

Generation Z's sustainable consumption of eco-friendly products: mediating roles of cognitive dissonance and purchase intention

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Abstract

This study examines factors influencing sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z consumers in Bali Province amid the rapid growth of fast fashion and the thrifting trend. Adapting the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to analyze the attitude-behavior gap, the study examines environmental concern, sustainability awareness, and knowledge of sustainability as determinants, with purchase intention and cognitive dissonance as mediating variables. Data from 230 Generation Z respondents were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results show that knowledge of sustainability has a positive, significant direct effect on green consumption behavior, whereas environmental concern and sustainability awareness alone fail to trigger concrete action. Purchase intention successfully mediates the translation of ecological empathy into behavior, while cognitive dissonance fails to mediate this gap, as post-purchase guilt is neutralized by social normalization of thrifting culture. The novelty lies in extending the S-O-R model to highlight psychological anomalies among green fashion consumers, emphasizing purchase intention over cognitive dissonance in shaping consumption behavior. The study recommends that industry players shift marketing strategies from passive awareness campaigns toward initiatives that lock in purchase intent, and suggests future research explore disruptions within the social commerce ecosystem.

Keywords: *cognitive dissonance, purchase intention, sustainable consumption, generation z, thrifting*

Introduction

The global manufacturing industry is currently integrating ecological responsibility as a strategic imperative that directly determines the direction of business, shifting from what was previously merely ethical discourse (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Arman, 2021; Zhao et al., 2025). The industry's failure to adopt these principles is no longer merely a reputational risk but an existential threat to the future relevance of businesses amid increasingly critical market preferences (Dubey et al., 2024; Theocharis, 2025). This push for transformation aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goals agenda, particularly in fostering responsible consumption and production ecosystems to minimize the ecological footprint (United Nations, 2015; Hassan et al., 2022). Therefore, the adoption of environmentally friendly practices has now evolved into a new social contract between producers, consumers, and nature that is no longer negotiable (Bhutto, 2026; Liang et al., 2022). One of the sectors feeling this pressure the most is the fashion industry, which has historically been known as the world's largest contributor to textile waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Faragher, 2022). This position indicates that the fashion industry not only has a massive market but also possesses excellent potential to transform into a global hub for production, innovation,

and a green ecosystem.

At the national level, the fashion industry and the threat of textile waste have grown significantly. National waste generation has surpassed 2.3 million metric tons per year, equivalent to 12% of total household waste (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2021). The massive influx of fast fashion and secondhand clothing is rapidly being absorbed by major cities in Indonesia. Although this trend is experiencing strong growth, there are still real challenges in cultivating consumers who possess sufficient knowledge, an understanding of the industry, and a willingness to participate in a fashion business environment aligned with the principles of sustainability.

This phenomenon has found a unique ecosystem in the province of Bali, which holds a special position in Indonesia's consumer landscape. As an epicenter of international tourism, Bali has very high exposure to global fashion trends. Thrifting hubs are now proliferating not only in the form of boutiques and physical stores but are also expanding into the digital ecosystem through live shopping (Lukiyana & Sanusi, 2023; Rais & Hidayat, 2022). This penetration of the thrifting market is predominantly driven by Generation Z consumers (Lyticia Wouguia, 2021; Palomo-dom & El, 2023; Prits, 2023). Although they have cultural roots in environmental sustainability, the high intensity of their social interactions and the power of digital purchasing make them highly reactive to the dynamics of visual trends (Cayaban et al., 2023; Guerrero et al., 2024), thereby triggering the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FOMO) (Ahmad & Decombe, 2022; Moulidhanty & Aruan, 2024). Although there is evidence that the cultural normalization of secondhand goods does not always motivate consumers to act ethically, research indicates that many young consumers are actually more likely to fall into hyper-consumption rather than adopting truly sustainable consumption practices (Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025). This indicates that the factors influencing an individual's decision to engage in sustainable consumption require further exploration.

This distinctive market structure carries theoretical implications. Bali's position as Indonesia's leading international tourism hub subjects Generation Z consumers to an unusually high level of global fashion exposure, compounded by a rapidly expanding thrifting ecosystem that spans physical boutiques and live digital commerce (Lukiyana & Sanusi, 2023; Rais & Hidayat, 2022). This intensity of exposure differs structurally from non-tourism-driven markets studied in prior S-O-R research, where thrifting is less socially visible and less normalized as a lifestyle marker. In Bali, the normalization of secondhand consumption as a fashionable identity practice, rather than a purely economic or ethical one, may weaken the psychological discomfort that would otherwise be expected to follow impulsive or non-sustainable purchases, providing a distinct behavioral context in which to test the S-O-R model.

In consumer behavior research, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework is often used to explain how individuals determine their shopping patterns. This theory examines three main factors: stimuli from the external environment (Stimulus), internal processes driven by the individual's mental state (Organism), and the resulting actual actions (Response) (Wang & Jiang, 2024). Various studies indicate that ecological awareness and knowledge play a significant role in shaping consumer purchasing behavior (Bhutto, 2026; Liang et al., 2022; Prisco et al., 2025). Most studies using empirical data examine general consumption contexts, with a tendency to measure the impact of these

variables solely in a linear manner (Rais & Hidayat, 2022; Vicamara & Santoso, 2023). Thus, although the S-O-R framework has been widely applied and tested in various contexts, its use within a value-driven thrifting ecosystem has not yet been extensively explored.

While environmental knowledge and awareness are theoretically expected to predict sustainable behavior, emerging empirical evidence presents a contradiction: secondhand and thrifting consumers frequently continue to exhibit fast-fashion-like purchasing patterns despite holding pro-environmental beliefs (Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025). This inconsistency suggests that sustainability knowledge and awareness do not operate as direct behavioral triggers, but are instead filtered through an unobserved internal mechanism. Prior S-O-R-based fashion studies have generally modeled the "organism" stage as a single, uniformly positive motivational state, typically purchase intention, without testing a competing, tension-based organism state that could explain why well-informed consumers still fail to act sustainably. This gap motivates the present study's inclusion of cognitive dissonance as a parallel organism-stage mechanism.

The conventional application of the S-O-R framework, which treats the organism stage as a single linear pathway from stimulus to response, is therefore insufficient to explain the attitude-behavior gap observed among Generation Z consumers. Such linear modeling implicitly assumes that any organism-stage state, whether generated by concern, awareness, or knowledge, leads uniformly toward pro-environmental action. This assumption does not hold when consumers experience internal psychological conflict rather than straightforward motivation. Explaining the attitude-behavior gap requires modeling two distinct organism pathways in parallel: one that translates concern into planned action (via purchase intention), and one that generates internal tension without necessarily resolving it into behavior (via cognitive dissonance).

In the field of sustainable fashion research, previous studies have largely examined the phenomenon of thrifting purely from the perspectives of economic and lifestyle motivations without accounting for consumers' internal conflicts. In many cases, sustainability is viewed merely as a product feature rather than as a belief system that influences how a product is evaluated. This is consistent with findings in other value-based industries, where ethical knowledge and awareness have been shown to strongly shape individuals' behavioral intentions and transactional decisions (Cahyani et al., 2026). Several fashion studies also indicate that understanding of sustainability and environmental awareness can influence consumers' opinions and financial decision-making (Dubey et al., 2024; Wojdyla & Chi, 2024). However, these ideas are rarely found alongside cognitive beliefs and internal evaluations within the S-O-R model, particularly in the context of the digital market reality with aggressive promotions where such intentions often evaporate (Ahmad & Decombe, 2022; Salah et al., 2024).

For Generation Z consumers in Bali, shopping decisions are heavily influenced by lifestyle motivations and ecological literacy. However, mere exposure to environmental issues does not necessarily mean they will immediately take action to engage in responsible consumption. The S-O-R model states that stimuli influence responses indirectly through the organism's state (Wang & Jiang, 2024). This behavioral gap places Generation Z in a state of psychological tension known as Cognitive Dissonance (Divrik, 2025). Therefore, viewing Purchase Intention and Cognitive Dissonance as the link between Environmental Concern, Sustainability Awareness, and Knowledge of Sustainability and the desire to shop is

grounded in the true S-O-R framework, rather than merely adding an extra or unnecessary step.

This study does not claim that there have been no previous S-O-R studies. However, it aims to provide context by incorporating environmental knowledge and awareness as belief-based factors that influence internal conditions (organism), helping to explain Generation Z consumers' intentions in Bali to adopt eco-friendly fashion products. This paradox becomes even more complex when thrifting functions as a massive visual commodity. Understanding environmental impacts, recognizing the consequences of waste, and grasping the opportunities of the circular market help people feel more positive about buying secondhand products because they see clear benefits. At the same time, the normalization of the idea that excessive purchasing of used clothing is acceptable simply because it is secondhand suggests that individuals are seeking a moral rationalization (moral license) (Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025). Thus, the S-O-R framework is the primary theory employed here, in which Purchase Intention and Cognitive Dissonance function as internal beliefs that indirectly mediate the stimulus. This method offers a better understanding of why Generation Z consumers intend to become green consumers while preserving the original S-O-R framework.

Before turning to the specific hypotheses, it is important to clarify the conceptual status of Environmental Concern, Sustainability Awareness, and Knowledge of Sustainability within this model. Within the S-O-R framework, a stimulus need not originate from a physical external source; it may take the form of externally-derived information or normative pressure that an individual has internalized prior to conscious evaluation (Wang & Jiang, 2024). Environmental Concern, Sustainability Awareness, and Knowledge of Sustainability are conceptualized here as internalized representations of external stimuli - environmental discourse, media exposure, and social norms surrounding sustainability - rather than as fixed personality traits. This positioning is consistent with S-O-R applications in consumer behavior research, where affective and cognitive orientations toward an external issue (e.g., environmental degradation) function as the stimulus that triggers subsequent organism-level processing (Bhutto, 2026; Wang & Jiang, 2024).

Environmental concern is a person's sense of concern regarding issues of environmental degradation. This emotional attachment motivates Generation Z to feel responsible for the Earth they will inherit (Liang et al., 2022). A study by Bhutto (2026) found that this emotional engagement significantly shapes a strong cognitive tendency to purchase more ethical products. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated. This dynamic is consistent with Festinger's original conceptualization of cognitive dissonance, which describes the psychological discomfort that arises when an individual holds two or more conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or values, particularly when actual behavior contradicts a held moral value (Divrik, 2025). Among Generation Z fashion consumers, this conflict is intensified by hedonic desires, fear of missing out (FOMO), and the desire for uniqueness, which drive impulsive fast-fashion purchases even among environmentally aware individuals (Moulidhanty & Aruan, 2024).

H1: Environmental Concern has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention for eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

Furthermore, regarding ecological understanding, Generation Z is generally believed to

possess good sustainability literacy and to be aware of the long-term impacts of textile waste. However, when this high level of knowledge and awareness clashes with the reality of a digital marketplace filled with the temptations of fast fashion and visual trends, consumers often experience a sharp internal conflict. The more they are exposed to sustainability values, yet simultaneously bombarded by social pressure to look trendy at low prices, the greater the psychological discomfort or cognitive dissonance they experience. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Sustainability Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Cognitive Dissonance related to eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

H3: Knowledge of Sustainability has a positive and significant effect on Cognitive Dissonance related to eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

Within the S-O-R paradigm, positive external stimuli and conative drives are assumed to be capable of generating an adaptive final response. Various previous studies confirm that sustainability insights, awareness of consequences, and environmental concern are key predictors that drive consumers to take concrete actions, such as extending a product's lifespan or being willing to pay more for eco-friendly products (Masserini et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2025). Similarly, purchase intention has long been recognized as a direct determinant of actual behavior (Azizah et al., 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Environmental Concern has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior regarding eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

H5: Sustainability Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior toward eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

H6: Knowledge of Sustainability has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior toward eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

H7: Purchase Intention has a positive and significant effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior toward eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

On the other hand, the psychological dynamic known as cognitive dissonance creates mental tension that prompts consumers to seek coping mechanisms, such as moral licensing, to justify their impulsive purchases as if they were ethical (Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025). Consequently, a high level of internal disagreement will cause consumers to be less consistent in adopting genuinely eco-friendly behavior. Furthermore, the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior is caused by cognitive dissonance. This mental state disrupts the connection between actual shopping practices and theoretical understanding of the environment (Divrik, 2025). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H8: Cognitive dissonance has a significant negative effect on sustainable consumption behavior regarding eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

Beyond its direct effect, cognitive dissonance is also expected to function as a mediating mechanism. Since Sustainability Awareness and Knowledge of Sustainability are theorized to be antecedents of this dissonance, their influence on actual behavior may not be direct but instead channeled through the intensity of the psychological discomfort each individual experiences. In other words, the extent to which awareness or knowledge translates into

consistent pro-environmental behavior depends on how successfully the resulting dissonance is resolved, whether through genuine behavior change or through coping responses that preserve existing consumption habits. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H9: Cognitive Dissonance mediates the effect of Sustainability Awareness on Sustainable Consumption Behavior regarding eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

H10: Cognitive Dissonance mediates the effect of Knowledge of Sustainability on Sustainable Consumption Behavior toward eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

However, in a different mediational context, the presence of purchase intention acts as a rational bridge that neutralizes situational barriers in the fashion market. Young consumers will become more concerned about the impact of textile waste, which will encourage them to seek more ethical consumption alternatives. Concrete actions, such as purchasing eco-friendly fashion products, ultimately stem from well-formed intentions. This aligns with previous findings showing that purchase intention can be highly effective in transforming consumption behavior in sustainable markets into environmental concern (Azizah et al., 2024; Zhong et al., 2025).

H11: Purchase Intention mediates the effect of Environmental Concern on Sustainable Consumption Behavior regarding eco-friendly fashion products among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design with a causal-explanatory approach to test the cause-and-effect relationships among variables within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework. The data used are quantitative and derived from primary data, which were collected directly from respondents via an online questionnaire. The population in this study comprises all Generation Z consumers residing in the Province of Bali, with a sampling technique using a non-probability sampling approach, specifically the purposive sampling method. The established sampling criteria are that respondents must be members of Generation Z aged 14 to 28 years; reside in the province of Bali; and have experience purchasing fashion products, whether fast fashion or secondhand clothing (thrifting), at least twice within the last six months. Referring to the guidelines for determining sample size in PLS-SEM modeling, which recommend a minimum of ten times the number of the largest structural path leading to a specific latent construct (Hair et al., 2021), the final sample size used in this study was precisely set at 230 respondents. Given that the exact size of the Generation Z consumer population in Bali is unknown (unknown population), the sample size was determined based on guidelines for multivariate analysis (Hair et al., 2019). These guidelines recommend that the ideal sample size fall within a range of 5 to 10 times the total number of observed indicators. With a total of 24 indicators in this study, the recommended sample size range is 120 to 240 respondents. Therefore, a sample size of 230 respondents is considered sufficient to ensure the stability of parameter estimates and minimize potential standard errors.

Prior to full-scale distribution, the measurement instrument underwent two validation

stages. First, the items were constructed directly in Indonesian based on the theoretical indicators of each construct as outlined in the measurement sources listed below, rather than being translated from an existing English-language instrument; a back-translation procedure was therefore not required. The item wording was then reviewed by the study's academic supervisor (expert judgment) to assess content validity, clarity, and contextual appropriateness for Generation Z respondents in Bali. Second, a pilot test was conducted with 50 respondents to evaluate the empirical performance of each item. Based on this pilot data, several items exhibiting inadequate outer loadings in the preliminary PLS-SEM analysis were removed prior to the main data collection, ensuring that only items meeting acceptable psychometric thresholds were retained in the final instrument.

Primary data were collected online via a self-administered questionnaire using Google Forms, employing a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). The use of a four-point Likert scale was a deliberate methodological choice, made by deliberately excluding a neutral midpoint response option. This forced-choice design was intended to prevent respondents from defaulting to a safe or ambivalent answer, a tendency known as central tendency bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). By removing the neutral option, respondents were encouraged to express a clearer and more definitive attitude, preference, or evaluation toward each statement. The measurement instruments were adapted from validated literature, including Environmental Concern (Prisco et al., 2025) , Sustainability Awareness and Knowledge of Sustainability (Liang et al., 2022) , Purchase Intention (Dubey et al., 2024) , Cognitive Dissonance (Divrik, 2025; Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025) , and Sustainable Consumption Behavior (Wang & Jiang, 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via the SmartPLS software. This method was chosen due to its robustness in simultaneously testing complex multiple mediation models without being constrained by the assumption of normality (Hair et al., 2021). The evaluation was conducted in two stages: first, an evaluation of the outer model to ensure validity (Factor Loadings > 0.70, AVE > 0.50, HTMT < 0.90) and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability > 0.70). Second, an evaluation of the inner model to assess the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). Hypothesis testing was performed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples based on the significance criterion $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$. Based on this structural framework, the functional relationships among the variables are formulated into the following mathematical equations:

$$\eta_1 = \gamma_{11}\xi_1 + \gamma_{12}\xi_2 + \gamma_{13}\xi_3 + \zeta_1 \quad (1)$$

$$\eta_2 = \gamma_{21}\xi_1 + \gamma_{22}\xi_2 + \gamma_{23}\xi_3 + \zeta_2 \quad (2)$$

$$\eta_3 = \beta_{31}\eta_1 + \beta_{32}\eta_2 + \gamma_{31}\xi_1 + \gamma_{32}\xi_2 + \gamma_{33}\xi_3 + \zeta_3 \quad (3)$$

Where ξ_1 is *Environmental Concern*; ξ_2 is *Sustainability Awareness*; ξ_3 is *Knowledge of Sustainability*; η_1 is *Purchase Intention*; η_2 is *Cognitive Dissonance*; η_3 is *Sustainable Consumption Behavior*; γ (gamma) and β (beta) are structural regression path coefficients; and ζ (zeta) is *error term* or the level of structural error.

Table 1. Variables, Deficiencies, Indicators, and Research Sources

Variable	Definition	Indicator
Knowledge of Sustainability (<i>Masserini et al., 2024; Prisco et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025</i>)	The level of consumers' cognitive understanding of environmental, social, and economic issues related to the life cycle of a fashion product.	Knowledge of the impact of <i>fast fashion</i> on pollution/emissions; understanding of eco-labels/ethical certifications; knowledge of recycled materials; understanding of the circular economy (<i>reuse/recycle</i>); knowledge of ethical production processes.
Sustainability Awareness (<i>Brand & Rausch, 2022; Divrik, 2025; Moulidhanty & Aruan, 2024</i>)	Active awareness in which individuals recognize the long-term impacts of their actions or consumption patterns on environmental well-being.	Awareness of the consequences of textile waste; concern for brand transparency and ethics; limiting the frequency of clothing purchases; awareness of the individual's role in environmental conservation; the urgency of shifting to responsible consumption patterns.
Environmental Concern (<i>Bhutto, 2026; Liang et al., 2022</i>)	Individuals' emotional and affective attachment, as well as deep concern, regarding environmental degradation or damage.	Concerns about the ecological/climate crisis; personal moral responsibility; support for environmental campaigns on social media; concern for local environmental issues (Bali); concern about the impact of environmental degradation on future generations.
Purchase Intention (<i>Bhutto, 2026; Prisco et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2025</i>)	A stage of cognitive and affective tendencies that bridges the gap between environmental concern and actual purchase plans.	Probability of prioritizing secondhand/eco-friendly clothing; plans to seek out information on product ethics; intention to recommend thrifting/ethical brands; primary options in shopping plans; commitment in the face of the allure of cheap fashion.
Cognitive Dissonance (<i>Divrik, 2025; Mizrachi & Sharon, 2025</i>)	A state of psychological discomfort or inner conflict when beliefs (environmental concern) conflict with actual actions (impulsive or excessive purchasing).	Feelings of <i>guilt</i> or post-purchase regret; inner discomfort regarding a product's impact; rationalization or justification (<i>moral licensing</i>); confusion between trends and sustainability values; attempts to ignore negative information.
Sustainable Consumption Behavior (<i>Cayaban et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2025</i>)	Consumers' actual actions in purchasing, using, and disposing of goods to maximize social well-being and reduce ecological impacts.	Preference for secondhand clothing; habits of caring for, repairing, or donating clothing; <i>willingness to pay a premium</i> ; avoiding brands with a poor reputation; minimizing waste through long-term, functional purchases.

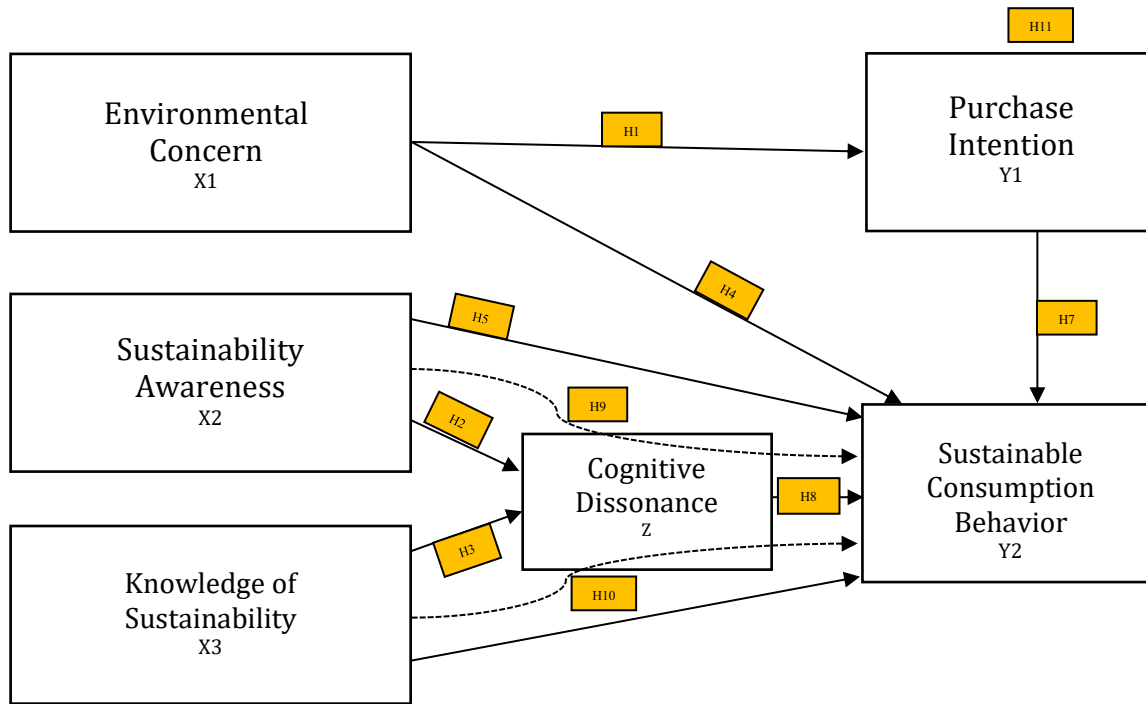


Figure 1. Research Model

This study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to explain how Generation Z consumers in Bali make decisions regarding sustainable fashion consumption. In this model, Environmental Concern (X1), Sustainability Awareness (X2), and Knowledge of Sustainability (X3) function as external stimuli that influence an individual's mental state. The organism stage is represented by Purchase Intention (Y1) as a motivational drive and Cognitive Dissonance (Z) as a form of psychological tension resulting from value conflicts when confronted with fast fashion trends. Ultimately, these dynamics will trigger a response in the form of Sustainable Consumption Behavior (Y2). This theory was chosen because it has proven effective in dissecting the complexity of consumer decision-making and explaining the attitude-behavior gap anomaly in the fashion market (Azizah et al., 2024; Wang & Jiang, 2024). By integrating these variables, this study aims to examine the influence of ecological factors on consumption behavior, while also demonstrating the mediating roles of purchase intention and cognitive dissonance among Generation Z consumers in Bali.

Results and Discussion

This study involved 230 Generation Z respondents in Bali Province. Demographically, the sample was dominated by female respondents at 62.2%, while male respondents accounted for 37.8%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the 19–23 age range (76.5%), followed by the 14–18 age group (12.2%) and the 24–28 age group (11.3%). Based on occupational background, the majority of respondents were college students (72.2%), followed by private- t employees (11.7%), high school students (9.6%), and entrepreneurs (3.5%). Furthermore, the distribution of respondents' places of residence was concentrated in urban areas and their surrounding regions, namely Denpasar Regency

(33%) and Badung Regency (24.3%), while the remainder were spread across various other regions in Bali. This profile confirms that the participating respondents constitute a young demographic group that is highly relevant and active within the *fashion* trend landscape under study.

Before testing the hypotheses, an evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments used. Based on the results of data analysis using SmartPLS, all indicators met the criteria for convergent validity with factor loadings above 0.70. Although several items in the Cognitive Dissonance variable fell within the range of 0.634 to 0.658, these indicators were retained because the construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded the threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). Discriminant validity was also well established. Furthermore, the reliability test showed that the research instrument possessed adequate internal consistency. Although the Cronbach's Alpha value for the Cognitive Dissonance variable was slightly below the ideal threshold (0.695), this was still acceptable because PLS-SEM prioritizes the Composite Reliability value as a more precise indicator of reliability (Hair et al., 2021). The Composite Reliability values for all variables exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.70, so the overall construct was deemed highly reliable. A summary of the measurement model test results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (<i>rho-c</i>)	AVE
Cognitive Dissonance	0.695	0.811	0.520
Environmental Concern	0.701	0.834	0.628
Knowledge of Sustainability	0.816	0.879	0.644
Purchase Intention	0.853	0.894	0.629
Sustainability Awareness	0.727	0.830	0.550
Sustainable Consumption Behavior	0.813	0.877	0.640

In the structural model evaluation stage (inner model), the analysis showed that the research model has very strong predictive power. The independent variables were able to explain 62.9% of the variance in Sustainable Consumption Behavior ($R^2 = 0.629$), 41% of the variance in Cognitive Dissonance ($R^2 = 0.410$), and 28% of the variance in Purchase Intention ($R^2 = 0.280$). Furthermore, the composite Q-Square value reached 0.8424, indicating that this model has a predictive relevance of 84.24% in accurately projecting phenomena in the field. The results of the structural parameter testing via the bootstrapping procedure reveal interesting findings regarding the behavioral anomalies of Generation Z in Bali. A summary of the hypothesis test results is presented in Table 3.

Based on testing of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, Environmental Concern was found to significantly influence Purchase Intention ($P=0.000$), but failed to directly influence Sustainable Consumption Behavior ($P=0.105$). On an affective level, Generation Z consumers in Bali exhibit a high level of concern regarding environmental damage caused by textile waste, which successfully triggers their transactional intent toward eco-friendly fashion products. However, this concern is not strong enough to directly translate into concrete action. When subjects are confronted with market realities,

the visual appeal of fast fashion and secondhand clothing (thrifting)—which are far more affordable, often overrides that mere sense of concern. These findings underscore the “attitude-behavior gap” phenomenon, in which empathy for the environment will not result in purchasing actions without well-considered intent and planning.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Item	Original Sample	T-Statistics	P-Value	Description
CD -> SCB	0.079	0.863	0.388	Rejected
EC -> PI	0.529	7.743	0.000	Accepted
EC -> SCB	0.094	1.623	0.105	Rejected
KS -> CD	0.215	2.666	0.008	Accepted
KS -> SCB	0.232	3.281	0.001	Accepted
PI -> SCB	0.404	4.582	0.000	Accepted
SA -> CD	0.472	6.290	0.000	Accepted
SA -> SCB	0.135	1.760	0.078	Rejected
SA -> CD -> SCB	0.037	0.828	0.408	Rejected
KS -> CD -> SCB	0.017	0.817	0.414	Rejected
EC -> PI -> SCB	0.214	3.602	0.000	Accepted

On the other hand, cognitive stimuli in the form of Sustainability Awareness ($P=0.000$) and Knowledge of Sustainability ($P=0.008$) were found to significantly trigger an increase in Cognitive Dissonance. These findings indicate that the higher Generation Z’s ecological awareness and understanding of the negative impacts of the apparel industry, the more vulnerable they are to experiencing mental strain. This inner conflict becomes particularly evident when these well-educated participants cannot resist the temptation of consumerist desires stemming from exposure to lifestyle trends in urban Bali. They find themselves caught in a state of dissonance: they understand that fast fashion harms the planet, yet feel socially pressured to continue consuming trendy clothing to maintain their visual identity.

Although both act as cognitive stimuli, there is a crucial difference in their direct effects on Sustainable Consumption Behavior. Sustainability Awareness was found to have no effect on consumption behavior (rejected, $P=0.078$), indicating that merely being “aware” of the environmental crisis lacks sufficient driving force to change Generation Z’s shopping habits. Conversely, Knowledge of Sustainability successfully exerted a direct positive influence ($P=0.001$). This demonstrates that technical and in-depth literacy, such as the ability to identify recycled materials or read eco-labels on clothing items equips consumers with the rational framework to make responsible purchasing decisions directly and without confusion in the marketplace.

Furthermore, mediation analysis revealed that Cognitive Dissonance failed to bridge the gap between Sustainability Awareness ($P=0.408$) and Knowledge of Sustainability ($P=0.414$) and actual action, consistent with the rejection of Cognitive Dissonance’s direct influence on Sustainable Consumption Behavior ($P=0.388$). Empirically, the mental tension in the form of guilt following an impulsive purchase turned out to be merely a fleeting emotional outburst for this younger demographic. Given that thrift shopping has been normalized and socially recognized as a fashionable lifestyle, while also being touted as a pseudo-“circular” solution, the cognitive dissonance they experience loses its power to distort or correct their subsequent purchasing decisions.

These results reveal a fundamental divergence between the two organism-stage pathways tested in this study. The Environmental Concern → Purchase Intention → Behavior path succeeds because Purchase Intention represents a positively-valenced, forward-looking psychological state: once concern is crystallized into a concrete plan or commitment, it directly channels affective motivation into action. The Sustainability Awareness/Knowledge → Cognitive Dissonance → Behavior path, by contrast, fails because Cognitive Dissonance is a negatively-valenced, tension-based state that demands resolution but does not itself specify a direction for that resolution—it can be resolved either through genuine behavior change or through coping mechanisms, such as moral licensing, that preserve existing habits. In the context of Bali's normalized thrifting culture, the latter route appears far more accessible to Generation Z consumers than authentic behavioral change, explaining why discomfort-based mechanisms are comparatively ineffective compared to intention-based ones in driving sustainable consumption.

Conversely, Purchase Intention was proven unequivocally and convincingly to mediate the influence of Environmental Concern on Sustainable Consumption Behavior ($P=0.000$), and this mediation is directly proportional to the magnitude of Purchase Intention's own influence on the final behavior ($P=0.000$). The success of purchase intention as this rational bridge provides a tangible solution to the attitude-behavior gap. When Generation Z's affective concern is successfully crystallized into a clear purchasing commitment such as allocating specific funds or proactively seeking out ethical brands, the subject is no longer vulnerable to the distractions of fast fashion promotions. It is this dedication to transactional intent that serves as the sole logical catalyst capable of transforming mere concern into tangible environmental conservation actions within the contemporary fashion market.

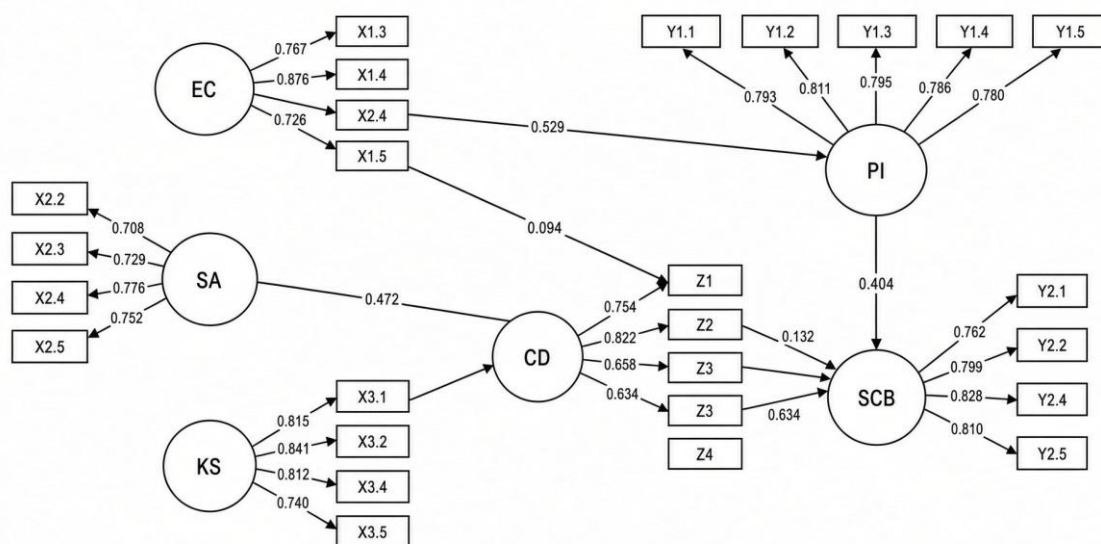


Figure 2. Path Model in Research

Environmental concern was found to have a positive and highly significant influence on consumers' purchase intention. In line with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework, affective concern and understanding of environmental issues act as external stimuli that internally shape individuals' motivational responses toward

sustainable fashion alternatives. Among Generation Z consumers in Bali, direct interaction with the reality of textile waste reinforces ethical considerations in shopping decisions, leading to more deliberate transactional intentions toward sustainable fashion. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that environmental concern positively influences consumers' purchase intentions toward "green products".

The research results show that purchase intention has a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable consumption behavior, highlighting the central role of intention as a rational bridge within the SOR framework. A strong desire and commitment to make sustainable purchases are key components of the "organism" stage, and a mature perspective on ecological values increases the likelihood that consumers will actually take conservation actions in the real market. Further empirical evidence suggests that young consumers with well-managed purchase intentions, such as allocating a dedicated budget are more likely to engage in green consumption amid the temptations of fast fashion. These findings support the hypothesis that dedication to transactional intentions drives actual purchasing behavior (Vicamara & Santoso, 2023).

In addition, knowledge of sustainability was found to be a cognitive predictor that successfully exerted a direct, positive, and significant influence on sustainable consumption behavior. This indicates that intellectual ability, the ability to recognize recycled materials, and literacy regarding eco-labels play a crucial role in guiding their purchasing decisions in the open market. According to the SOR framework, the higher an individual's practical ability to identify sustainability values, the more likely they are to execute such behaviors accurately without confusion. Conversely, environmental concern and sustainability awareness were found to have no significant direct influence, validating the existence of an attitude-behavior gap where mere sympathy remains stagnant and fails to translate into real action due to budget constraints (Rais & Hidayat, 2022).

This study demonstrates that purchase intention conclusively and convincingly mediates the relationship between environmental concern and sustainable consumption behavior. These findings indicate that having environmental concern does not automatically lead to responsible purchasing behavior. Rather, it must first help individuals form strong transactional plans and intentions. According to the SOR framework, this mechanism aligns with the idea that affective stimuli influence an individual's internal processes, which in turn lead to the formation of final actions. These findings support the literature confirming that purchase intention is the primary pathway linking affective awareness to the realization of green consumption in the field (Pang et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study found that cognitive dissonance empirically failed to mediate the relationship between cognitive stimuli (sustainability awareness and knowledge of sustainability) and sustainable consumption behavior. Although sustainability literacy was shown to trigger mental tension and inner conflict when it clashed with the consumptive desires driven by urban visual trends, it did not distort their shopping decisions. Given that the culture of thrift shopping has been socially recognized as a fashionable lifestyle for Generation Z, the mental tension following impulsive purchases is reduced to nothing more than a fleeting emotional outburst. These findings align with the argument that the mechanism of moral burden has lost its ability to compel young consumers to switch to ethical products (Divrik, 2025; Mizrahi & Sharon, 2025).

Overall, these mediation findings reinforce the idea that purchase intention serves as

the primary psychological mechanism that effectively bridges ecological concern to actual behavioral intent, while the cognitive dissonance variable has become ineffective. This contributes to the literature on sustainable consumption behavior by providing evidence that integrating environmental awareness is only effective in driving actual action if it has been internalized as a concrete and planned transactional intent. Therefore, marketing and industry interventions must be designed to shift from merely guilt-tripping, affect-based marketing campaigns toward technical cognitive education and explicit price rationalization (green premium) to secure Generation Z consumers' purchasing actions.

Beyond the structural results, patterns observed during the data collection process further substantiate this attitude behavior gap. A majority of respondents (65.2%) reported having purchased secondhand or fast fashion clothing within the past six months, and nearly all respondents (96.1%) actively used social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram as references for fashion trends, indicating that consumption decisions among Generation Z in Bali are shaped largely by digital exposure rather than deliberate ecological reasoning. Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire items reinforces this pattern: affective items such as personal responsibility toward environmental preservation recorded a relatively high mean score of 3.46, with 51.3% of respondents selecting the highest score, whereas technical knowledge items, including the ability to identify recyclable materials, recorded a notably lower mean of 2.98, with 20% of respondents scoring at the lowest levels. This gap in literacy appears to feed directly into rationalization tendencies, reflected in the sizeable proportion of respondents (over 20%) who admitted to ignoring negative information about a product when strongly desiring a trending item. Taken together, these patterns support the quantitative finding that ecological concern alone, without adequate sustainability literacy, tends to be neutralized through cognitive coping mechanisms rather than translated into consistent sustainable purchasing behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the hypothesis testing summarized in Table 3, six of the eleven proposed hypotheses were supported. Environmental Concern significantly predicted Purchase Intention (H1, accepted) but showed no significant direct effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior (H4, rejected). Sustainability Awareness significantly predicted Cognitive Dissonance (H2, accepted) but likewise had no significant direct effect on Sustainable Consumption Behavior (H5, rejected). Knowledge of Sustainability was the only antecedent to show a significant effect on both Cognitive Dissonance (H3, accepted) and Sustainable Consumption Behavior directly (H6, accepted). Purchase Intention significantly predicted Sustainable Consumption Behavior (H7, accepted), while Cognitive Dissonance did not (H8, rejected). Mediation testing further revealed that Cognitive Dissonance failed to mediate the effects of either Sustainability Awareness (H9, rejected) or Knowledge of Sustainability (H10, rejected) on behavior, whereas Purchase Intention successfully mediated the effect of Environmental Concern on Sustainable Consumption Behavior (H11, accepted).

This study concludes that sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z in Bali Province is governed by complex psychological dynamics, in which the phenomenon of the attitude-behavior gap is clearly validated. Passive environmental concern and awareness have proven insufficient to directly change shopping behavior; rather, they trigger cognitive

dissonance resulting from the clash between ecological ideals and the allure of the fashion industry. Interestingly, this cognitive dissonance manifesting as guilts entirely incapable of curbing their consumerist behavior. This is due to the strong social normalization of the thrift-shopping culture, which has already come to be viewed as a fashionable and acceptable lifestyle. Ultimately, environmental conservation efforts in the real market can only be executed through a cognitive-practical understanding of sustainability and must be driven by the reinforcement of planned purchase intentions, the only effective rational bridge for transforming affective concern into tangible transactional action. This asymmetry between a failed discomfort-based pathway and a successful intention-based pathway constitutes a key theoretical contribution of this study, challenging the assumption that psychological tension alone is sufficient to drive sustainable behavior change.

As a practical implication, the finding that Knowledge of Sustainability—rather than Environmental Concern or Awareness alone—is the strongest direct driver of behavior suggests that industry players should shift their strategic focus from affective, guilt-based marketing campaigns toward tactical cognitive education. Concrete initiatives could include clear carbon-footprint transparency labeling, accessible explanations of recycled-material composition, and verified eco-label certification that consumers can readily interpret at the point of purchase. Because Cognitive Dissonance was shown to have no meaningful influence on actual behavior, businesses should not rely on discomfort- or guilt-inducing messaging (e.g., highlighting the environmental cost of fast fashion), as this study demonstrates such tension is easily neutralized through the social normalization of thrifting rather than resolved through purchasing behavior change.

Conversely, since Purchase Intention was the only construct proven to successfully bridge concern into action, businesses should prioritize strategies that convert environmental concern into concrete commitment. This includes integrating sustainable options directly into social commerce checkout flows to minimize situational barriers between intention and purchase, offering wishlist or budget-planning features that let consumers pre-commit funds toward sustainable items, and adjusting pricing structures (a moderated "green premium") to remain accessible to the student-dominated Generation Z segment identified in this study's sample. Collectively, these recommendations reposition sustainability marketing away from appeals to guilt and toward mechanisms that operationalize intention into action.

On the other hand, this study is subject to several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design captures consumer attitudes and behavior at a single point in time, and therefore cannot account for how cognitive dissonance or purchase intention may evolve throughout an individual's consumption journey. Second, the geographic scope in Bali, dominated by a student demographic (72.2% of respondents), limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to working Generation Z consumers with greater financial independence. Third, while the sample size ($n=230$) satisfies the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM estimation, it remains modest relative to the size of the broader Generation Z population in Bali, warranting caution in generalizing the findings. Fourth, this study did not collect data on the specific product categories or physical condition of the thrifted items purchased by respondents, such as clothing type or whether items were new with tags, lightly used, or heavily worn. Future studies could incorporate this dimension to provide a more granular understanding of how product-level characteristics influence the psychological dynamics

examined here. Therefore, future research is recommended to include a proportion of professional workers in the sample to test the variable of financial independence. Further research is also highly recommended to replace the construct of cognitive dissonance—which has been shown to lose its significance as a mediator with more relevant psychosocial variables, such as peer pressure or status-based consumption, in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation of Generation Z behavior.

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