

ANALYZING GEN Z CONSUMER PREFERENCES OF SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING IN FMCG PRODUCTS

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Abstract

Sustainable packaging has emerged as a critical differentiator in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, particularly among younger demographics who demonstrate heightened environmental awareness. This study examines Gen Z consumers' preferences for sustainable packaging in FMCG products, focusing on two key objectives: identifying the factors that influence their purchase decisions and assessing their willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging. Primary data were collected from Gen Z respondents in urban and semi-urban India using a structured questionnaire, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and factor analysis. The relevance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between sustainability awareness and actual purchase behaviour, providing empirical insights for FMCG companies operating in emerging economies where cultural, economic, and regulatory contexts differ from Western markets. The findings reveal that transparency and genuine environmental commitment, along with clean and easy design, emerge as the strongest predictors of sustainable packaging preference. Nevertheless, price sensitivity and lack of awareness present significant barriers to adoption. The study recommends that FMCG brands prioritize authentic sustainability communication, minimalist design aesthetics, and targeted awareness campaigns to effectively engage Gen Z consumers and translate environmental values into consistent purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: Gen Z; sustainable packaging; FMCG; consumer preference; factor analysis; India

1. INTRODUCTION

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector constitutes a cornerstone of the Indian economy, ranking as its fourth-largest industry. This sector encompasses a broad range of products, including household items, personal care products, food and beverages, and over-the-counter medicines. Over the past decade, the FMCG industry in India has experienced robust growth, with revenues increasing at an average rate of 21.4% between 2011 and 2018, surging from US\$31.6 billion to US\$52.8 billion (IMARC Group, 2024). Rural markets have been significant contributors to this expansion, with projections indicating growth to US\$220 billion by 2025.

Simultaneously, environmental concerns have profoundly reshaped consumer behaviour across global markets. Among all demographic segments, Generation Z—individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012—has emerged as the most environmentally conscious cohort. Having grown up with digital technologies and unprecedented access to information about climate change, plastic pollution, and ecological degradation, Gen Z consumers exhibit heightened awareness of sustainability issues. According to NielsenIQ (2023), this generation is significantly more likely to purchase from companies that prioritize eco-friendly practices, including sustainable packaging solutions.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing environmental awareness among Gen Z consumers, a substantial gap exists in the empirical understanding of their specific preferences and behaviors regarding sustainable packaging in the FMCG sector. Brands and manufacturers frequently struggle to align their sustainability initiatives with consumer expectations, resulting in ineffective strategies, wasted resources, and missed market opportunities. Furthermore, existing literature presents conflicting evidence regarding Gen Z's willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaging, with some studies reporting strong willingness (Kanvic Consulting, 2024; Statista, 2023) while others indicate significant price sensitivity (Patel & Rath, 2020; Opeopl, 2024). This inconsistency underscores the need for context-specific research, particularly in emerging economies like India, where cultural, economic, and regulatory factors differ substantially from Western markets. The present study addresses this gap by systematically investigating the factors that drive Gen Z's sustainable packaging preferences and their actual willingness to incur additional costs for environmentally friendly alternatives.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This research is guided by the following two objectives:

- 1: To identify the key factors influencing Gen Z's purchase decisions related to sustainable packaging in FMCG products.
- 2: To assess the willingness of Gen Z to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Gen Z consumers (aged 18–28 years) residing in urban and semi-urban areas of India. It examines consumer awareness, attitudes, and preferences toward sustainable packaging in commonly used FMCG products, including food and beverage items, personal care products, and household supplies. The investigation covers material preferences (biodegradable, recyclable, compostable, refillable), the role of brand transparency and social media influence, and the relationship between sustainability claims and purchase intentions. The research does not extend to packaging logistics, manufacturer-side constraints, or comparative analysis across multiple generations.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial significance for FMCG companies seeking to build stronger connections with Gen Z consumers through sustainable practices. By providing empirical evidence on the specific factors that influence this demographic's packaging preferences, the research enables brands to make informed decisions regarding product design, marketing communications, and sustainability investments. Additionally, the findings contribute to the academic literature on sustainable consumer behaviour in emerging markets, an area that remains relatively underexplored compared to North American and European contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The sustainable packaging market is projected to grow from USD 292.71 billion in 2024 to USD 423.56 billion by 2029, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.67% (Meyers Printing, 2025). Shorr's 2025 Sustainable Packaging Consumer Report found that 49% of Gen Z consumers are willing to spend more for eco-friendly packaging, with 90% expressing a higher likelihood of purchasing from brands that utilize sustainable packaging.

In the Indian context, Kanvic Consulting (2024) highlighted that 64% of Gen Z consumers in India are willing to pay a premium for grocery products with sustainable packaging, indicating a pronounced preference for eco-friendly packaging among younger consumers compared to older generations. The IMARC Group (2024) reported that India's

biodegradable packaging market reached USD 3.51 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow to USD 5.59 billion by 2033, driven by rising environmental awareness, government bans on single-use plastics, and consumer preference for sustainable products.

Cross-cultural research by Lee and Chen (2024) examined Gen Z consumers across India, the United States, and Southeast Asia. While cultural differences existed in preferred materials—such as paper-based packaging in Asia and compostables in the United States—the underlying values remained consistent. Across all regions, Gen Z prioritized transparency, functionality, and third-party sustainability certifications, confirming that this generation holds globally consistent expectations about sustainability.

Sharma and Mehta (2024) examined how brands can align sustainable packaging with Gen Z's aesthetic and ethical values, identifying a strong preference for brands that offer refill options, reusable containers, or minimalist design with clear environmental messaging. The study recommended using packaging as a storytelling platform to showcase sustainability efforts, as this increases emotional engagement and brand loyalty. Kaur and Bansal (2023) further explored how digital platforms influence Gen Z's preferences, showing that social media, influencers, and brand websites play a significant role in educating consumers and shaping perceptions. Packaging that included QR codes, digital sustainability reports, or eco-tips received higher engagement.

However, barriers to sustainable packaging adoption persist. Opeep's Youth Pulse Report (2024), surveying 2,500 Gen Z individuals across five European countries, found that only 32% prioritized sustainable consumption, ranking it ninth among their concerns. Euromonitor International (2023) noted that despite strong environmental beliefs, Gen Z consumers are often constrained by price, seeking affordable ways to reduce their environmental impact. Duo's Research (2023) revealed that 56% of Gen Z consumers are less inclined to repurchase from retailers if delivery packaging is not sustainable, yet 37% indicated they might overlook packaging sustainability if they favor the product.

In the Indian context, Patel and Rathi (2020) investigated how environmental consciousness impacts Gen Z's acceptance of sustainable packaging and found that while many young consumers expressed concern for the environment, their willingness to pay a premium was low. Price sensitivity remained a key barrier despite positive attitudes toward eco-friendly packaging. The authors concluded that unless brands balance sustainability with affordability, widespread adoption of green packaging may be difficult among Gen Z consumers.

D'Souza, Menon, and Thomas (2022) investigated Gen Z's response to greenwashing in the FMCG industry, finding that young consumers are increasingly skeptical of vague or unverified sustainability claims. Packaging with transparent messaging, third-party certifications, and detailed information about environmental impact earned higher trust. The research emphasized that Gen Z demands authenticity and clarity from brands and penalizes those perceived to be using sustainability as a mere marketing gimmick.

The literature reveals a complex picture: while Gen Z values sustainability in principle, actual purchasing behavior is influenced by price, design, convenience, social media trends, and trust in brand claims. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing primary empirical data from Indian Gen Z consumers, employing both univariate and multivariate statistical techniques to delineate the underlying factor structure of sustainable packaging preferences.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a descriptive research design with a quantitative orientation to systematically analyze Gen Z consumers' attitudes and preferences regarding sustainable packaging in FMCG products. The target population comprised Generation Z consumers aged 18 to 27 years residing in urban and semi-urban areas of India, selected

because they are active FMCG purchasers, exhibit heightened environmental awareness, and represent the future mainstream consumer segment. The sampling frame included college students, recent graduates, and young working professionals accessed through academic institutions, professional networks, social media platforms, and workplace referrals. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to the exploratory nature of the research, practical time and budget constraints, and the online data collection method. A total of 108 respondents constituted the final sample, providing a participant-to-variable ratio of 18:1 for the six factor analysis variables, well above the recommended minimum threshold. This sample size ensures adequate statistical power for the multivariate procedures employed in the study.

Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed specifically for this study, consisting of three sections: demographic characteristics, general awareness and behavioral items, and six Likert-scale items measuring attitudes toward sustainable packaging. The questionnaire was administered electronically via Google Forms from January 21 to March 31, 2025, enabling a broad geographical reach and efficient data capture. Secondary data were sourced from company websites, industry reports, academic journals, and government publications. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0 across three sequential stages. Stage 1 involved descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Stage 2 comprised univariate analysis using four chi-square goodness-of-fit tests for age, gender, familiarity, and willingness to pay, with alpha set at $p < 0.05$. Stage 3 employed multivariate analysis using principal component analysis with varimax rotation, with suitability confirmed by KMO (0.751) and Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$), and factor loadings of 0.50 or higher considered meaningful.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Under 18	21	19.40%
	18–22	49	45.40%
	23–28	38	35.20%
Gender	Male	16	14.80%
	Female	78	72.20%
	Other	14	13.00%
Education Level	High School	14	13.00%
	Undergraduate	72	66.70%
	Graduate	22	20.40%
Monthly Income (INR)	Below 10,000	8	7.40%
	10,000–25,000	36	33.30%
	25,000–50,000	46	42.60%
	Above 50,000	18	16.70%

Table 1. presents the complete demographic profile of the 108 respondents, including age, gender, education level, and monthly income.

As presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents (80.6%, n = 87) fell within the core Gen Z age range of 18 to 28 years, with the largest cohort being those aged 18 to 22 years (45.4%, n = 49). The sample was predominantly female (72.2%, n = 78), with smaller representations of male (14.8%, n = 16) and other gender identities (13.0%, n = 14). In terms of education level, the majority were undergraduate students (66.7%, n = 72), followed by graduates (20.4%, n = 22). Regarding monthly income, 76.0% (n = 82) of respondents fell within the ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 range, indicating that most participants belonged to middle-income households. This demographic profile—predominantly female, undergraduate-educated, middle-income Gen Z consumers—should be considered when generalizing the findings to the broader Gen Z population in India.

4.2 General Survey Data

a. Familiarity with Sustainable Packaging

Familiarity Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very Familiar	16	14.80%
Somewhat Familiar	75	69.40%
Not Familiar at All	17	15.70%
Total	108	100.00%

Table 2. displays respondents' familiarity with sustainable packaging.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of Gen Z respondents (84.2%, n = 91 out of 108) reported at least some familiarity with sustainable packaging, with 69.4% (n = 75) indicating they were "Somewhat Familiar" and 14.8% (n = 16) indicating they were "Very Familiar." Conversely, only 15.7% (n = 17) of respondents reported being "Not Familiar at All" with sustainable packaging.

These findings indicate that while a substantial majority of Gen Z consumers possess baseline awareness of sustainable packaging concepts, deep or comprehensive familiarity remains limited. Only one in seven respondents (14.8%) considered themselves "Very Familiar," suggesting that most Gen Z consumers have encountered the term or concept but lack detailed knowledge about specific sustainable packaging types (e.g., compostable vs. biodegradable), certification labels, or proper disposal methods. This pattern of moderate but shallow familiarity has important implications for FMCG brands: awareness-building campaigns are needed not only to reach the unfamiliar minority (15.7%) but also to deepen the knowledge of the majority who currently possess only superficial understanding.

b. Willingness to Pay a Premium for Environmentally Friendly Packaging

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	25.00%
No	41	38.00%
Maybe	40	37.00%
Total	108	100.00%

Table 3. Willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaging.

As presented in Table 3, only 25.0% (n = 27 out of 108) of Gen Z respondents definitively expressed willingness to pay a premium for products with sustainable packaging. A larger proportion, 38.0% (n = 41), indicated they were unwilling to pay extra, while a substantial 37.0% (n = 40) responded as uncertain ("Maybe").

These results reveal a significant gap between environmental awareness and willingness to incur personal financial cost. Despite 84.2% of respondents reporting at least some familiarity with sustainable packaging, only one-quarter are prepared to translate that awareness into premium payment behavior. The high proportion of "Maybe" responses (37.0%) is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that a large segment of Gen Z consumers is ambivalent rather than firmly opposed. This ambivalence may stem from several factors identified in the literature, including price sensitivity (Patel & Rathi, 2020), skepticism about brand claims (D'Souza et al., 2022), or uncertainty about whether sustainable packaging delivers tangible environmental benefits.

When interpreting these findings in relation to the second objective of this study, it is evident that while a minority of Gen Z consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable packaging, the majority either resist or remain undecided. This suggests that price remains a dominant factor in FMCG purchasing decisions for this demographic, and that willingness to pay cannot be assumed simply on the basis of environmental awareness. However, the sizable uncertain segment (37.0%) also represents a potential opportunity for FMCG brands: with effective education, transparent labeling, and affordable pricing strategies, a portion of these "Maybe" respondents could potentially be converted into premium-paying consumers.

4.3 Chi-Square Test of Independence: Willingness to Pay a Premium

To assess the second objective of this study—to assess the willingness of Gen Z to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging—a chi-square test of independence was conducted. The analysis examined the relationship between Gen Z consumers' familiarity with sustainable packaging (independent variable: Very Familiar, Somewhat Familiar, Not Familiar at All) and their willingness to pay a premium (dependent variable: Yes, No, Maybe).

Hypotheses

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no association between familiarity with sustainable packaging and willingness to pay a premium among Gen Z consumers. The two categorical variables are independent.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant association between familiarity with sustainable packaging and willingness to pay a premium among Gen Z consumers. The two categorical variables are dependent.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between Gen Z consumers' familiarity with sustainable packaging (Very Familiar, Somewhat Familiar, Not Familiar at All) and their willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging (Yes, No, Maybe). The relationship between these variables was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4, N = 108) = 10.64, p = .031$. The effect size, as measured by Cramér's V, was .222, indicating a small to moderate association. As presented in Table 4, among respondents who were "Very Familiar," a majority (56.3%) indicated willingness to pay a premium, compared to only 11.8% among those "Not Familiar at All." The "Somewhat Familiar" group demonstrated the highest ambivalence (38.7% "Maybe"). Therefore, the null hypothesis of independence is rejected.

Familiarity Level	Willing to Pay (Yes)	Not Willing (No)	Unsure (Maybe)	Total
Very Familiar	9 (56.3%)	4 (25.0%)	3 (18.8%)	16
Somewhat Familiar	16 (21.3%)	30 (40.0%)	29 (38.7%)	75
Not Familiar at All	2 (11.8%)	7 (41.2%)	8 (47.1%)	17
Total	27 (25.0%)	41 (38.0%)	40 (37.0%)	108
Statistical Test	Value	df	p	Cramér's V
Pearson Chi-Square	10.64	4	0.031	0.222

Table 4. Contingency Table and Chi-Square Test Results for Familiarity and Willingness to Pay a Premium

Note. N = 108. Percentages reported within each familiarity level. The chi-square test was statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$.

Consistent with the second objective of this study—to assess the willingness of Gen Z to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging—these findings indicate that familiarity and willingness to pay are significantly associated. Willingness increases monotonically with familiarity: 11.8% (Not Familiar), 21.3% (Somewhat Familiar), and 56.3% (Very Familiar). The high proportion of "Maybe" responses (37.0% overall) suggests that ambivalence, rather than firm opposition, characterizes most uncertain consumers. This represents an opportunity for FMCG brands: targeted educational interventions and transparent sustainability claims could convert a portion of ambivalent consumers into premium-paying customers.

4.4 Multivariate Analysis: Factor Analysis: Factors Influencing Gen Z's Preference for Sustainable Packaging in FMCG Products

Factor analysis was conducted on the six Likert-scale items measuring Gen Z's underlying reasons for preferring sustainable packaging. Prior to extraction, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed through two diagnostic tests:

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0.751 (exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.60, indicating adequate inter-variable correlations). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: $\chi^2 = 185.818$, $df = 15$, $p < 0.001$ (significant, indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and factor analysis is appropriate)

Variables	Component	
	1	2
1. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because it has clean and easy design	0.829	
2. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because social media shapes their preferences	0.82	
3. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because it is free from harmful chemicals	0.783	
4. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because they support socially responsible brands	0.71	
5. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because they are highly conscious of climate change	0.609	
6. Gen Z prefer sustainable packaging because of its transparency and genuine environmental commitment		0.949
Eigen values	2.858	1.008
Percentage of total variance	28.58	10.08

Table 5. Pattern Component Matrix, Eigen Values and Total Variance Percentage for Components obtained by Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation Method

Note: Factor loadings <.35 have been omitted from the table.

Component 1: Socially-Driven Aesthetic and Health Preferences (47.51% variance explained). Five items demonstrate strong loadings on this component, with the highest being "clean and easy design" (0.829) and "social media influence" (0.820). Additional items loading on this component include "free from harmful chemicals" (0.783), "support for socially responsible brands" (0.710), and, notably, "climate change consciousness" (0.609). This component captures a multidimensional construct wherein Gen Z's preference for sustainable packaging is driven by visual appeal, digital social validation, health and safety considerations, brand ethics, and environmental concern—all of which are socially mediated and externally observable. The loading of climate change consciousness within this component (rather than forming a separate factor) suggests that environmental concern is intertwined with aesthetic and social values rather than standing alone as a purely altruistic motivation.

Component 2: Trust in Authentic Environmental Commitment (16.91% variance explained). Only one item loads strongly on this component: "transparency and genuine environmental commitment" (0.949), with cross-loadings from other items being negligible (all < 0.279). This represents a distinct, unidimensional factor that captures Gen Z's demand for honesty, verifiability, and substantive action from brands. The exceptionally high loading (0.949) indicates that authenticity is not merely one factor among many but rather a dominant and separate dimension of preference. Brands perceived to engage in greenwashing or vague sustainability claims are likely to be actively rejected by this segment.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide meaningful insights into Gen Z consumers' preferences for sustainable packaging in FMCG products, addressing the two core objectives. Regarding the first objective—to identify the key factors influencing Gen Z's purchase decisions—the factor analysis extracted two distinct dimensions. Component 1 (Socially-Driven Aesthetic and Health Preferences) explained 47.51% of the variance, with clean design (0.829), social media

influence (0.820), and freedom from harmful chemicals (0.783) emerging as the strongest predictors. This finding aligns with Sharma and Mehta (2024), who found that minimalist design and health messaging resonate strongly with Gen Z, and with Kaur and Bansal (2023), who documented the significant role of digital platforms in shaping sustainable packaging perceptions. Component 2 (Trust in Authentic Environmental Commitment) explained 16.91% of the variance, with transparency and genuine commitment loading exceptionally high at 0.949. This strongly corroborates D'Souza, Menon, and Thomas (2022), who found that Gen Z consumers are highly skeptical of greenwashing and demand verifiable, authentic sustainability claims. Notably, climate change consciousness loaded on Component 1 rather than forming a separate factor (0.609), suggesting that environmental concern is intertwined with aesthetic, social, and health values rather than standing alone as a purely altruistic motivation.

Regarding the second objective—to assess the willingness of Gen Z to pay a premium for environmentally friendly packaging—the descriptive and inferential results revealed a more complex picture. Overall, only 25.0% of respondents definitively expressed willingness to pay a premium, while 38.0% were unwilling and 37.0% were uncertain. The chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant association between familiarity with sustainable packaging and willingness to pay a premium, $\chi^2(4, N = 108) = 10.64, p = .031$, Cramér's $V = .222$. Willingness increased monotonically with familiarity: 11.8% among "Not Familiar," 21.3% among "Somewhat Familiar," and 56.3% among "Very Familiar." This finding partially contrasts with Kanvic Consulting's (2024) report that 64% of Indian Gen Z would pay a premium, but aligns with Patel and Rathi (2020) and Opeepl (2024), who found that sustainability competes with other priorities and that price sensitivity remains a substantial barrier. The high proportion of "Maybe" responses (37.0%) suggests ambivalence rather than firm opposition, representing a potential opportunity for FMCG brands. The primary barriers identified—lack of awareness (33.3%) and quality concerns (27.8%)—further support the conclusion that educational interventions and transparent communication could convert uncertain consumers into premium-paying customers. Collectively, these findings indicate that while Gen Z values sustainability, willingness to pay is contingent upon deep familiarity, authentic brand commitment, and aesthetically appealing design.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined Gen Z consumer preferences for sustainable packaging in FMCG products, revealing that transparency and genuine environmental commitment is the most powerful predictor of preference, followed by clean design and social media influence. However, only a quarter of respondents were willing to pay a premium for sustainable packaging, with a significant association found between familiarity and willingness to pay. The majority of respondents were either unwilling or uncertain, with lack of awareness identified as the primary barrier to adoption. The high proportion of uncertain responses suggests ambivalence rather than resistance, representing a convertible consumer segment through targeted education and transparent communication. For FMCG brands, sustainable packaging strategies must prioritize authenticity, aesthetic design, social media engagement, and awareness campaigns to bridge the gap between environmental values and actual purchase behavior. Ultimately, increasing deep familiarity with sustainable packaging is a prerequisite for improving willingness to pay a premium among Indian Gen Z consumers.

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