

Consumer Awareness: Environmental Consciousness, Conscious Lifestyle among Generation Z based on Primary Data

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Abstract: Conscious living is a consumer phenomenon that is closely related to the issues and trends of health promotion, sustainability and environmental awareness. This complex behaviour is investigated in this study among Generation Z. In many cases, the specific values and mindset of young people induce specific solutions, be it in terms of education, preference systems or consumer choice. Young people are also a special target group with regard to this issue because their values are often still immature and can be shaped and moulded. In our view, it is important to make young people aware of the meaning and significance of this way of life and of its individual social and environmental benefits and effects. In this study, we present the partial results of quantitative research on Generation Z in the light of descriptive statistics and correlation analyses. Based on the evaluation of 226 evaluable questionnaires, we were able to establish and confirm that in many cases young people themselves are not aware of the ways and aspects of self-aware lifestyles, which underpin the importance and necessity of educational programmes.

Keywords: generation Z; conscious lifestyle; sustainability

1 Introduction

Youth orientation, self-discovery and the development of their strengths and talents are both individual and social responsibilities. They become who they are, what they shape society and the world through a complex process that we can influence and do something about.

In an era of dynamic change in the 21st Century, characterised by technological advances, global challenges and the transformation of social structures, the relevance and relevance of the new generations in shaping society and the

innovative solutions they represent are undisputed. In this context, the aim of this study is to contribute with its analysis and results to a more consciously planned future, highlighting the potential represented by the new generations and the innovations they offer.

The new generations - especially Generation Z and their successors - have grown up in a world where digital technology, the internet and social media are a natural part of their everyday lives. The digital space permeates their daily lives, and education, entertainment and finance are no exception [1]. This constant connection and flow of information has led to new perspectives and ways of thinking that have a significant impact on their social and environmental sensitivity and problem-solving abilities. Generations growing up in this type of environment have the capacity to find innovative solutions to current social, economic and environmental problems, which is crucial for building a sustainable and inclusive future.

The relevance of the social shaping effect is also reflected in the fact that new generations are increasingly rejecting the traditional consumer model and seeking alternative solutions that are less environmentally damaging and promote social justice. The new generations' activism and open attitude to innovation can thus directly contribute to solving global problems and offer new paradigms for the organisation of future societies.

Innovative solutions are not just limited to technology. [2] [3] Organizations are also forced to open up to innovation and to use all means to win over their customers, thereby giving themselves a competitive advantage [4] [5] [6]. The new generations tend to formulate a more thoughtful, sustainable and inclusive vision of the future, which includes rethinking education, the labour market, urban planning and social policy, a vision that is expressed in many forums [7] [8] [9] [10]. These approaches are fundamental to creating a world for current and future generations that are able to adapt and respond to ever-changing environmental, social and economic challenges [11].

The new generation has overtaken contemporary education, and there is a need to change and alter the closed and schematic systems of the past. The previous structured and lecture-style teaching method is increasingly being replaced by methods that focus on visuality, multi-modality and practice-oriented methods [12]. It is no coincidence that there is a lot of research on what solutions, methods and content can be relevant and experiential for the new generation. [13] [14] [15] [16].

Innovative solutions can enable the development and creation of systems that can make the path of self-development and self-knowledge experiential through coaching, mentoring, orientation [17]. This is a great opportunity for our society and our future, as these generations, through their decisions, actions and mindsets, are significant shapers, determinants and key players in the development of our society.

In conclusion, the societal shaping influence of the new generations and the innovative solutions they represent are not only relevant, but essential to shaping future societies in a sustainable, more inclusive and accepting way. In order to achieve a consciously planned future, it is essential to take into account and support the potential, ideas and innovations that new generations bring. This not only gives us the opportunity to overcome current challenges, but can also contribute to a future that is fairer, more liveable, sustainable and happier for all [18].

2 Presentation of Literature

Generational differences can also be used as segmentation criteria in many areas of marketing. This is because each generation can be very well characterised by the values, behaviours and mindsets they share. In our primary research, we are also focusing on one generation (Generation Z), so one important pillar of our literature review is the analysis of the general and specific conscious lifestyles of this generation. [19] [20]

Australian social researcher McCrindle has been studying the different generations for some time, with separate studies and infographics on both Generation Z and Generation Alpha. It is important to stress, however, that generational patterns and characteristics, as well as research, are best studied and interpreted at the local level. According to McCrindle's research, Zs make up 23% of the total population. When choosing a job, the three most important factors for them are accessible and approachable leadership, learning and development opportunities, and career development opportunities [21] The same research on Generation Alpha is the first to focus on the Alpha designation. As the first letter of the Greek alphabet, it represents the beginning of something new, a future in which Alphas born between 2010 and 2025 will live longer, be more culturally diverse, have a more sophisticated tech savvy, but will typically stay in education longer, starting their adult lives later and leaving the comfort of their parents' homes later. We might even call them 'screenagers', as research shows they spend an average of four hours and forty-four minutes in front of a screen. They are also characterised by individualism and a need for personalisation. What they lack, however, is the ability to be practical, to assess risks realistically and to set and achieve achievable goals. In about 4 years the first Alpha will enter the labour market, where new professions are expected to emerge and existing ones will need to be compatible with the skills and needs of the new generation [22].

The characteristics, motivations and learning preferences of Generation Z, which are different from those of millennials, may require educators to rethink and redesign strengths-based education to ensure that content and pedagogical approaches are in line with the needs and expectations of the new generation. [23]. This generation can access the latest information with a click, they are a click away

from any experience. They are the ones who were already aware of 9/11, who experienced through their parents the Great Depression, Covid-19, total isolation, being in the online world, and then again the experiential reality of face-to-face contact. They have also been hit by so many stimuli in this youthful period that it is difficult to find them, to invent themselves and place them on their self-image. In addition, they believe they have the power to change the world, they expect education to provide them with skills and knowledge that they can use immediately and apply in real life [24].

Inner Development Goals (IDG) is a non-profit and open source initiative for inner development. It researches, collects and communicates science-based skills and attributes that help us live purposeful, sustainable and productive lives [25]. It seeks to bridge the gap between personal growth and global transformation. [26] It also helps to formulate personal development goals that focus on the inner world, emotional and mental well-being of individuals. These may include self-acceptance, self-awareness, empathy and the development of personal values. For young people of Generation Z or Alpha, Inner Development Goals can play an extremely important role in the development of personal identity and well-being. Generation Z, the digital natives, often use online platforms for emotional expression and self-expression while searching for inner balance and self-identity. The Alpha generation, characterised by the ubiquity of technology, also needs the tools and opportunities offered by the Inner Development Goals for personal development. For both generations, understanding and unfolding their own inner world is key to their ability to cope with the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. A conscious way of life, including the issue of their ecological responsibility and the importance of self-awareness as a core attitude rooted in inner values, can be shaped and strengthened among these young people through systematic educational activities [27]. Numerous studies show that knowledge, attitudes, commitment and individual responsibility are important dimensions of responsible, conscious environmental behaviour [28] [29] [30] [31] [32].

Orimer's research explored the perceptions, feelings and actions associated with conscious living among Generation Z.

3 Material and Method

In the framework of a primary research, we conducted quantitative data collection among the domestic Generation Z using a snowball sampling procedure. We used a pre-tested, standardised online questionnaire survey, which resulted in 226 evaluable questionnaires.

The themes of the questionnaire were the perception and practice of conscious living, the analysis of individual life goals and value orientation. The questionnaire typically used closed questions, with three open questions in the form of free

association. Among the closed questions, both nominal (single- and multiple-choice selective, dichotomous questions) and metric level questions (Likert and semantic differential scales) were used.

Scale questions were asked on a scale of 1 to 4. One reason for this is the individual scale preference of Hungarian respondents: due to the school grading system, our Hungarian respondents are most stable in interpreting a scale of up to five grades as opposed to scales of 1-7, 1-9 or 1-10. The even scale was chosen because the middle value (3) for the odd (1-5) scale is an escape route for respondents and the presence and possible overrepresentation of "indifferent" consumers choosing the middle value complicates the segmentation process from both a statistical and a professional point of view. Therefore, we opted for an even scale, which, by excluding the middle value, forces the respondent to take a more rigorous stance, thus contributing more to the successful conduct of segmentation [33].

In this paper we focus on the analysis of quantitative research questions related to conscious living. In our quantitative research phase, we aimed to test the following two hypotheses:

The perception of self-consciousness of one's lifestyle and the opinion (attitude) about conscious living are related (H1).

There is a link between individual values and the practice of conscious living (H2).

Descriptive statistics, bivariate and multivariate analyses were used to process the quantitative results and test the hypotheses using SPSS 26.0 software.

To examine the correlation between the results measured on the metric scale, the analysis of variance method was used, including the one-way ANOVA method for comparing multiple sample means. The mean of a metric dependent variable was compared between more than two groups. The post-hoc test was used to determine which pairs of groups were significantly different. In doing so, significance values were used to determine the existence of correlations ($\text{sig} \leq 0.05$). Internal correlations were analysed along the comparison of group means using the F-statistic, i.e. the coefficient of variance of the means within samples [33] [34]. For the correlation tests described in this study, where the significance value according to the ANOVA table was below 0.05, a statistical relationship between the two variables was confirmed.

4 Results

For the first time, respondents were asked about conscious living through free association of words.

The results show an absolutely positive attitude: health, happiness, exercise, sport, nutrition and environmental protection were the most frequently mentioned terms.

Even the results of the free association of words indicated that young people associate conscious living with a healthy, active, balanced, relaxed and happy person who is aware of regular exercise, good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. At the same time, there are also a number of statements about protecting the environment, which young people believe means more than just taking care of oneself. We live consciously when we have empathy for the environment around us. In addition, it was particularly interesting for us that young people spontaneously associated conscious living with planning, development and goal-setting, suggesting that young people associate conscious living most strongly with a way of living and thinking that is well planned, based on and guided by goals and plans.



Figure 1

The result of a consumer's free association with conscious living

Source: own research, 2024. *N*=224 persons

In order to analyse the image of conscious living in a more comprehensive way, we used a list of statements to analyse young people's perceptions and opinions on this issue.

Within this framework, it has become much clearer what dimensions, characteristics and behaviours are associated with conscious living by members of Generation Z. The results show that conscious living is most strongly associated with healthy living in the mindset of young people. In addition, the second most important aspect is self-awareness and self-development, followed and complemented by good human relations and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

Consciousness, according to young people, is, therefore, a combination of taking care of our health, nurturing our social relationships and having a balanced relationship with our environment.

Table 1
Consumer opinions on conscious living among Generation Z

Statements about conscious living	average (where 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree)	Dispersion
Conscious living makes you healthier	3.47	0.682
People who live consciously, protect nature and the environment	3.25	0.714
Conscious living means I have time for everything I love	2.60	0.941
Conscious living includes healthy eating	3.22	0.741
Conscious living includes regular exercise	3.29	0.764
Good human relations are part of a conscious lifestyle	3.27	0.771
People who live consciously live longer	2.86	0.865
Conscious living is more common among older people	2.04	0.880
Conscious living is expensive, costs a lot of money	2.62	0.919
Conscious living is typical of my generation	2.58	0.811
More educated, well-educated people lead a conscious lifestyle	2.96	0.817
Conscious living is difficult to reconcile with urban living	2.30	0.934
Most of my friends live consciously	2.39	0.784
My family members lead a conscious lifestyle	2.81	0.808
Among people of my generation, conscious living is seen as just a fashionable trend, they don't really believe in its benefits	2.32	0.827
Self-awareness and self-development are necessary for a conscious lifestyle	3.31	0.733

Source: own research, 2024 N=226

The survey also asked young people how much they think they live consciously themselves. On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 = not at all, 4 = to a large extent), the mean score was 2.81 for the whole sample, with a standard deviation of 0.5.

We also asked them what they think the impact of their own generation is on sustainability. The results show that young people consider themselves to have an important impact on sustainability (mean 3.10, standard deviation = 0.7, where 1 = no impact at all, 4 = very important).

In the next phase of the research, we conducted a correlation study to analyse whether there is a correlation between the opinion about the conscious lifestyle and the living of the conscious lifestyle. We hypothesised that those who perceive their own lifestyle as conscious also have a more positive view of the conscious lifestyle overall (H1).

The correlation test results showed that the two variables are not independent ($\text{sig} \leq 0.05$; H1 confirmed).

A correlation study between opinions on conscious living and perceptions of conscious living.

Table 2

A correlation study between opinions on conscious living and perceptions of conscious living

A correlation study between opinions on conscious living and perceptions of conscious living		N	Mean	Std. deviation	sig
Conscious living makes you healthier	does not live consciously	58	3.28	0.696	0.0044
	live more consciously	152	3.50	0.681	
	live fully consciously	16	3.88	0.342	
	Total	226	3.47	0.681	
People who live consciously, protect nature and the environment	does not live consciously	58	2.31	0.995	0.0090
	live more consciously	152	2.67	0.867	
	live fully consciously	16	3.00	1.155	
	Total	226	2.60	0.938	
Conscious living means I have time for everything I love	does not live consciously	58	2.90	0.810	0.0000
	live more consciously	152	3.28	0.683	
	live fully consciously	16	3.88	0.342	
	Total	226	3.22	0.739	
Conscious living includes healthy eating	does not live consciously	58	3.07	0.792	0.0036
	live more consciously	152	3.33	0.753	
	live fully consciously	16	3.75	0.447	
	Total	226	3.29	0.762	
Conscious living includes regular exercise	does not live consciously	58	3.07	0.835	0.0425
	live more consciously	152	3.33	0.735	
	live fully consciously	16	3.50	0.730	
	Total	226	3.27	0.769	
Good human relations are part of a conscious lifestyle	does not live consciously	58	2.66	1.001	0,0102
	live more consciously	152	2.88	0.797	
	live fully consciously	16	3.38	0.719	
	Total	226	2.86	0.863	
Conscious living is more common among older people	does not live consciously	58	2.83	0.704	0,0428
	live more consciously	152	2.51	0.956	
	live fully consciously	16	2.07	1.088	
	Total	226	2.62	0.917	
Conscious living is expensive, costs a lot of money	does not live consciously	58	2.28	0.874	0.0000
	live more consciously	152	2.61	0.747	
	live fully consciously	16	3.38	0.500	
	Total	226	2.58	0.809	

Conscious living is difficult to reconcile with urban living	does not live consciously	58	1.79	0.614	0,0000
	live more consciously	152	2.54	0.699	
	live fully consciously	16	3.13	0.806	
	Total	226	2.39	0.782	
Most of my friends live consciously	does not live consciously	58	2.45	0.820	0.0002
	live more consciously	152	2.92	0.724	
	live fully consciously	16	3.13	1.088	
	Total	226	2.81	0.806	
Among people of my generation, conscious living is seen as just a fashionable trend, they don't really believe in its benefits	does not live consciously	58	2.66	0.890	0.0176
	live more consciously	152	2.32	0.817	
	live fully consciously	16	2.13	1.088	
	Total	226	2.39	0.869	

Source: own research, 2024 N=226; One-Way ANOVA

Analysis of the internal structure of the correlation analysis shows that young people who self-reported living more consciously and consciously tended to agree more strongly with all the statements supporting the benefits and holistic nature of conscious living.

Young people who admit that they do not live consciously do not yet perceive the benefits of conscious living sufficiently, and consider conscious living to be more a behaviour of older people. Another important finding in this respect is that most of these young people believe that conscious living is seen as a fashion, a trend, by the majority of their generation.

This latter result is also very important in our view because it highlights the need for education on conscious living in this segment. To help this group of young people to understand what conscious living means and what its benefits are at individual, social and environmental level. If it is a lifestyle that is in tune with an inner motivation and value orientation, then it will be a sustainable lifestyle; if it is merely following a fashionable trend, then it is a very easily changeable and modifiable behaviour, which can easily be overridden by external influences (opinion leaders, news and information relevant to the generation).

In order to get a more comprehensive picture of the context in which young people experience living a conscious lifestyle, we also looked at their values. The reason for this is that numerous studies have shown that values and individual value orientations are reflected in human and consumer behaviour, manifesting themselves in specific consumer decisions and preferences [35] [36]. The values were examined using Kahle's list of values, supplemented with elements that fit the purpose and subject of the research.

The results show that the most important values for young people are a happy life, friends, good human relations and health. In terms of priorities for value orientation,

the values that young people consider most important are those that they associate with living a conscious lifestyle.

It can thus be assumed that their individual value system preference has a positive effect, encouraging them to live a conscious lifestyle.

Table 3
Value orientation from the perspective of Generation Z

Values	Mean	Std. deviation
Sustainability	3.16	0.646
Environmental awareness	3.22	0.706
Health	3.67	0.575
Happy life	3.79	0.523
A balanced life	3.61	0.604
Career, professional success	3.39	0.715
Material well-being	3.56	0.633
Lots of free time	3.42	0.706
Adventures, travel	3.42	0.819
Friends, good human relations	3.77	0.524

Source: own research, 2024 N=226 persons

In the next step of the research, we examined whether there is a relationship between individual values and the practice of conscious living (H2). The hypotheses were based on the value system-based behavioural models that demonstrate the impact of individual value systems on consumer attitudes and consumer decisions.

The results of the One-Way ANOVA showed that there was no significant relationship between the factors ($\text{sig} > 0.05$, H2 was discarded).

This finding of the research was examined in more detail to understand why the concept of value-based behavioural models of conscious living among young people could not be validated.

To this end, we segmented the sample and analysed separately young people who consider themselves to be living a self-aware lifestyle (K1) and young people who do not consider themselves to be living a self-aware lifestyle (K2).

In the analysis of value orientation, we found serious inconsistencies when comparing the segments.

The results showed that young people who considered themselves to be living a self-aware lifestyle considered all value dimensions more important than the average, except sustainability and environmental awareness. These are the two dimensions that are most closely linked to living a conscious lifestyle, to the ethos of conscious living rooted in values. In contrast, young people who do not live a self-conscious lifestyle rated just these two dimensions as above-average in importance, and the other, more individualised, goal values as below average.

Table 4
Values survey among young people living self-conscious and non-conscious lives

Values	sample average	young people living a healthy lifestyle (K1)	young people living an unconscious lifestyle (K2)
Sustainability	3.16	3.00	3.24
Environmental awareness	3.22	3.13	3.21
Health	3.67	3.75	3.62
Happiness	3.79	3.88	3.66
A balanced life	3.61	3.88	3.52
Career, professional success	3.39	3.63	3.17
Material well-being	3.56	3.88	3.52
Lots of free time	3.42	3.63	3.38
Adventures, travel	3.42	3.63	3.38
Friends, good human relations	3.77	4.00	3.72

Source: own research, 2024 N=226

These differences in values suggest that there may be many young people living self-conscious lifestyles who are likely to have misconceptions about conscious living. They may believe that they are living a conscious lifestyle based on information they know and accept, but in reality this lifestyle is not a sustainable, conative one based on individual values. Just as there may be many young people who do not live a conscious lifestyle, there may in fact be many who are more committed to it.

These results highlight in particular the importance and relevance of providing young people with correct, professional information about healthy lifestyles. Misconceptions and young people's perceptions of themselves, which often do not reflect reality, are activities that help ensure that they are correctly perceived. In our view, education, and in particular campaigns to influence the conative part of attitudes, is what is most needed.

Summary, Conclusions

For the first time, the research analysed perceptions of conscious living. The results show an absolutely positive attitude. Young people associate conscious living with a healthy, active, balanced, relaxed and happy person who takes regular exercise, eats right and leads a healthy lifestyle.

Conscious living is most closely linked to healthy living in the mindset of young people. In addition, the second most important aspect is self-awareness and self-development, followed by good human relations and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

The research was able to prove that there is a correlation between the perception of a conscious lifestyle and living a conscious lifestyle (H1 confirmed). Those who consider their own lifestyle to be conscious also have a more positive perception of the conscious lifestyle overall.

In this research, we could not prove the relationship between individual values and the practice of conscious living (H2). When we looked in greater detail at why the concept of value-based behaviour models could not be validated in relation to the experience of living a conscious lifestyle among young people, we found that young people's perceptions of their self-conscious lifestyle did not necessarily reflect reality and were not a durable form of behaviour resulting from their individual values.

In the light of these results, we believe that it would be extremely important to use the tools of social marketing, to provide correct, professional information on healthy lifestyles and to use educational campaigns that take into account young people's individual values and ways of obtaining information.

One of the limitations of the research is the sample size and the single-generation focus of the research. In this respect, the results cannot be extended to a single population and some segmentation procedures (K-means) are not applicable due to the sample size.

As a continuation of the research, we plan to expand the sample size and include additional generations in the sample to conduct comparative analyses. In addition, in order to analyse the discrepancies that emerge during this phase of the research in a more sophisticated way, a qualitative procedure will be conducted in the form of individual interviews as a post-research phase.

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