

Why Generation Z Does Not Buy Sustainable Fashion: A Bibliometric Diagnosis and the Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) Framework

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Abstract

Among consumer cohorts, Generation Z has attracted sustained scholarly attention as the group most publicly committed to environmental values, yet one that consistently fails to translate that commitment into sustainable fashion purchasing behaviour. Fashion, however, is not merely a product category but a meaning-making system through which societies construct and contest identity, social position, and moral worth, suggesting that this gap cannot be explained through individual-level accounts alone. Following the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR; Paul et al. 2021) protocol, this review synthesises N = 61 empirical studies from Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC)-ranked journals across two phases (n = 27; n = 34), using bibliometric mapping via Biblioshiny and VOSviewer. The analysis identifies a persistent theoretical asymmetry: while scholarship employs Cultural, Social, and Personal vocabularies, its explanatory foundations remain concentrated in Personal-level behavioural frameworks. To address this misalignment, the Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) schema is introduced. Systematic classification (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.75$) yields Cultural (16.4%), Social (27.9%), and Personal (55.7%) distributions and three jointly necessary gap-closure conditions: value activation, identity salience, and practical barrier removal. This study provides the first bibliometrically grounded diagnosis of theoretical asymmetry in the Generation Z sustainable fashion literature and highlights affordability constraints as a critical barrier warranting validation across diverse cultural contexts.

JEL Classification: M31; Q56

1. Introduction

Among consumer cohorts, Generation Z has attracted sustained scholarly attention as the group most publicly committed to environmental values, yet one that consistently fails to translate that commitment into sustainable fashion purchasing behaviour (Borah et al. 2024; Vesterinen et al. 2024). This paradox constitutes the empirical starting point of the present review.

Fashion is not merely a product category. It operates as a meaning-making system through which societies produce, circulate, and contest identity, social position, and moral worth (McCracken and Roth 1989; Thompson and Haytko 1997). A garment communicates before it is evaluated. Its perceived sustainability value is not intrinsic to the object. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of three structural forces. Institutional field pressures shape what the fashion market makes available and legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Cultural-semiotic systems determine how sustainability is encoded as a social signifier (Hall 1980, 1997). Marketplace ideologies define which consumption practices are experienced as natural, desirable, or aspirational (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Encoded meanings are interpreted differently across receiving formations, depending on the normative environment, economic position, and accumulated cultural capital of the consumer (Bourdieu 1984). Sustainable fashion therefore functions as a contested signifier whose meaning is relational and structurally dependent on its cultural and institutional context.

This cultural premise carries a direct empirical implication. If sustainable fashion is a culturally encoded signifier, its meaning will vary across social environments and institutional contexts. The failure of Generation Z consumers to act on sustainability values may therefore reflect structural conditions rather than psychological deficits alone. The fast fashion industry reinforces these conditions. It does not simply offer lower-priced products. It reproduces a culturally embedded practice through institutional isomorphism—the tendency of organisations within a field to converge towards shared norms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Mimetic and normative pressures homogenise supply towards fast fashion. At the same time, externalities and information asymmetries obscure its true social cost. Habitus further shapes this process. As a system of durable dispositions, it determines what consumers perceive as desirable, affordable, and legitimate before conscious evaluation occurs (Bourdieu 1984). A consumer socialised into the habitus of fast fashion does not actively choose it over sustainable alternatives; fast fashion operates as the default, while sustainable fashion requires justification. The Circuit of Culture formalises this interdependence. Consumption decisions cannot be isolated from the interconnected moments of representation, identity, production, and regulation (du Gay et al. 1997).

The Cultural, Social, and Personal (CSP) levels map directly onto this circuit. Meaning is institutionally encoded at the Cultural level. It is socially transmitted through identity and representation at the Social level. It is then individually decoded at the Personal level during consumption. Consumers actively appropriate and reinterpret culturally available fashion discourses to construct identities. This process is inherently dialogical and may either reinforce or challenge sustainability narratives depending on the cultural formation within which the consumer is situated (Thompson and Haytko 1997).

This theoretical framing leads to a testable expectation. A corpus that adequately captures the phenomenon should engage frameworks across all three levels. At the Cultural level, this includes institutional and cultural-semiotic theories (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Hall 1980, 1997; Suchman 1995). At the Social level, it includes theories of norm transmission and identity (Bandura 1977; Tajfel and Turner 1979). At the Personal level, it includes behavioural decision frameworks (Ajzen 1991; Schwartz 1977; Stern 2000). This review evaluates whether the Generation Z sustainable fashion literature meets this expectation.

Empirical evidence consistently confirms the persistence of the perception–action gap across markets and methodologies (Gomes et al. 2023; Spotswood et al. 2025; Williams and Hodges 2022). Environmental concern, perceived quality, and future orientation positively influence purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. However, structural affordability remains the most immediate barrier at the point of purchase (Gomes et al. 2023). This threshold is not universal but varies across market contexts (Zhao and Huh 2025). More fundamentally, failed ethical consumption reflects the structure of the choice environment itself. Institutional and cultural defaults render sustainable behaviour costly and socially exceptional (Spotswood et al. 2025). The gap therefore does not originate in consumer values. It reflects structural conditions that remain insufficiently theorised.

Existing systematic reviews examine sustainable fashion consumption broadly (Busalim et al. 2022; Mathew and Spinelli 2025). Busalim et al. (2025) specifically document consumer resistance patterns in the USA and India, establishing that structural barriers operate independently of attitudinal orientations. Schiaroli et al. (2024) provide a complementary synthesis of determinants and barriers across consumption stages, while Gálvez-Sánchez et al. (2024) examine CSR and brand equity dimensions of sustainable fashion adoption. However, prior reviews do not apply bibliometric methods to this domain, do not restrict analysis to ABDC-ranked journals, and do not isolate Generation Z as a distinct analytical population. As a result, they do not detect the structural imbalance that characterises this literature. Researchers frequently invoke Cultural and Social constructs in their keywords. Yet, they anchor their explanations in individual-level psychological frameworks. This mismatch produces partial explanations. It generates fragmented findings and unexplained variance rather than cumulative theoretical progress. The present review introduces a two-phase replication design to address this limitation. Phase 1 (October 2024, $n = 27$) establishes the CSP schema. Phase 2 (February 2026, $n = 34$) tests its stability across an expanded corpus ($N = 61$). The asymmetry not only persists but intensifies, indicating a structural condition rather than a sampling artefact.

This review makes four contributions. First, it provides the first bibliometrically grounded diagnosis of theoretical asymmetry in the Generation Z sustainable fashion literature using two independent analytical tools on a Scopus-derived corpus. Second, it demonstrates that this asymmetry is stable and increases as the literature expands. Third, it introduces the Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) framework as a theory-anchored corrective architecture with clearly defined levels, structured through the Value–Belief–Norm chain (Stern 2000). Fourth, it synthesises three jointly necessary conditions for closing the perception–action gap: value activation, identity salience, and practical barrier removal. These conditions emerge from the most theoretically fragmented segment of the corpus, where 55.7% of theoretical applications are distributed across diverse frameworks without convergence.

Four research questions guide the review. RQ1 examines the structural asymmetry in the intellectual foundations of the corpus. RQ2 analyses the distribution and causal ordering of Cultural, Social, and Personal antecedents. RQ3 identifies methodological and contextual gaps that constrain explanatory power. RQ4 specifies the conditions necessary for closing the perception–action gap, pending empirical validation. The Theory–Context–Method (TCM) framework (Paul and Rosado-Serrano 2019), combined with bibliometric analysis, provides the analytical structure. The CSP framework provides the conceptual resolution. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 outlines the methodology. Section 3 presents bibliometric findings and TCM synthesis. Section 4 develops the CSP framework. Section 5 proposes a structured research agenda. Section 6 concludes with theoretical and practical implications.

2. Methodology

2.1 Analytical Architecture

This review adopts a two-layer analytical architecture that separates classification from explanation. At the classification level, the Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) framework organises antecedents into three analytically distinct registers: Cultural (macro), Social (meso), and Personal (micro). At the explanatory level, the Theory–Context–Method (TCM) framework (Paul and Rosado-Serrano 2019) structures the synthesis across theoretical, contextual, and methodological dimensions. CSP provides the classification structure; TCM provides the analytical engine through which distributional patterns are interpreted.

The three CSP levels are causally ordered following the value–belief–norm (VBN) chain (Stern 2000): Cultural conditions shape value orientations, Social mechanisms transmit beliefs, and Personal mechanisms determine behavioural activation. Table 1 summarises the theoretical anchors and scope of each level. Three boundary conditions were applied consistently across the corpus. First, CSR is classified as Cultural when treated as an institutional context variable and as Personal when operationalised as a consumer-level attitude or perception. Second, sustainable consumption is treated as a boundary case when both Cultural discourse and Personal behaviour are jointly present. Third, identity is classified as Social when linked to group or peer processes and as Personal when linked to self-concept or self-efficacy.

Table 1
CSP schema: level definitions, theoretical anchors, and scope of coverage.

CSP Level	Primary Theoretical Anchors	What the Level Covers
Cultural (macro)	DiMaggio and Powell (1983) – institutional field pressures; Hall (1980, 1997) – encoding/decoding and representation; Arnould and Thompson (2005) – CCT marketplace ideology; Suchman (1995) – legitimacy; Bourdieu (1984) – cultural capital and habitus	Institutional norms, CSR discourse, circular economy, greenwashing, sustainable development, fast fashion industry structure, cultural meaning systems, habitus of sustainable consumption
Social (meso)	Tajfel and Turner (1979) – SIT; Bandura (1977) – SCT; Mehrabian and Russell (1974) – S-O-R	Generation Z cohort dynamics, influencer norm transmission, social media channels, identity signals, eWOM, subjective norms, observational learning, parasocial relationships
Personal (micro)	Ajzen (1991) – TPB; Schwartz (1977) – NAM; Stern (2000) – VBN	Purchase intention, attitude, PBC, personal norm, willingness to pay, environmental concern, pro-environmental behaviour, moral neutralisation, hedonic benefit competition
Note. CCT = Consumer Culture Theory. SIT = Social Identity Theory. SCT = Social Cognitive Theory. S-O-R = Stimulus–Organism–Response. TPB = Theory of Planned Behaviour. NAM = Norm Activation Model. VBN = Value–Belief–Norm Theory.		

2.1.1 Classification Robustness

CSP classification was conducted by the first author and independently validated by a second rater with expertise in marketing analytics, sustainability, and bibliometric methods. Inter-rater agreement reached Cohen's $\kappa = 0.75$ across the full corpus ($N = 61$), indicating substantial agreement (Landis and Koch 1977). Disagreements were resolved through structured discussion, with theoretical justification provided for each boundary case.

Robustness checks confirm classification stability under alternative boundary assignment rules. Reassigning all dual-register cases to the higher structural level produces distributions consistent with the primary pattern, confirming that the asymmetry reported in Section 3 is not an artefact of classification decisions. The ABDC A/A* restriction is a deliberate design choice. High-ranking marketing and management journals have historically prioritised individual-level psychological frameworks (Donthu et al. 2021; Paul and Criado 2020). This reflects the theoretical centre of gravity of the field's leading outlets and aligns with the review's objective of diagnosing mainstream research priorities rather than providing a field census.

2.2 Bibliometric Methods

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using two complementary tools applied to the same Scopus corpus. Biblioshiny/bibliometrix (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017) generated AU–CR–DE three-field plots – mapping author (AU), cited references (CR), and author keywords (DE) simultaneously – with node size determined by local citation frequency and link width by co-occurrence strength. VOSviewer (Van Eck and Waltman 2010) produced author keyword co-occurrence networks using Association Strength normalisation.

The use of independent algorithms on identical data enables cross-tool validation of structural patterns. Both instruments converge on the same finding – a concentration of theoretical references at the Personal level – without any manual coding input. This convergence constitutes bibliometric triangulation and is reported in Section 3. The two-phase application of both tools (Phase 1: $n = 27$; Phase 2: $N = 61$) additionally enables detection of directional change as the corpus expands.

2.3 Two-Phase Search Design and Corpus Rationale

The corpus was constructed through a two-phase Scopus search using an identical TITLE-ABS-KEY Boolean string combining Generation Z with sustainable fashion and green consumption terms, restricted to business and social science domains and to publications from 2019 onwards. The search string was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("sustainable fashion" OR "sustainable consumption" OR "green consumption" OR "fast fashion") AND ("social influence" OR "cultural norms" OR "personal values" OR "environmental concern" OR "purchase intention" OR "consumer behaviour").

Phase 1 (October 2024) yielded 27 studies following ABDC A/A* filtering and PICO-based screening. Phase 2 (February 2026) identified 34 additional eligible studies using identical criteria. The final corpus comprises $N = 61$ studies across 13 journals (2021–2026). Scopus was selected as the sole database

based on coverage and reproducibility advantages (Gusenbauer and Haddaway 2020; Singh et al. 2021). The full screening process is illustrated in Fig. 1; inclusion criteria are presented in Table 2.

Two domain-central journals – Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management (JFMM; ABDC B; SJR 2024: Q1) and Journal of Global Fashion Marketing (JGFM; ABDC B; SJR 2024: Q1) – were included as justified boundary cases given their centrality to the review's substantive domain. Journal of Cleaner Production was retained at ABDC A per the corpus lock-date (ABDC 2022) despite subsequent reclassification to C in the 2025 review, consistent with the lock-date principle. Johnstone and Lindh (2022) was excluded at full-text review under the Population criterion, as the study targets European millennials exclusively with no Generation Z sub-group analytically isolated. Gomes and Casillas (2025) was included as the replacement, satisfying all four PICO criteria.

Note

ABDC B journals: JFMM (n = 11), JGFM (n = 4); total B = 15; A/A = 46 (75.4%). JCP retained as A† per ABDC 2022 corpus lock-date (n = 9). Phase 2 duplicates (n = 1,028) represent Phase 1 records identified within the Phase 2 Scopus retrieval. Adapted from Page et al. (2021) under CC BY 4.0 licence.*

Table 2
PICO inclusion and exclusion criteria applied consistently across both review phases.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population (P)	Generation Z explicitly stated as focal population	Gen Z one cohort among several without analytical isolation
Interest (I)	Sustainable fashion consumption as primary focus	Supply-chain, production-side, or firm-level studies
Context (Co)	Demand-side consumer behaviour in fashion markets	Wholesale, B2B, or logistics contexts
Outcomes (O)	Methodological transparency sufficient for quality assessment	Conference papers, grey literature, non-peer-reviewed sources
Journal quality	ABDC 2022 A*/A-ranked journals + domain-relevant Q1 B-ranked journals (JFMM, JGFM)	Below B threshold, unranked, or non-ABDC-listed journals
Language	English-language publications	Non-English-language publications
Period	2019 onwards	Pre-2019 publications
<i>Note. All six criteria must be simultaneously satisfied. JFMM and JGFM included for domain centrality (n = 15 total B studies). JCP retained as A† (n = 9) per ABDC 2022 corpus lock-date. Johnstone and Lindh (2022) excluded: millennials-only sample; no Generation Z sub-group isolated.</i>		

3. Findings

This section addresses the first and second research questions by mapping the structural distribution of the N = 61-study corpus through bibliometric analysis and CSP classification.

3.1 The Bibliometric Asymmetry

The primary finding of this review is a persistent structural asymmetry between the theoretical vocabulary authors use at the keyword level and the cited frameworks that anchor their studies. Three independent bibliometric operations – the AU–CR–DE three-field plot, the VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence network, and the numerical CSP classification – converge on the same structural condition: the corpus spans three theoretical registers in its author-keyword vocabulary, whilst its theoretical foundations collapse predominantly into one. Cultural-level sparsity is the strongest cross-instrument signal. Its consistent absence across all three measurement operations – each using a different algorithm on the same corpus – establishes it as a structural feature of this literature, not an artefact of the search design.

3.1.1 Phase 1 AU–CR–DE Reading

The Phase 1 three-field plot (Fig. 2a; n = 27) establishes the asymmetry in its foundational form. In the CR_SO column, Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour occupies the largest block, followed by Kapferer's brand identity framework – a meso-level construct, not a macro-level theoretical anchor. Fornell and Larcker, Podsakoff, Schwartz, and Hair complete the visible tier: individual-level behavioural or psychometric measurement references. Hofstede appears as a thin block – the sole macro-level entry – but is deployed across corpus studies consistently as a moderating variable rather than a foundational theoretical commitment.

Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005), Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), Legitimacy Theory (Suchman 1995), and Bourdieu (1984) are absent from the visible CR_SO tier. The citation column registers a single theoretical register: Personal. The DE column simultaneously registers three. Cultural keywords – sustainable consumption, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and circular economy – are drawn from the vocabulary of institutional discourse and CCT marketplace ideology (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Social keywords – generation z, fast fashion, identity, and generational cohorts – are drawn from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and social norm transmission frameworks (Bandura 1977). Personal keywords – purchase intention, materialism, and mindfulness – complete the register. Author keywords span three levels; theoretical citations collapse into one.

The CR_SO column is dominated by TPB (Ajzen 1991); CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Suchman (1995), and Bourdieu (1984) are absent. The DE column spans Cultural (CSR, sustainable development, circular economy), Social (generation z, fast fashion, identity), and Personal (purchase intention, materialism, mindfulness) registers. Source: Biblioshiny/bibliometrix (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017).

3.1.2 Phase 2 Combined Corpus Reading

The combined AU–CR–DE plot (Fig. 2b; N = 61) confirms that the asymmetry is not a Phase 1 artefact – it is a structural trajectory. Ajzen's TPB occupies a proportionally larger share of the CR_SO column than in Phase 1; Personal-level theoretical dominance intensifies as the corpus expands. At the base of the CR_SO column, 'arnould' appears (Biblioshiny renders author surnames in lowercase as a default output convention), confirming Consumer Culture Theory's entry into the citation network at the margin. This entry confirms that the asymmetry is beginning to be noticed at the field frontier; it has not been resolved. The visible CR_SO tier remains a single-register column.

In the DE column, Cultural vocabulary expands: circular economy, green marketing, brand activism, and fashion industry supplement the Cultural-register terms present in Phase 1. Social vocabulary consolidates around generation z, generational cohorts, and identity. The DE column becomes more multi-register as the corpus grows; the CR_SO column becomes more concentrated. Geographic diversification in Phase 2 – adding USA, Turkey, Indonesia, and Southeast Asian market coverage – does not attenuate the asymmetry; it deepens it. The degree to which Personal-level concentration deepens across the two phases is quantified in Section 3.3.

Figure 2b. AU–CR–DE three-field plot for the combined corpus (N = 61, February 2026).

The TPB block (Ajzen 1991) occupies a proportionally larger share of the CR_SO column than in Phase 1; 'Arnould' at the base confirms CCT's marginal entry. DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Suchman (1995), and Bourdieu (1984) remain absent. Cultural vocabulary in the DE column expands to include circular economy, green marketing, brand activism, and fashion industry. Source: Biblioshiny/bibliometrix (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017).

3.2 Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis: Cross-Tool Validation

VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence analysis (Van Eck and Waltman 2010) using Association Strength normalisation produces four algorithmically generated clusters whose structure maps onto the CSP architecture (see Fig. 3). The most evidentially significant feature is the density differential between the Personal and Cultural poles.

Cluster 3 – comprising sustainable development, willingness to pay, and decision making – corresponds to the Cultural level and is strikingly sparse: its nodes are few and its inter-node connections weak. Its centroid terms are precisely those that Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and Legitimacy Theory (Suchman 1995) were designed to explain. Their sparse co-occurrence structure is a substantive bibliometric signal: Cultural-level concepts exist in the keyword vocabulary, but the studies deploying them do not share a Cultural-level theoretical foundation dense enough to generate strong associative ties. Cluster 2 – centred on sustainable fashion, fashion industry, and Italy – maps onto the Cultural–Personal intersection. Cluster 4 – centred on materialism and mindfulness – is a Personal-level specialist satellite. Cluster 1 – anchored by consumption behaviour, sustainability, purchase intention,

and Generation Z – is the largest and densest cluster, consistent with the 55.7% Personal corpus weight reported in Section 3.3. Two bibliometric instruments using entirely different algorithms independently register the same structural condition: Cultural undertheorisation.

Association Strength normalisation (Van Eck and Waltman 2010). Cluster 1 (Personal): consumption behaviour, sustainability, purchase intention, generation z. Cluster 2 (Cultural–Personal): sustainable fashion, fashion industry, Italy. Cluster 3 (Cultural): sustainable development, willingness to pay – sparse node density confirms Cultural undertheorisation. Cluster 4 (Personal satellite): materialism, mindfulness. Node size indicates keyword frequency; line thickness indicates association strength.

3.3 CSP Classification: Numerical Quantification

CSP classification of the full N = 61 corpus yields: Cultural n = 10 (16.4%), Social n = 17 (27.9%), Personal n = 34 (55.7%). Full-corpus inter-rater agreement ($\kappa = 0.75$, N = 61; Landis and Koch 1977) confirms substantial agreement. The phase trajectory confirms structural intensification rather than stabilisation. Phase 1 (n = 27): Cultural 18.5%, Social 33.3%, Personal 48.1%. Phase 2 additions (n = 34): Cultural 14.7%, Social 23.5%, Personal 61.8%. Cultural share contracts by 3.8 percentage points and Personal share rises by 13.7 percentage points across the expansion phase.

CSP proportions are robust under alternative boundary-resolution rules: re-assigning all dual-register boundary cases to the higher structural level produces Cultural n = 12 (19.7%), Social n = 18 (29.5%), Personal n = 31 (50.8%) – directionally consistent with the primary distribution. The three instruments converge on one finding: Personal-level concentration is structural and intensifying.

3.4 TCM Synthesis

The following subsections organise the corpus across the Theory, Context, and Method dimensions. They do not restate the bibliometric evidence presented in Sections 3.1–3.3; they report what the corpus discloses when read through each analytical lens.

3.4.1 Theory Dimension

Over 55 distinct theoretical frameworks are deployed across the 61 studies; no single theory achieves dominance. Table 3 reports all frameworks deployed as primary or co-primary anchor in two or more studies. TPB (Ajzen 1991) is the most concentrated, appearing in 9 studies. The remaining frameworks are distributed across Personal-level traditions – S-O-R, Signalling Theory, Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al. 1991), Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000), Norm Activation Model (Schwartz 1977), and more than 40 additional traditions – confirming both the breadth and the fragmentation of individual-level theorising. No integrating framework organises these traditions into a coherent multi-level explanatory architecture.

Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) appears as a primary framework in zero studies, despite CSR, circular economy, and sustainable development appearing in more than 30 DE keyword

entries – precisely the concepts this framework was designed to explain. Legitimacy Theory (Suchman 1995) appears in one study, in a greenwashing context (Di Pillo et al. 2025). Social Practice Theory (Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005) reaches primary-framework status in one study – Spotswood et al. (2025) – the sole corpus study to theorise consumption as a socially and institutionally configured practice. The Cultural tier is not merely underrepresented; it is theoretically vacant across the primary citation column.

Table 3
Theory deployment by CSP level across the combined corpus (primary frameworks; $n \geq 2$).

Theory	CSP Level	n	Key Corpus Studies
TPB (Ajzen 1991)	Personal	9	Zimand-Sheiner and Lissitsa (2024); Kaur et al. (2023); Amarullah et al. (2025); Di Pillo et al. (2025); Güner et al. (2025); Schiaroli et al. (2025); Güsser-Fachbach et al. (2022); Boyer et al. (2024); Johnstone and Lindh (2022)
Signalling Theory	Personal–Social	6	Gomes et al. (2023); Huh and Kim (2024); Gomes and Casillas (2025); Lim et al. (2025); Liu et al. (2025); Bao et al. (2026)
S-O-R (Mehrabian and Russell 1974)	Social–Personal	5	Confetto et al. (2023); Borah et al. (2024); Tandon et al. (2023); Rételioné and Bhutto (2024); Ng (2026)
Generational Cohort Theory	Social–Cultural	4	Casalegno et al. (2022); Muralidharan et al. (2024); Branca et al. (2025); Amarullah et al. (2025)
SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000)	Personal	4	Branca et al. (2025); Kim-Vick and Cho (2024); Kumar and Panda (2025); Gong et al. (2022)
SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979)	Social	4	Kautish and Khare (2022); Gong et al. (2022); Belanche et al. (2024); Boyer et al. (2024)
VBN (Stern 2000)	Personal–Cultural	4	Tandon et al. (2023); Prisco et al. (2025); Pegan et al. (2025); Muralidharan et al. (2024)
ELM (Petty and Cacioppo 1986)	Social	3	Azemi et al. (2022); Ahmed et al. (2025); Liu et al. (2025)
Green Brand Theory / GBE	Personal–Social	3	Tung and Vigneron (2024); Schiaroli et al. (2025); Najafabadiha et al. (2025)
NAM (Schwartz 1977)	Personal	3	Tandon et al. (2023); Boyer et al. (2024); Prisco et al. (2025)
TCV (Sheth et al. 1991)	Personal	2	Aggarwal et al. (2024); Essiz and Senyuz (2024)
Mindful Consumption Theory	Personal	2	Manchanda et al. (2023); Kumar and Panda (2025)
Parasocial Relationship Theory	Social	2	Ahmed et al. (2025); Soni and Bhukya (2025)
Value Co-Creation / Brand Mgmt	Social	2	Palakshappa et al. (2024); Walter et al. (2024)
<i>Note. Counts represent primary or co-primary framework citation; measurement references are excluded. CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and Social Practice Theory (Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005) each reach primary-framework status in one study – Armouch et al. (2024) and Spotswood et al. (2025), respectively.</i>			

Theory	CSP Level	n	Key Corpus Studies
Information Processing Theory	Social–Personal	2	Li and Leonas (2022); Bao et al. (2026)
<i>Note. Counts represent primary or co-primary framework citation; measurement references are excluded. CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and Social Practice Theory (Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005) each reach primary-framework status in one study – Armouch et al. (2024) and Spotswood et al. (2025), respectively.</i>			

3.4.2 Context Dimension

The 61 studies span 20 national or multi-national contexts across six continents, with publication dates ranging from 2021 to 2026. Table 4 reports the full geographic distribution alongside the institutional or cultural encoding context for each market. USA (n = 10) and Italy (n = 9) are the two largest single-country contexts; nine studies draw on multi-country data. India (n = 8) and China (n = 6, plus Hong Kong n = 1) represent the largest Asian presences.

Regulatory and institutional variation remains theoretically underleveraged. China's dual carbon neutrality policy and New Chinese Style aesthetic provide a policy-constrained institutional formation (Borah et al. 2024; Liu et al. 2024; Bao et al. 2026; Ng 2026), yet none of the Chinese-context studies theorises the state's regulatory role through Institutional Theory or Legitimacy Theory. Southeast Asian market contexts (Amarullah et al. 2025; Ng 2026) mark the region's first corpus entry; neither study theorises the TikTok Shop or Lazada isomorphic mechanisms that normalise disposable fashion consumption at institutional scale. Italy's luxury heritage (Casalegno et al. 2022; Demyanova et al. 2023; Varese et al. 2025) and India's textile reuse traditions (Kautish and Khare 2022; Manchanda et al. 2023) provide partial Cultural-level encoding; the EU normative isomorphism field is described empirically across European contexts but remains untheorised through DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) framework.

Table 4
Context dimension: geographic distribution of included studies (N = 61).

Country / Region	N	% of Corpus	Institutional / Cultural Encoding Context
USA	10	16.4%	Market-driven sustainability discourse; absence of mandatory extended producer responsibility
Italy	9	14.8%	Luxury heritage encodes sustainable materials within quality-signalling tradition; EU Textile Strategy creates normative isomorphism
Multi-country	9	14.8%	Cross-national institutional variation; includes France/Tunisia (Diallo), Russia/Italy (Demyanova), MTurk multi-country (Armouch), USA/UK (Azemi), Poland/Czech/Slovenia (Malecka), multi-lab (Lee), USA/India (Busalim), Turkey/Kuwait (Güner), Italy/Netherlands (Schiaroli)
India	8	13.1%	Textile reuse and repair tradition; rapid e-commerce platform penetration creates competing institutional pressure
China (mainland)	6	9.8%	Dual carbon neutrality policy and New Chinese Style aesthetic; state regulatory role untheorised through Institutional Theory
Portugal	3	4.9%	Southern European regulatory context; Gen Z environmental concern across three studies
UK	2	3.3%	Post-Brexit regulatory divergence; normative sustainability discourse
Spain	2	3.3%	EU regulatory environment; fashion industry and CSR brand equity
Europe (Johnstone: Sweden/Europe)	1	1.6%	Normative isomorphism across EU retail markets
Germany	1	1.6%	EU regulatory environment; cause-marketing and brand credibility
Austria	1	1.6%	EU circular economy regulatory context; clothing repair networks
Finland	1	1.6%	Nordic sustainable consumption norms; clothing consumption curtailment
Lithuania	1	1.6%	Emerging CEE sustainable consumption market
New Zealand	1	1.6%	Voluntary clothing stewardship; environmental norm salience
Israel	1	1.6%	Fast-fashion platform consumer context (SHEIN)

Note. Multi-country category includes nine studies whose primary data collection spanned two or more national contexts; each is counted once. Phase 1 (n = 27) = October 2024 search phase; Phase 2 (n = 34) = February 2026 search phase.

Country / Region	N	% of Corpus	Institutional / Cultural Encoding Context
South Korea	1	1.6%	K-fashion cultural formation; institutional fashion industry dynamics untheorised
Indonesia	1	1.6%	Emerging Southeast Asian market; TikTok Shop and fast-fashion platform dynamics untheorised
Costa Rica	1	1.6%	National-sample sustainable consumption policy study (Conejo et al. 2023)
Turkey (single-country)	1	1.6%	Emerging market; cultural conservatism moderating green identity
Hong Kong	1	1.6%	Fashion consumption knowledge–attitude–behaviour dynamics; Ng (2026)
TOTAL	61	100%	
<i>Note. Multi-country category includes nine studies whose primary data collection spanned two or more national contexts; each is counted once. Phase 1 (n = 27) = October 2024 search phase; Phase 2 (n = 34) = February 2026 search phase.</i>			

3.4.3 Method Dimension

Quantitative designs account for 48 studies (78.7%), of which SEM or PLS-SEM is the primary analytical method in 27 studies (44.3%); a further four mixed-methods studies incorporate SEM as a component, bringing the total SEM-deployment count to 31 (50.8%). Qualitative designs account for four studies (6.6%): Azemi et al. (2022), Spotswood et al. (2025), Murtas and Pedeliento (2025), and Shaheen Hosany and Serdiuk (2025) – the only four studies that access consumption phenomena outside the individual survey instrument. Mixed-methods designs account for eight studies (13.1%). One conceptual synthesis study is retained under PICO criterion four (Mohr et al. 2022).

The methodological pattern is not incidental. SEM and PLS-SEM designs require individual-level latent variables as standard model inputs; Cultural-level constructs such as institutional field pressure and CCT marketplace ideology are structurally incompatible with single-wave, cross-sectional survey operationalisation. The dominant method therefore selects for Personal-level variables, reinforcing the theoretical concentration documented in Sections 3.1–3.3 and generating findings that appear to confirm Personal-level theories as the appropriate explanatory instruments. This constitutes a self-reproducing methodological cycle: the method shapes what can be measured, and what can be measured shapes what is theorised.

Four critical absences characterise the corpus: zero longitudinal designs, zero digital behavioural trace studies, zero institutional observation designs, and zero cross-national comparative designs with matched samples. Against this background, Phase 2 introduces two emergent departures. Experimental or behavioural measurement designs appear in six studies – Belanche et al. (2024), Huh and Kim (2024), Ahmed et al. (2025), Lim et al. (2025), Liu et al. (2025), and Najafabadiha et al. (2025) – representing a

tripling from the two experimental designs in Phase 1 alone. Two studies deploy fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) – Liu et al. (2024) and Pegan et al. (2025) – a configurational method capable of identifying necessary and sufficient conditions for sustainable fashion behaviour across variable combinations: the closest the corpus reaches to multi-condition causal analysis at the Personal level.

4. Discussion

4.1 The CSP Framework as Classification Instrument and Causal Model

The Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) framework serves two functions simultaneously. As a classification instrument, it organises the theoretical literature by the causal register at which each framework intervenes. As a causal model, it proposes an explanation for why the perception–action gap has persisted: the literature concentrates its explanatory effort at the final conversion step in a causal chain whilst leaving the upstream conditions that determine whether that step is ever reached largely untheorised.

The causal ordering follows the value–belief–norm (VBN) chain formalised by Stern (2000). Cultural conditions shape the biospheric value orientations consumers bring to purchasing decisions. Social mechanisms transmit and modulate those orientations through peer networks and influencer channels. Personal factors determine whether the resulting normative pressure is sufficient to translate intention into behaviour. The upstream conditions – the choice architecture set at the Cultural level and the norm transmission environment configured at the Social level – are what the corpus leaves unexamined.

The architecturally consequential feature of the framework is its feedback loop. Gap closure at the Personal level is not behaviourally inert at higher levels. As sustainable consumption accumulates across a generational cohort, it progressively reshapes the institutional choice architecture, normalising sustainable options and restructuring the normative field for subsequent cohorts. Figure 4 visualises this architecture. The feedback arrow from Personal to Cultural is theoretically non-trivial: it transforms individual-level gap closure from a behavioural outcome into a lever for structural change.

The upper tier represents macro-Cultural institutional and semiotic conditions; the middle tier represents meso-Social norm transmission and identity salience mechanisms; the lower tier represents micro-Personal navigational capacity. The VBN causal chain (Stern 2000) provides the overarching integrative logic. The feedback arrow indicates that gap closure at the Personal level progressively shifts the Cultural choice architecture over time.

4.2 Macro-Cultural Level: Sustainability as Institutionally Contested Meaning

Two distinct mechanisms operate at the Cultural tier. The first is institutional; the second is cultural-semiotic.

Institutional mechanism. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three isomorphic pressures that together reproduce unsustainable consumption as the structural default. Coercive pressure operates through regulatory inaction: by failing to internalise the environmental costs of fast fashion – textile waste, microplastic pollution, and Scope 3 carbon emissions currently externalised to public systems – policy frameworks maintain the price differential that makes fast fashion structurally dominant. This constitutes a market failure: negative externalities are unpriced, producer–consumer information asymmetry is uncorrected, and volume-based business models become the rational competitive equilibrium. Mimetic pressure operates through algorithmic systems that amplify prevailing consumption patterns as the default reference for imitation (Soni and Bhukya 2025). Normative pressure is reproduced through professional fashion industry conventions that favour rapid obsolescence over circularity. CSR adoption exemplifies mimetic isomorphism: firms adopt sustainability positioning because the institutional field expects it (Suchman 1995), not because it signals genuine value alignment. This provides a structural explanation for greenwashing (Di Pillo et al. 2025): when legitimacy management is perceived as performative, consumer scepticism becomes a structurally rational response to institutional dysfunction (Nguyen et al. 2023) rather than an attitudinal bias to be corrected through communication. Circular economy instruments – extended producer responsibility, deposit-return schemes for textiles, and mandatory recycled-content standards – constitute the most theoretically grounded correction, operating upstream of consumer decision-making by restructuring the choice architecture rather than targeting individual attitudes (Demyanova et al. 2023; Gomes and Casillas 2025).

Cultural-semiotic mechanism. The five-moment Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al. 1997; Hall 1980, 1997) theorises how sustainable fashion competes not with a product category but with an established cultural practice. At the moment of representation, sustainable fashion is encoded as both ethical and aspirationally marginal, reinforcing its distance from the mainstream aesthetic field (Hall 1980, 1997). At the moment of identity, it competes for habitus – taste for fast fashion is a habitus product shaped by socialisation, social position, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Demyanova et al. (2023), Varese et al. (2025), and Khan et al. (2024) confirm that cross-country differences reflect institutional environments and habitus formations rather than individual attitudinal variation. At the moment of production, globally distributed supply chains and cost-externalising labour practices generate the price differential that makes sustainable fashion structurally inaccessible to price-sensitive cohorts. At the moment of consumption, sustainable choices occupy what Bhabha (1994) terms a liminal third space – a site of negotiation between dominant cultural practice and emergent sustainability consciousness that individual-level models cannot theorise. Diallo et al. (2021) confirm that the CSR-to-willingness-to-pay pathway is moderated by national long-term orientation, reinforcing that sustainability value is not institutionally portable without Cultural-level adjustment. At the moment of regulation, Casalegno et al. (2022) demonstrate that the antecedents translating sustainability orientations into purchase intention

differ structurally by cohort within the same institutional environment – confirming that Cultural choice architecture interacts with cohort-specific habitus in ways cross-sectional models systematically miss.

4.3 Meso-Social Level: Sustainability as Norm Transmitted or Suppressed

Two transmission channels operate simultaneously at the Social level: one amplifying sustainable norm circulation, the other suppressing it.

Forward transmission. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1977) provide the dual theoretical architecture. Observational learning from credible, aspirationally proximate models generates norm adoption when the modelled behaviour is perceived as available rather than aspirationally remote. Confetto et al. (2023) and Belanche et al. (2024) confirm stimulus–organism–response transmission of sustainability norms through social media content. Ahmed et al. (2025) demonstrate that human–virtual influencer pairings amplify sustainable fashion intentions through wishful identification. Belanche et al. (2024) establish that human influencers produce stronger identity-mediated effects than virtual influencers – virtual models structurally attenuate the perceived similarity that observational learning requires. Walter et al. (2024) confirm brand authenticity as a structural prerequisite for effective norm transmission. Palakshappa et al. (2024) extend this through a value co-creation lens: sustainability meaning is co-produced through dialogical brand–consumer engagement, reframing influencer strategy as a relational architecture problem rather than a channel selection decision.

Identity salience determines whether forward transmission converts into behaviour. Sustainable consumption must register as a group membership obligation rather than a suspendable personal preference (Gong et al. 2022; Mason et al. 2025). Skinner et al. (2023) confirm through social network analysis of #sustainablefashion content that norm circulation operates through network structure rather than individual influencer reach alone. Kim-Vick and Cho (2024) demonstrate that secondhand fashion platforms extend identity salience to the access economy, with social belonging operating as a driver independent of environmental motivation.

Counter-transmission. Soni and Bhukya (2025) demonstrate that aspirational self-care content normalises unsustainable consumption through parasocial relationship mechanisms, raising the normative reference point for acceptable consumption volume. Kantarcioğlu and Kubat Dokumacı (2025) confirm that gender identity and consumer values independently drive fast fashion engagement among Generation Z. This counter-channel is structurally embedded in platform engagement algorithms; it requires Cultural-level institutional intervention (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) rather than message-level counter-programming. Identity salience without Cultural institutional enablement and accessible Personal options produces moral awareness without behavioural output. The Social level functions as a transmission layer – amplifying, moderating, or suppressing the upstream signal depending on the network structure within which the individual consumer is embedded.

4.4 Micro-Personal Level: Sustainability as Navigational Capacity

The Personal level is the endpoint of a causal chain originating at the Cultural level – the site at which upstream conditions are either converted into observable behaviour or blocked from producing that outcome. It is not a complete explanation in itself.

Formal specification. Drawing on the configurational logic of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) – a method that identifies conditions that are necessary and/or sufficient for an outcome across variable combinations (Ragin 2008; Liu et al. 2024; Pegan et al. 2025) – the three-condition model is formalised as follows. Value activation (V), identity salience (I), and practical barrier removal (B) are jointly necessary but not individually sufficient for gap closure (G): $\neg V \rightarrow \neg G$; $\neg I \rightarrow \neg G$; $\neg B \rightarrow \neg G$. The absence of any single condition prevents gap closure regardless of the strength of the remaining two. Adding further predictors to an already-activated three-condition configuration produces diminishing explanatory returns. How the three conditions interact – additively, multiplicatively, or through threshold saturation – is the primary unresolved question.

Value activation (NAM; Schwartz 1977). Environmental values require situational activation through awareness of consequences (AC) and ascription of responsibility (AR). The cultural choice architecture suppresses this activation by maintaining fast fashion as the visible default. Kautish and Khare (2022) confirm that green peer influence and social media exposure are the primary AC–AR activation channels in the Indian market. Manchanda et al. (2023) and Kumar and Panda (2025) demonstrate that mindfulness interventions raise environmental consequence salience before the decision moment, establishing the activation threshold as state-dependent rather than dispositionally fixed. Antunes et al. (2024) extend this by demonstrating that dispositional traits moderate the relationship between sustainability values and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

Identity salience (SIT; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Sustainability must register as a group membership obligation. This condition is upstream-dependent on the Social-level transmission conditions described in Section 4.3. Lee and Kim (2024) introduce subjective age as a moderator: the perception that sustainability belongs to younger consumers enables self-concept – independent of actual cohort membership – to shape the salience condition, establishing it as malleable rather than a demographic fixed effect.

Practical barrier removal (TPB; Ajzen 1991). Price, convenience, and availability must not block action when the first two conditions are met. Gomes et al. (2023) document that structural affordability remains the most proximate barrier at the point of transaction among Portuguese Generation Z consumers, even when environmental concern and green perceived quality are positive and significant. The willingness-to-pay threshold is institutionally variable, not generationally fixed (Zhao and Huh 2025). Arora and Manchanda (2022) demonstrate that green perceived value mediates the relationship between environmental attitudes and sustainable apparel purchase intention. Malecka et al. (2024) show that

dual-role secondhand market participants approach cost barriers through a different calculus than single-role buyers. Murtas and Pedeliento (2025) identify convenience architecture alongside price as an undertheorised barrier removal component. Bao et al. (2026) confirm that conversion from sustainability signals to purchase depends on information processing capacity shaped by the prevailing Cultural choice architecture – confirming the Personal tier's upstream dependency. Two suppressor mechanisms extend the model: moral neutralisation through economic rationality and government dependency (Kaur et al. 2023; Shaheen Hosany and Serdiuk 2025; Sykes and Matza 1957); and hedonic benefit competition, in which emotional gratification and novelty generate a rival goal state whose utility differential must be exceeded by the sustainable alternative (Branca et al. 2025). The net cost–benefit differential versus the fast fashion alternative is therefore a more demanding threshold than absolute price parity.

4.5 Price Accessibility as the Highest-Leverage Intervention Point

This argument is advanced as a corpus-based theoretical inference from the N = 61 studies reviewed, not as a universal empirical claim; generalisability requires cross-national experimental and longitudinal confirmation not yet present in the literature.

Price accessibility is the highest-leverage single intervention because it is the only barrier removal mechanism that operates across all three CSP levels simultaneously. At the Cultural level, Extended Producer Responsibility regulation and carbon cost internalisation address the institutional price premium through coercive isomorphic pressure (DiMaggio and Powell 1983): mandating that producers bear end-of-life textile waste costs – estimated at approximately 92 million tonnes annually (UNEP 2019) – closes the price differential that makes fast fashion structurally dominant. This is a market-failure correction, not a consumer-targeting intervention. At the Social level, price reduction enables participation in sustainability-identifying peer networks, converting sustainable purchasing from a sacrificial act available only to higher-income cohorts into a legible identity signal (Tajfel and Turner 1979). At the Personal level, it removes the primary perceived behavioural control constraint on the TPB pathway (Ajzen 1991) without requiring prior attitude change. The structural nudge logic (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) applies precisely here: making the sustainable option cost-competitive restructures the choice architecture for all three conditions simultaneously. Malecka et al. (2024) and Murtas and Pedeliento (2025) confirm that platform-level collaborative consumption models achieve the same outcome through market-structural rather than regulatory routes, though the carbon and waste displacement effects of secondhand platform scaling remain insufficiently theorised.

5. Future Research Agenda

This section identifies the five highest-priority directions for advancing theoretical and empirical understanding of the Generation Z sustainable fashion value–action gap. Table 5 maps each priority to

its theoretical anchor, CSP level, and recommended design. A full research agenda, including specific hypothesis sets and operationalisation guidance, is provided in the supplementary material.

Table 5

Grouped future research priorities by CSP level, theoretical framework, and recommended design.

Priority	Theoretical anchor	CSP level	Recommended design
P1: Experimental validation	fsQCA (Ragin 2008); NCA (Dul 2016)	All three levels	Multi-site experiment; Boolean configuration testing
P2: Longitudinal and trace data	VCN (Stern 2000)	Personal	Panel survey; e-commerce and platform trace data
P3: Institutional and regulatory	Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983); CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005)	Cultural	Field study; regulatory impact analysis
P4: Cross-cultural comparison	Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al. 1997); SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979)	Cultural–Social	Matched cross-national samples
P5: Configurational methods	fsQCA (Ragin 2008); NCA (Dul 2016)	Personal	Mechanism-specification modelling

5.1 Experimental Validation of the Three-Condition Model

The three-condition model – value activation, identity salience, and practical barrier removal as jointly necessary but not individually sufficient conditions for gap closure – is a theoretical proposition advanced in Section 4.4. Experimental validation is the field's most urgent methodological requirement. The appropriate design isolates and manipulates each condition independently, then tests gap closure across all eight Boolean configurations of their presence and absence. Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA; Ragin 2008) is the natural analytical instrument because it is purpose-built for necessity–sufficiency logic across configurational combinations. Liu et al. (2024) and Pegan et al. (2025) confirm technical deployability within this domain; neither tests the three-condition configuration as a unified model. Cross-national replication is a second-order requirement given the institutional variability documented across the EU, USA, China, and Southeast Asian contexts in Table 4: single-country validation cannot establish structural necessity across institutional formations.

5.2 Longitudinal Designs and Behavioural Trace Data

Zero longitudinal studies appear in the N = 61 corpus. Cross-sectional designs cannot determine whether purchase intentions convert into behaviour over time, whether value activation persists after norm exposure, or whether Cultural-level policy changes produce measurable Personal-level effects. The empirical analogue of the perception–action gap – the distance between self-reported intention and verified purchase behaviour – has never been measured directly in this literature. Digital behavioural trace data from e-commerce platforms and secondhand fashion marketplaces would provide direct

purchase evidence rather than reported intention. Longitudinal panel designs tracking the VBN causal chain (Stern 2000) across cohorts are the only designs capable of empirically observing the CSP feedback loop described in Section 4.1.

5.3 Institutional-Level and Regulatory Research

Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) are absent as primary frameworks across the corpus despite their direct relevance to the Cultural tier. Field-level observation, regulatory impact analysis, and platform governance studies are required to theorise the isomorphic pressures that Section 4.2 identifies as upstream determinants of Personal-level gap closure. Two research sites are immediately productive. Southeast Asia – where TikTok Shop and Lazada create normative isomorphism pressure at algorithmic scale (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) – is the critical test case for whether the Cultural level of the CSP framework transfers across distinct digital market formations (Hall 1980, 1997). European markets, where the EU Textile Strategy and extended producer responsibility schemes are entering implementation, provide a natural experiment in coercive isomorphic intervention.

5.4 Cross-Cultural Comparative Designs

The corpus spans Italy ($n = 9$), USA ($n = 10$), India ($n = 8$), and China ($n = 6$), yet no study employs a matched cross-national design that holds the consumer population constant whilst varying the institutional environment. Without such designs, observed cross-country differences in sustainable fashion behaviour cannot be reliably attributed to institutional rather than demographic sources. Matched samples, theorised through the Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al. 1997) to specify how sustainability meaning is institutionally encoded differently across markets, would enable decomposition of Cultural-level from Personal-level gap sources. Diallo et al. (2021) establish the theoretical warrant: national long-term orientation moderates the CSR-to-willingness-to-pay pathway, confirming that institutional moderation of the full three-condition model is an empirically open question.

5.5 Configurational Methods and Mechanism Specification

Whether value activation, identity salience, and barrier removal interact additively, multiplicatively, or through threshold saturation remains unresolved – a question SEM and PLS-SEM designs cannot address by design. Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA; Dul 2016) provides the complementary instrument: where fsQCA identifies sufficient configurations for gap closure, NCA identifies which single conditions are necessary, establishing ceiling constraints when any condition is absent. Together, fsQCA and NCA constitute the methodological architecture most closely aligned with the three-condition model's formal logic and should become the standard analytical framework for Personal-level gap-closure research. Circuit of Culture analysis at the production and regulation moments (du Gay et al. 1997) would extend Cultural-tier research beyond the consumption-moment focus that has dominated even the corpus's Cultural studies.

These five priorities are additive rather than substitutive. Each either validates a specific architectural claim of the three-condition model, provides causal inference capability that cross-sectional designs structurally cannot, or extends the CSP framework into theoretical registers the corpus has left unoccupied.

6. Conclusion

This review set out to determine whether the Generation Z sustainable fashion literature theorises the perception–action gap at the level of complexity the phenomenon requires. Bibliometric analysis of $N = 61$ ABDC-ranked studies (2021–2026), validated through AU–CR–DE three-field plotting, VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence clustering, and full-corpus inter-rater agreement ($\kappa = 0.75$; Landis and Koch 1977), establishes that it does not. A persistent structural imbalance characterises the corpus: researchers consistently invoke Cultural and Social phenomena in their author keywords whilst building explanatory frameworks almost exclusively from Personal-level behavioural models. This imbalance intensifies as the corpus expands – the Personal share rises from 48.1% to 61.8% across phases, whilst the Cultural share contracts from 18.5% to 14.7%. Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), Legitimacy Theory (Suchman 1995), and Bourdieu (1984) remain absent as primary frameworks. The Cultural–Social–Personal (CSP) framework addresses this structurally. Functioning simultaneously as a classification instrument and as a causal model, the CSP schema proposes that the gap persists because the literature theorises only the final conversion step in a VBN causal chain whilst leaving the upstream institutional conditions and social transmission mechanisms that determine whether that step is ever reached largely unexamined. A dynamic feedback loop is integral to the architecture: gap closure at the Personal level progressively reshapes the Cultural choice architecture, normalising sustainable options and restructuring the normative field within which subsequent cohorts' consumption dispositions are formed.

The theoretical significance of this finding is that the perception–action gap is not an individual-level puzzle requiring a more sensitive attitudinal instrument; it is a cross-level structural problem requiring a cross-level theoretical architecture. The three-condition gap-closure model – value activation, identity salience, and practical barrier removal as jointly necessary but not individually sufficient conditions – synthesises the corpus's most fragmented tier into a set of theoretically grounded propositions. Two limitations bound these claims. First, the ABDC quality filter and English-language restriction structurally concentrate the imbalance finding relative to a broader field census. Second, and more fundamentally, the CSP schema has not been empirically validated: the $\kappa = 0.75$ inter-rater agreement establishes coding reliability, not construct validity, and the three-condition model remains a theoretical proposition awaiting experimental confirmation. The most consequential practical implication, however, is immediate: sustainable fashion strategy that targets individual attitudes whilst leaving Cultural choice architectures unchanged is working against structural conditions it has not theorised. Price accessibility is the highest-leverage intervention precisely because it operates across all three CSP levels simultaneously, generating cross-level cascade effects that no communicative intervention alone can replicate.

The forward research path is defined by five structured priorities: experimental validation of the three-condition model using fsQCA and NCA; longitudinal and behavioural trace designs capable of observing intention–behaviour conversion directly; institutional-level and regulatory research targeting the Cultural tier the corpus has systematically undertheorised; cross-cultural comparative designs with matched samples; and configurational methods that can resolve the mechanism-level questions cross-sectional designs cannot address. Each priority addresses a specific structural absence in the current corpus. Taken together, they specify the methodological conditions required for the CSP schema to advance from theoretical diagnosis to evidence-based practice – and for the Generation Z sustainable fashion literature to theorise the gap at the level of complexity the phenomenon demands.

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Author contributions

Prashanth Cherian Kochuveetil: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing (original draft), Writing (review and editing). Manish Kumar Srivastava: Supervision, Validation, Writing (review and editing). Dheepa Thangamani: Supervision, Validation, Writing (review and editing). Sreedhara R: Validation, Writing (review and editing). All authors approved the final version.

Data availability

The bibliometric data supporting the findings of this study, including Scopus export files, VOSviewer network maps, and Biblioshiny output files, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Figures

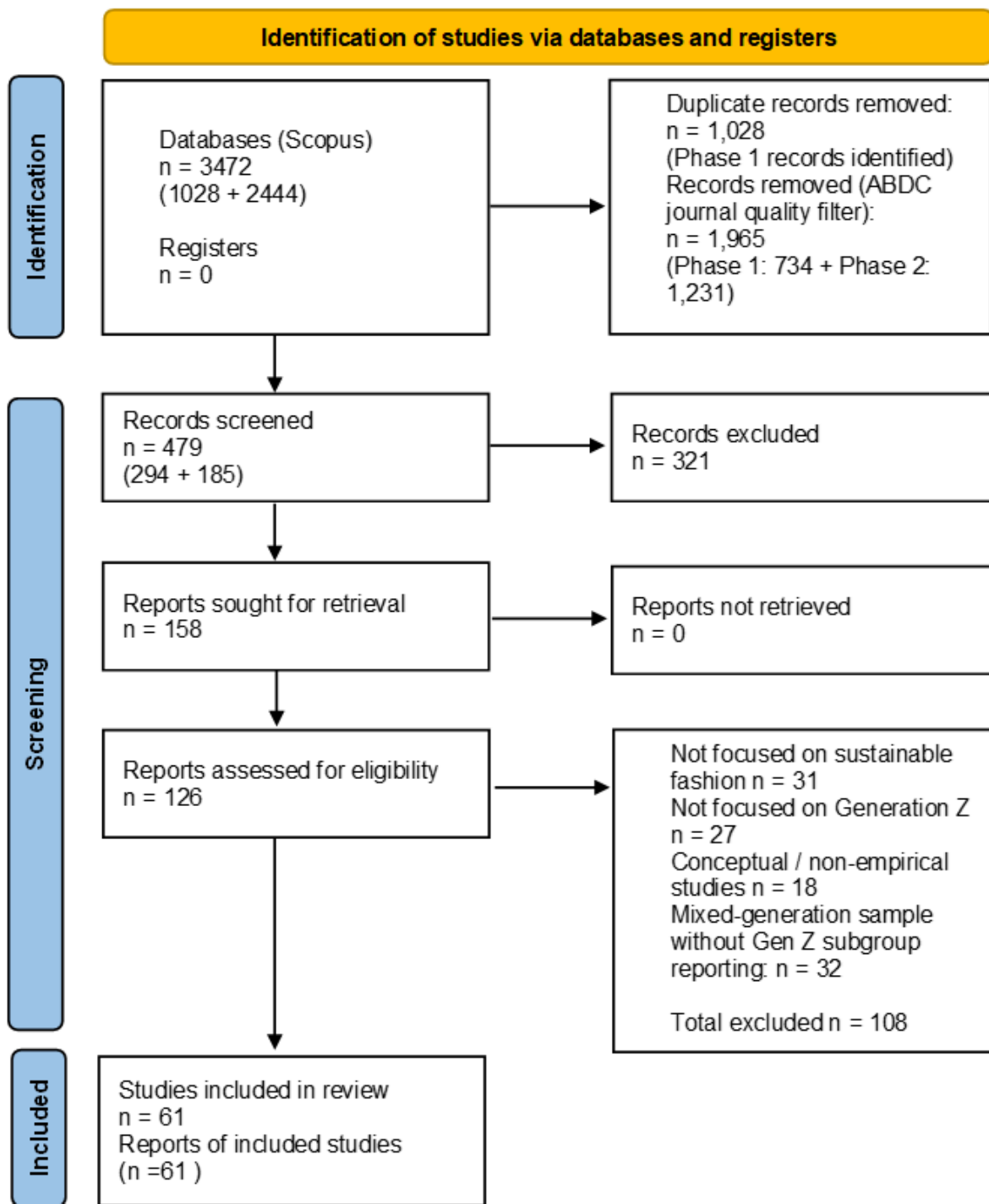


Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram

Note. ABDC B journals: JFMM (n = 11), JGFM (n = 4); total B = 15; A*/A = 46 (75.4%). JCP retained as A† per ABDC 2022 corpus lock-date (n = 9). Phase 2 duplicates (n = 1,028) represent Phase 1 records identified within the Phase 2 Scopus retrieval. Adapted from Page et al. (2021) under CC BY 4.0 licence.

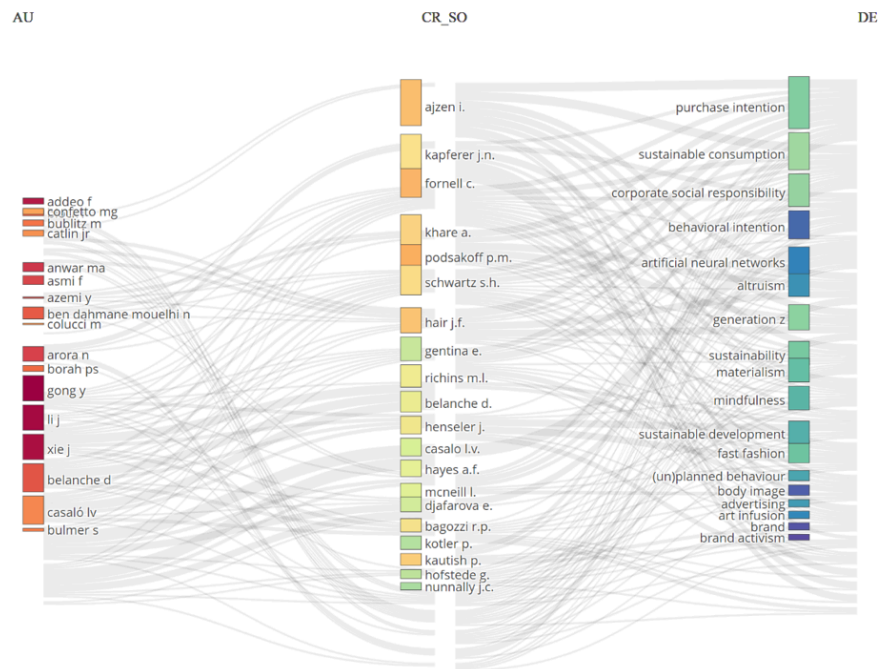


Fig. 2a

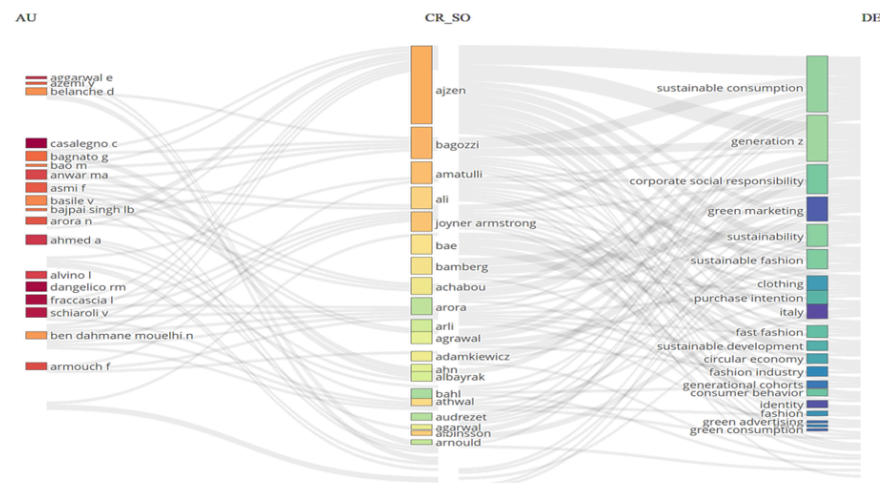


Fig. 2b

Figure 2

a. AU–CR–DE three-field plot for Phase 1 corpus (n = 27, October 2024).

b. AU–CR–DE three-field plot for the combined corpus (N = 61, February 2026).

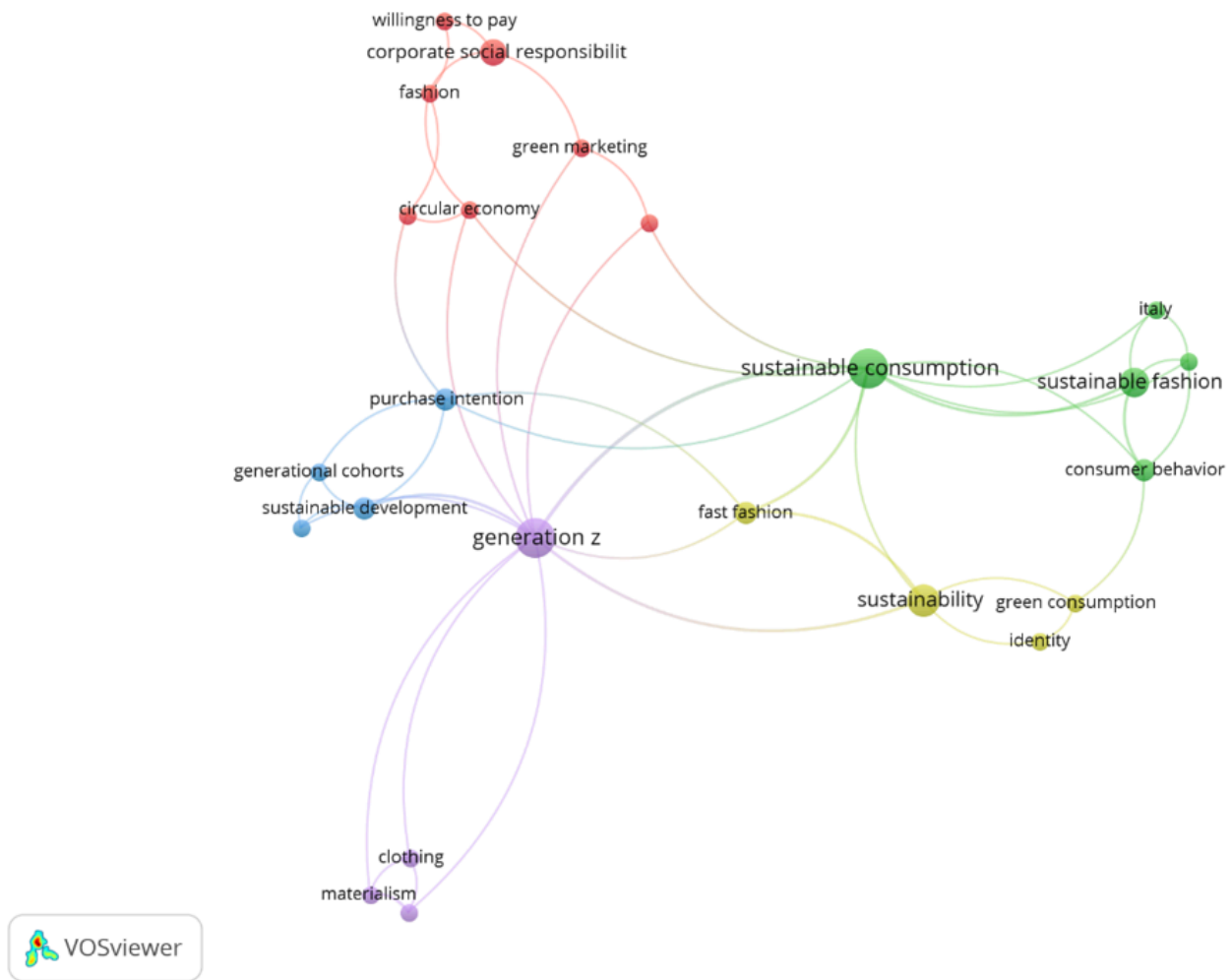


Figure 3

Author keyword co-occurrence network for the combined corpus (N = 61).

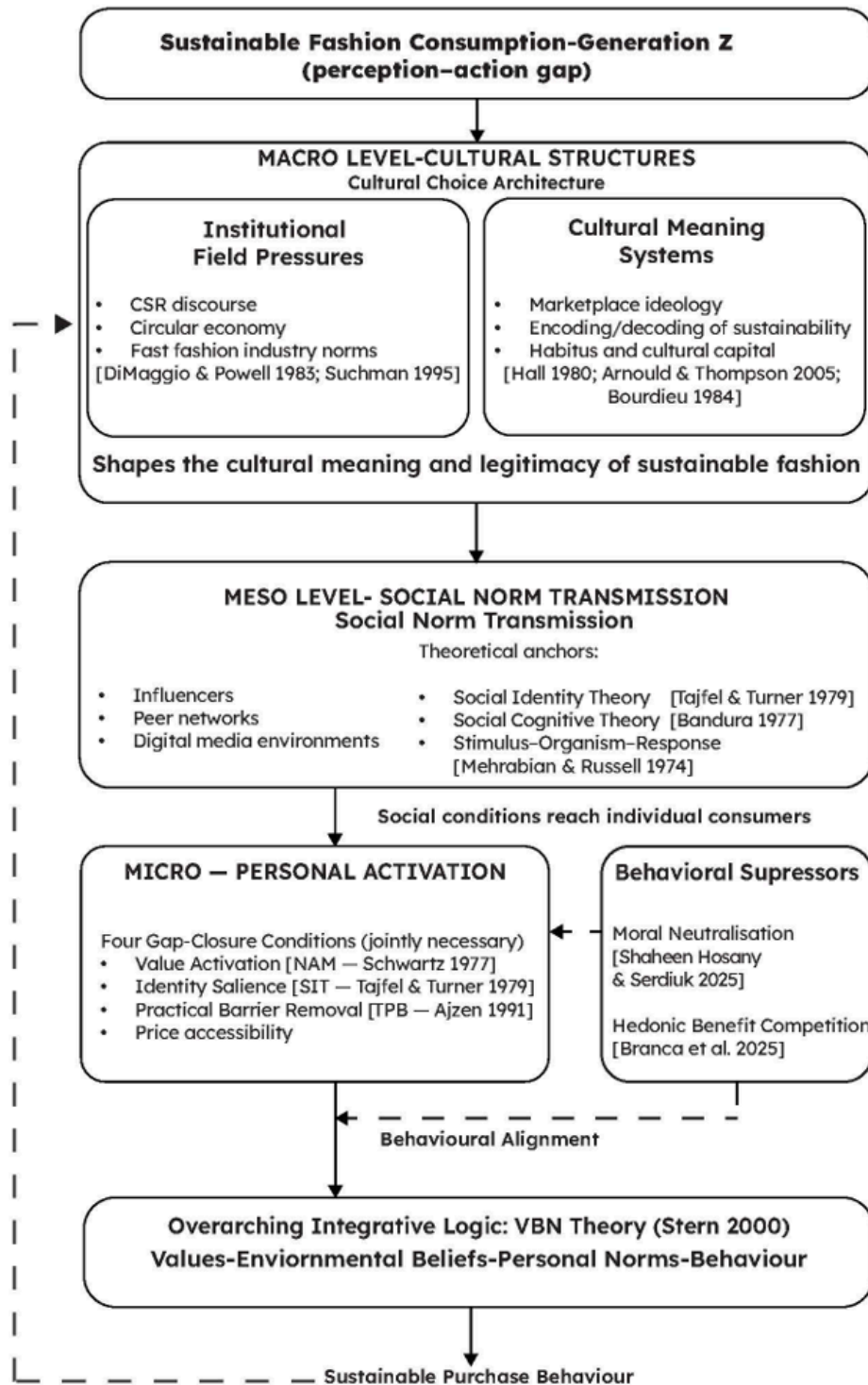


Figure 4

CSP-TCM conceptual framework.