiritual alignment** yielded the lowest score (**3.32**), suggesting that while values are acknowledged, they do not always translate into consistent behaviour especially in spontaneous or trend-driven purchases.

4.3.2 Analysis and Interpretation

The research results demonstrate an essential difference between what people **believe and what they actually do** especially when it comes to research activities or changes in their lifestyle. The majority of respondents agree sustainable fashion matters but only a small number actively check brand credentials or match their purchases to their personal beliefs. The observed behavioural gap matches the patterns found in the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** which shows how perceived behavioural control and social norms affect the intention–action divide (Ajzen, 1991).

The study reveals that **willingness to pay more** stands as a crucial factor in consumer decision-making. The high score indicates that price does not seem to be a major obstacle for this specific group of people yet it might prevent other consumers who are not included in this research from making purchases. Value-based startups targeting Gen Y and Gen Z consumers should focus on **ethical value instead of economic cost** when developing pricing narratives and digital storytelling content.

Social media functions as a crucial mechanism that drives behavioral changes. The engagement score was moderate but Instagram and TikTok continue to play a vital role in raising consumer awareness about alternative brands and making them accessible. Sustainable fashion startups should use interactive campaigns and influencer partnerships and educational content to convert passive awareness into active loyalty.

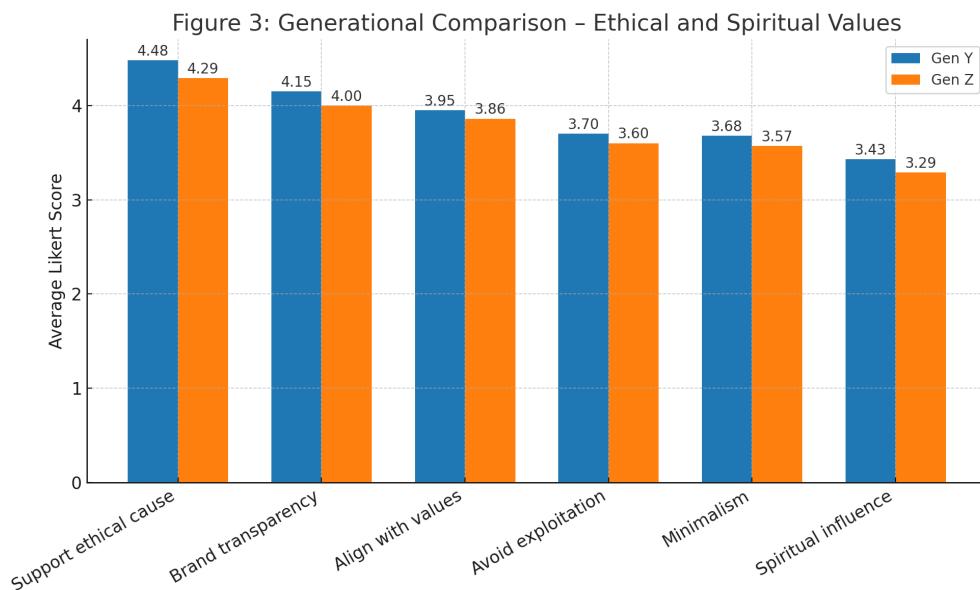
4.3.3 Implications for Value-Based Startups

These patterns confirm that sustainable fashion behaviours among Gen Y and Gen Z are **partially enacted**, with clear room for **deeper activation strategies**. Brands aiming to connect with these generations must therefore not only reflect ethical and spiritual values but also **remove friction** in behavioural follow-through—by simplifying information access, clarifying certifications, and reinforcing emotional rewards for conscious purchases.

This behavioural profile also supports the **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**, especially the component of *identified regulation*, where individuals are more likely to act when they personally endorse the values driving that behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Startups that cultivate a sense of autonomy and meaningful impact are more likely to convert attitudes into action.

4.4. Generational Differences: Gen Y vs Gen Z

The analysis of sustainability-related behaviors and values requires generational segmentation as a fundamental approach. The two main consumer groups for emerging fashion startups consist of **Generation Y (Millennials born 1981–1996)** and **Generation Z (born 1997–2012)** so understanding their distinct characteristics offers practical guidance for value-based branding and product development. The survey includes six Likert-scale items which this section uses to compare ethical and spiritual fashion values between these two cohorts. The results appear in Figure 3.



4.4.1 Overview of Key Differences

Gen Y members scored higher than Gen Z members in all ethical and spiritual value categories on average. Notably:

- The statement "**I feel better when I buy something that supports a good cause or ethical mission**" received the highest mean score from Gen Y participants (**Mean = 4.48**). Gen Z participants also scored this statement highly, although slightly lower at **4.29**. This indicates a shared emotional connection to ethical consumption, though Millennials may have a more entrenched internalisation of such values.
- The two groups placed high importance on **transparency** since **Gen Y scored 4.15** and **Gen Z scored 4.00**. Both generations show distrust toward corporate messaging while they want brands to be open and accountable in their branding practices.

- The two groups demonstrated similar levels of agreement about **spiritual influence on consumption** with **Gen Y at 3.43** and **Gen Z at 3.29**. The scores between the two groups are similar yet Gen Z shows a slight decrease because this generation tends to view spirituality as a lifestyle choice rather than a moral guide.
- The survey results showed **Minimalism received 3.68 points from Gen Y** and **3.57 points from Gen Z** indicating a slight preference for simple living among Millennials. The cultural movement toward decluttering and slow living during Gen Y's adulthood likely contributed to this trend because people sought relief from digital exhaustion and excessive consumption.
- The ethical value alignment and brand avoidance due to exploitation scores showed the smallest divergence with a difference of 0.1 to 0.2 points. The ethical awareness between the two groups was similar yet Millennials demonstrated a slightly stronger ethical awareness.

4.4.2 Interpretation and Insights

The research findings from existing literature support these observed generational differences. The sustainability discourse and late capitalist experiences of Millennials led them to develop consumption-based moral identity systems (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Gen Z members have learned to handle conflicting digital media messages which weakens their actual behavior compared to their declared values (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

The lower spiritual connection of Gen Z indicates that brands should present spirituality through concepts like mindfulness and authenticity and emotional wellness instead of traditional belief systems. The storytelling approach that connects to purpose and meaning and heritage elements will likely appeal more to Millennials when presented through ethical frameworks.

The Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) model supports these findings because Millennials translate their values into attitudes which may lead to behavioral changes. Startups need to find a balance between aesthetic appeal and activist principles when developing their products and digital engagement approaches.

4.5. Key Motivations: Thematic Insights from Open-Ended Questions

To complement the quantitative data, this section explores the qualitative responses to the open-ended question:

“What motivates you most when buying fashion items from sustainable or ethical brands?”

The research team analyzed the answers through thematic analysis to identify five main categories which explain the emotional and ethical and practical factors that influence Gen Y and Gen Z participants to adopt sustainable fashion consumption.

1. Ethical Responsibility and Moral Integrity

The main theme that emerged was the desire to **avoid harm** and **uphold moral integrity** in consumer behavior. Respondents commonly referenced the avoidance of fast fashion and exploitation:

"Not contributing to fast fashion."

"Knowing that my purchase supports fair wages."

"That the money I spent is not gonna harm anyone."

The Value Attitude Behaviour (VAB) model explains how ethical values transform into purposeful consumer decisions (Homer & Kahle, 1988). The data show a form of “consumer activism” because people feel responsible for the moral implications of their supply chain choices.

2. Environmental Consciousness

Many responses pointed to environmental protection as a core motivational force:

"Cause it's eco-friendly."

"Giving the world the least harm possible."

"Protecting the environment."

"Knowing that their clothes are recyclable."

The statements confirm previous results from Likert-scale items because participants **strongly agreed that sustainable fashion matters for the planet's future**. The strong **planetary awareness** among Gen Z members stems from their ecological anxiety and Millennials' focus on long-term perspectives.

3. Emotional and Spiritual Fulfilment

Several participants expressed that buying from ethical brands provides a sense of **emotional satisfaction and inner peace**:

"I feel better if I know that I am contributing to something good."

"My beliefs."

"Sensitivity towards nature and living things."

The responses align with **spiritual and emotional branding models** because consumers use their purchases to express their **identity, intentions** while practicing **mindfulness** (Varma, 2022). These consumers transform fashion into a sacred practice which helps them connect with their personal values and those of the planet.

4. Desire for Transparency and Trust

Transparency in brand practices was another key motivator mentioned:

"When they are transparent about the manufacturing process."

"Transparency."

The results match the earlier Likert response average of 4.12 for transparency. The results indicate that Gen Y and Gen Z are informed, skeptical, and demand verifiable claims from brands (Han et al., 2017).

5. Aesthetic Appeal and Quality

Finally, respondents highlighted **quality and design** as simultaneous priorities:

"High quality items."

"Special design & good quality."

"Eco-friendly and timeless pieces."

The false binary between sustainability and style faces a challenge. Young consumers now demand fashion products that deliver both **ethical value and stylish appeal**. Brands that do not deliver design quality risk losing their audience who value both style and ethical standards.

Summary of Insights

The qualitative responses show that consumers want a complete motivational experience which combines **ethical values** with **environmental concerns**, **emotional authenticity** and **visual appeal**. **Gen Y and Gen Z consumers view sustainable fashion as a lifestyle choice which represents their desire to live better while consuming better and relating to the world in a better way.**

The research supports the need for brand strategies that use storytelling and transparent methods to create emotional connections with younger consumers who seek meaningful relationships with brands.

4.6. Summary and Integration of Key Themes

The section unites essential research findings which stem from quantitative and qualitative data obtained throughout the study. The research employed mixed-methods to examine how ethical and spiritual values affect sustainable fashion choices among Gen Y and Gen Z consumers. The combination of Likert-scale responses with open-ended narratives showed that consumers base their choices on multiple values.

4.6.1 Ethical Values as Primary Drivers

The two generations showed ethical factors including fair labor practices and human rights and anti-exploitation as their main drivers for sustainable consumption. The quantitative results demonstrated that all participants strongly agreed with statements like:

"I feel better when I buy something that supports a good cause or ethical mission" and

"I prefer brands that are transparent about their values and practices."

The open-ended responses from participants showed that they used emotional relief together with responsibility and moral alignment to explain their purchasing decisions. The Value–Attitude–Behaviour (VAB) model received strong validation in this context because ethical values inside the mind create attitudes which direct purchasing choices.

4.6.2 Environmental Concerns and Practical Idealism

Planetary protection and eco-consciousness also stood out as major motivators. The high agreement with sustainability's planetary importance (mean score = 4.47) and frequent mention of ecological

damage in qualitative responses demonstrate that environmentalism is not just a trend—it is a **deeply embedded concern**, especially among Gen Z.

However, the behavioural data also showed that while participants supported sustainability **in principle**, actual practices such as researching brands or seeking certifications received lower average scores. This gap reflects the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), where intention may not always translate into action due to time, cost, or accessibility constraints (Ajzen, 1991).

4.6.3 Spiritual and Emotional Alignment as Emerging Motivations

The participants used spirituality as a supporting element in their decision-making process. The Likert scores for direct spiritual influence were low at ~3.39 average but open-ended responses showed that many people link sustainable consumption to emotional well-being and inner peace and intentionality.

The patterns match the **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** particularly identified regulation which means behavior is driven by internalized but personally accepted values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Sustainable fashion serves as a means for people to express their authentic selves and develop mindful identities particularly among Gen Z members.

4.6.4 Generational Distinctions and Strategic Implications

Although Gen Y and Gen Z share many core values, subtle generational differences were noted:

- **Gen Y group demonstrated higher scores across all six ethical and spiritual value statements which indicates stronger behavioral integration of these values.**
- **Gen Z shares the same level of motivation but needs additional engagement and educational efforts to transform their intentions into action especially regarding transparency and spiritual alignment.**

Value-based startups need to develop communication approaches that target specific audience segments. Value-based startups should use purpose-driven storytelling and heritage-based branding to reach Gen Y but Gen Z members prefer interactive content and digital transparency and co-creation opportunities.

4.7 Conclusion

The combined data shows sustainable fashion consumption among **Gen Y and Gen Z consumers** results from multiple factors including ethical considerations, environmental concerns, emotional needs and spiritual development. The ethical values provide a solid base for sustainable fashion consumption but identity expression and psychological well-being are gaining more importance.

The behavioral ecosystem consists of these themes which operate dynamically to form a system that **startups need to understand for successful consumer engagement**. The fashion industry will favor brands which successfully maintain credibility alongside creativity and consciousness in their operations.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The research investigated how ethical and spiritual values influence sustainable fashion purchasing habits among Millennials and Gen Z consumers. The research used the **Value Attitude Behaviour (VAB)** model and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** and **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** to study motivations and behaviors and generational differences in ethical fashion engagement through both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The research showed that **ethical values drive both Gen Y and Gen Z consumers the most**. The participants strongly agreed with statements that supported fair practices and avoided exploitation and preferred brands with transparency. The open-ended responses showed similar preferences through the repeated appearance of themes including fairness and moral integrity and emotional satisfaction.

Environmental consciousness was the second most cited motivation. The majority of participants understood sustainable fashion as vital for Earth's future and many stated that environmental considerations guided their brand selections. The survey results showed that participants held strong intentions toward sustainability yet their actual behavior such as brand research and spiritually aligned product selection was slightly inconsistent. The TPB shows that people with strong intentions may not take action because of their perceived lack of control over their behavior.

The survey results showed that spiritual values functioned as a less prominent but expanding force through the elements of mindfulness and intentional alignment with personal beliefs. The quantitative data showed ethical and environmental concerns outranked spiritual influence yet participants emphasized emotional well-being and peace of mind together with the positive feelings they experienced as their primary motivators.

The ethical and spiritual dimensions showed higher scores among **Millennials (Gen Y)** than **Gen Z** participants. The data indicates Gen Y maintains better alignment between their beliefs and actions than Gen Z does. The members of Gen Z demonstrated strong interest in sustainability yet they need stronger brand engagement and community support to transform their values into concrete actions.

Overall, younger generations demonstrate that fashion goes beyond visual appeal and following trends according to the study. Young people use fashion as an intricate way to express themselves while demonstrating moral dedication and spiritual contemplation. The findings provide essential knowledge for new startups that seek to establish themselves in the value-based fashion economy.

5.1. Practical Implications for Value-Based Startups

The research results provide practical guidance to fashion startups who work within ethical sustainable and spiritually conscious business models. The growing demand from Gen Y and Gen Z consumers for meaningful alignment in their purchasing choices requires value-based startups to move past basic sustainability statements by developing complete brand strategies that address ethical and emotional and spiritual aspects.

1. Centre Ethical Storytelling and Transparency

Startups need to make transparency their top priority for their supply chains as well as their materials and labor practices. The data demonstrates that both generations choose to support brands which maintain authentic open communication about their values. The company should reveal its complete production processes and show environmental certifications and share stories about people who contribute to product development.

- *Implementation Tip:* Use your website, packaging, and social media to show “who made this,” “what it’s made of,” and “why it matters.”

2. Integrate Mindfulness and Spiritual Resonance

The main driver remains materialism but spirituality has become a significant factor in product attachment. Startups should position fashion as a purposeful instrument for living by promoting customers to purchase fewer items of higher quality while linking their purchasing decisions to personal values such as compassion and balance and simplicity.

- *Implementation Tip:* Use messaging that invokes peace, clarity, and minimalism—especially in visual branding and product storytelling.

3. Offer Purpose-Driven Design, Not Just Eco Claims

Startups need to combine ethical and sustainable credentials with desirable aesthetics. Gen Z consumers along with other consumers will not give up style. Startups need to develop products which combine responsibility with visual appeal and comfort and cultural relevance.

- *Implementation Tip:* Invest in clean, innovative design and collaborate with designers or artists who reflect the brand’s values.

4. Leverage Community, Co-Creation, and Interactivity

Gen Z consumers specifically want to engage with brands while also becoming co-authors of their experiences. Brands that enable consumer participation through voting on causes and co-designing products and sharing user-generated content create stronger identification and loyalty among their customers.

- *Implementation Tip:* Use TikTok, Instagram Stories, and community voting platforms to build two-way communication and invite your audience into your ethical mission.

5. Address Behavioural Barriers with Practical Solutions

The strength of values does not translate into behavioral consistency because of price, convenience, or lack of awareness. Startups need to reduce friction by making sustainable choices more **accessible, affordable, and visible.**

- *Implementation Tip:* Offer entry-level sustainable pieces, subscription options, or educational content that helps guide beginner ethical shoppers.

In Summary

Startups operating in sustainable fashion need to shift their focus from product development to value creation. Startups that integrate ethical commitment and emotional intelligence and spiritual awareness into their brand DNA will create enduring relationships through trust and shared values with consumers.

5.2. Future Research Directions and Limitations

The research provides important findings about ethical and spiritual factors that drive Gen Y and Gen Z to choose sustainable fashion yet multiple research boundaries need acknowledgment. The research limitations create opportunities for future academic studies to explore.

Limitations

1. Sample Size and Demographic Scope

The research sample consisted of 57 participants who mostly resided in Europe while the majority belonged to Gen Z. The research results lack general applicability because they stem from a small sample that primarily includes European participants from Gen Z.

2. Self-Reported Data Bias

The survey responses depended on participants' self-assessments of their attitudes and behaviors which might be affected by social desirability bias because people tend to exaggerate their sustainability and ethical commitment to match societal norms.

3. Interpretation of Spirituality

The survey measured spiritual values without specifying particular definitions or categories between religious and secular spirituality or Eastern and Western spiritual frameworks. The research approach failed to deliver comprehensive understanding about the actual influence of spirituality on fashion choices.

4. Behaviour–Intention Gap Not Observed Longitudinally

The study failed to observe a behavior–intention gap because it measured attitudes and behaviors at one specific moment. The research did not assess whether people who expressed preference for ethical brands actually maintained consistent purchasing habits over time.

5.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Larger and More Diverse Samples

Future research needs to increase the participant number while recruiting participants from various geographic areas and socioeconomic levels and cultural backgrounds. The research would determine the global reach of identified motivations while evaluating how localisation impacts sustainable fashion values.

2. Deeper Exploration of Spirituality

Future research should investigate particular spiritual frameworks including Buddhist-inspired minimalism and eco-feminist values and mindfulness movements to study their connections with fashion consumption. The addition of qualitative interviews would provide deeper understanding of these complex motivators.

3. Longitudinal Studies on Value–Behaviour Consistency

Future research should monitor participants throughout time to study their actual purchasing behavior and brand interactions through digital tracking methods or diary recordings.

4. Comparative Studies Across Generations or Cultures

Research should analyze Gen Z and Gen Y participants from different nations while studying Gen Alpha and Gen X to understand sustainability and spirituality attitude changes throughout time and environmental settings

5. Experimental Research on Brand Strategies

Research studies should evaluate branding approaches including spiritual narratives and supply chain transparency displays to determine their effects on consumer trust and purchasing willingness. The research would deliver useful practical knowledge for ethical fashion startups.

6. FINAL NOTE

The fashion industry will need research about values and identity and consumption more than ever because it faces increasing demands for change. The research provides a modest advancement in this field by demonstrating that fashion has evolved from mere appearance to become more about alignment.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

APPENDIX 1

The research used a structured survey instrument to gather quantitative and qualitative data about ethical and spiritual values that affect sustainable fashion consumption among Generation Y and Generation Z. The questionnaire contained 24 items which were organised into four thematic sections.

Section	Focus Area	Question Examples
1. Demographics	Age, gender, education, income	"What is your age?", "What is your current education level?"
2. Ethical & Spiritual Values	Personal ethics, minimalism, spirituality	"My spirituality or inner beliefs influence the products I choose to buy"
3. Behavioural Intentions & Actions	Willingness to pay, brand trust, sustainability practices	"I actively seek out sustainable or eco-friendly fashion brands"
4. Motivations and Influencers	Open-ended perceptions and inspirations	"What motivates you most when buying fashion items from sustainable or ethical brands?"

A full list of survey items and their original wording is provided below:

Likert-Scale Statements (Rated from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. I believe that my purchasing decisions should align with my ethical values
2. I try to avoid buying from brands that exploit workers or harm the environment
3. I value simplicity and minimalism in the way I live and shop
4. My spirituality or inner beliefs influence the products I choose to buy
5. I feel better when I buy something that supports a good cause or ethical mission
6. I prefer brands that are transparent about their values and practices
7. I believe sustainable fashion is important for the future of the planet
8. I actively seek out sustainable or eco-friendly fashion brands

9. I am willing to pay more for ethically made clothing
10. I trust brands more when they support social and environmental causes
11. I check whether a fashion brand is sustainable before buying
12. I choose fashion items based on ethical or spiritual alignment
13. I follow sustainable fashion accounts or pages on social media
14. I talk to others about sustainable or ethical fashion choices

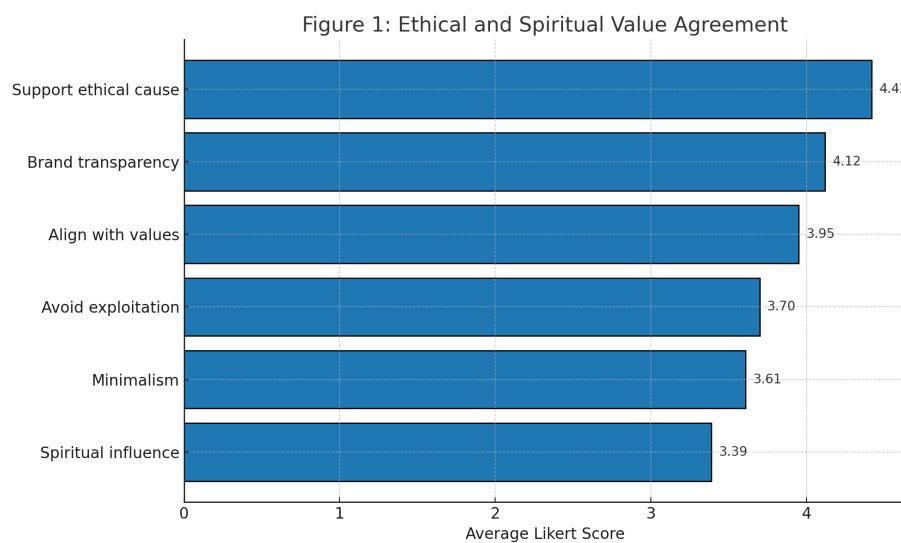
Open-Ended Questions

- What motivates you most when buying fashion items from sustainable or ethical brands?

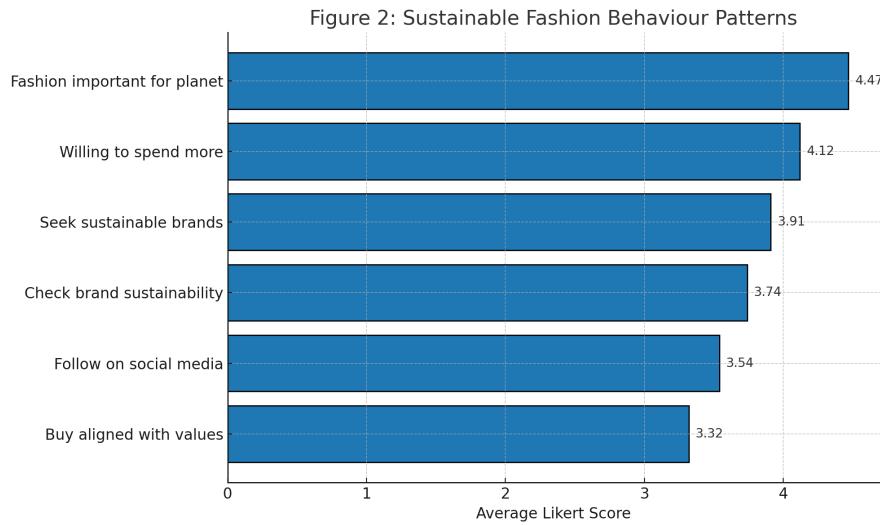
Appendix B: Data Summary Tables

The survey results are presented in this appendix through quantitative data which includes demographic breakdowns and Likert-scale response patterns.

APPENDIX 2



APPENDIX 3



APPENDIX 4

