

Why Do Gen Z Consumers Buy Green? The Roles of Environmental Concern, Skepticism, and Social Norms

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Abstract

Drawing on a behavioral marketing perspective, this study examines the effects of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms on green purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. This study employs a quantitative research design using survey data collected from Gen Z consumers in Indonesia who have purchased or considered purchasing eco-friendly personal care products. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis with SPSS 25 to test the proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that environmental concern has a positive effect on green purchase intention, while green skepticism negatively influences consumers' intention to purchase eco-friendly personal care products. In addition, social norms are found to positively influence green purchase intention. This study contributes to the green marketing literature by integrating positive, negative, and social factors. Practically, the findings highlight the need for firms to strengthen environmental communication and social influence to enhance green purchase intention among young consumers.

Keywords: environmental concern; green skepticism; social norms; green purchase intention; Gen Z

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and excessive waste generation have increased public awareness of sustainable consumption (Maduku, 2024; Putra & Wijaya, 2024; Saari et al., 2021). In response, many firms have introduced eco-friendly personal care products, including skincare, shampoo, and hygiene items that claim to be environmentally responsible. These products are particularly relevant for younger consumers, especially Generation Z, who are often portrayed as environmentally conscious and socially responsible (Lin & Niu, 2018; Wang & Chou, 2021). However, despite increasing awareness and market availability, consumers' intention to purchase eco-friendly personal care products remains inconsistent (Newton et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2019; Sinha & Annamdevula, 2022).

From a behavioral marketing perspective, this inconsistency suggests that green purchase intention is not solely driven by positive environmental attitudes (Banyté et al., 2023; Youn et al., 2021). While some consumers express strong concern for environmental protection, others remain hesitant due to doubts regarding the authenticity of green claims or uncertainty about the actual environmental benefits of green products (Khandai et al., 2025; Promalessy & Handriana, 2024; Zaid et al., 2025). In addition, social influence plays an important role in shaping consumption decisions, particularly among Gen Z consumers who are highly exposed to peer opinions and social media norms (Mason et al., 2025; Wang & Chu, 2021).

Environmental concern has long been recognized as a key driver of pro-environmental behavior. Consumers who are more concerned about environmental issues tend to feel a moral responsibility to support environmentally friendly products and brands (De Canio et al., 2020; Lopes et al., 2024). In the context of personal care products, environmental concern may encourage consumers to consider the ecological impact of their daily consumption choices, thereby increasing their intention to purchase eco-friendly alternatives (Malhotra & Shaiwalini, 2024; Yang et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, growing attention to sustainability has also been accompanied by increasing consumer skepticism toward green marketing practices. Green skepticism reflects consumers' doubts regarding the credibility of environmental claims made by companies (Khan et al., 2022; Saraireh, 2023; Syadzwinia & Astuti, 2021). The widespread use of vague or misleading green messages may reduce consumer trust and weaken the influence of environmental concern on purchase decisions (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2015; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). For Gen Z consumers, who are often highly informed and critical of marketing communication, skepticism may serve as a psychological barrier that discourages green purchase intention.

Beyond individual attitudes and skepticism, social norms also shape green consumption behavior. Social norms refer to perceived social expectations regarding appropriate or desirable behavior (Belgiawan et al., 2017; Zahid et al., 2023). When environmentally friendly consumption is perceived as socially accepted or encouraged, consumers may be more inclined to align their behavior with these expectations (Belgiawan et al., 2017; Wang & Chou, 2021). This effect may be particularly salient among Gen Z consumers, whose purchasing decisions are often influenced by peer behavior, online communities, and social media discourse.

Taken together, green purchase intention can be understood as the result of a complex interaction between positive environmental motivation, psychological resistance, and social influence. However, prior research has often examined these factors in isolation (Pristl et al., 2021; Sivapalan et al., 2024), providing a fragmented understanding of green consumption behavior. This study addresses this gap by examining the effects of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms within a single behavioral model, and focusing on eco-friendly personal care products among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia. By integrating positive, negative, and social drivers of green purchase intention, this study contributes to the green marketing literature by offering a more balanced perspective on sustainable consumption behavior. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for firms in designing credible green marketing strategies that resonate with young consumers while addressing skepticism and leveraging social influence.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the effects of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms on green purchase intention. A survey method was employed to collect data from Gen Z consumers who have experience with or interest in eco-friendly personal care products. The target population of this study consists of

Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, defined as individuals aged approximately 18 to 26 years. Respondents were required to have purchased or considered purchasing eco-friendly personal care products (such as skincare, shampoo, or personal hygiene products) within the past six months.

Data were collected using an online questionnaire, which was distributed through social media platforms and university networks. A purposive and convenience sampling approach was employed to ensure that respondents met the study criteria. After data screening, a total of 110 valid responses were retained for analysis. All constructs were measured using previously validated scales adapted to the context of eco-friendly personal care products. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Environmental Concern was measured using four items adapted from Goh & Balaji (2016) and Pagiaslis & Krontalis (2014), which reflect individuals' awareness of and concern for environmental issues. Green Skepticism was measured using four items adapted from Leonidou & Skarmeas (2015) and Skarmeas & Leonidou (2013), capturing respondents' level of doubt regarding the credibility of environmental claims made by companies. Social Norms were measured using four items adapted from Lin & Niu (2018), assessing perceived social pressure or expectations to engage in environmentally friendly consumption. Green Purchase Intention was measured using three items adapted from Chen & Chang (2012) and Goh & Balaji (2016), which reflecting respondents' willingness and intention to purchase eco-friendly personal care products in the future.

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software (e.g., SPSS). Descriptive statistics were first examined to describe respondent characteristics. The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was employed to test the effects of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms on green purchase intention.

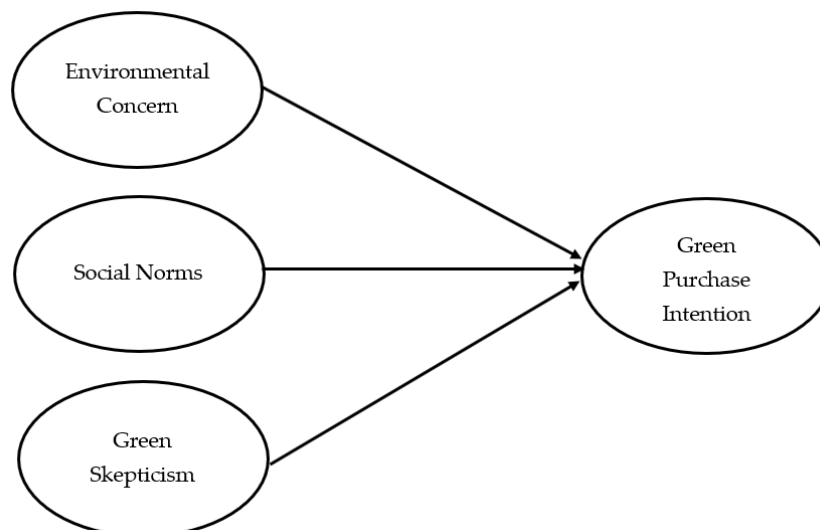


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. RESULTS

3.1 Respondent Profile (n = 110)

A total of 110 Gen Z respondents participated in this study. Most respondents were female (70.9%) and fell within the 21–23 age group (45.5%), followed by 18–20 (38.2%). In terms of status,

the sample was dominated by university students (67.3%), with the remaining respondents being early-career employees (32.7%). The majority reported living in urban areas (78.2%). Regarding eco-friendly personal care products, 65.5% of respondents reported having purchased such products within the last six months, while 34.5% indicated they had considered purchasing but had not done so. Among purchasers, most reported buying eco-friendly personal care products 1–2 times (44.5%), and the most common purchase channel was online marketplaces (56.4%), highlighting the importance of digital retail environments for green product discovery and purchase among Gen Z consumers.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Profile	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	78	70.9
	Male	32	29.1
Age	18–20	42	38.2
	21–23	50	45.5
	24–26	18	16.4
Status	University student	74	67.3
	Early-career employee	36	32.7
Residence	Urban/City	86	78.2
	Suburban/Peri-urban	24	21.8
Product purchase (last 6 months)	Purchased at least once	72	65.5
	Considered but not purchased	38	34.5
Purchase frequency	1–2 times	49	44.5
	3–4 times	16	14.5
	5+ times	7	6.4
	Not purchased (considered only)	38	34.5
Main purchase channel	Marketplace (e.g., Tokopedia/ Shopee)	62	56.4
	Brand official store/website	20	18.2
	Offline store (drugstore/ supermarket)	28	25.5

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Environmental Concern	4.12	0.61
Green Skepticism	2.89	0.73
Social Norms	3.76	0.65
Green Purchase Intention	3.94	0.68

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Overall, respondents reported a high level of environmental concern ($M = 4.12$), indicating strong awareness and concern for environmental issues. Green skepticism was moderate ($M = 2.89$), suggesting that while respondents were not highly skeptical, doubts regarding green claims were still present. Social norms related to eco-friendly personal care products were relatively high ($M = 3.76$), reflecting perceived social encouragement toward green consumption. The mean score for green purchase intention was also high ($M = 3.94$), which indicates a generally positive intention among Gen Z consumers to purchase eco-friendly personal care products.

3.3 Reliability Analysis

Table 3. Reliability of Measurement Scales

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Environmental Concern	0.86
Green Skepticism	0.83
Social Norms	0.88
Green Purchase Intention	0.85

As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.83 to 0.88, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These results indicate that the measurement scales used in this study are reliable.

3.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Correlation among Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
Environmental Concern	1			
Green Skepticism	-0.32**	1		
Social Norms	0.45**	-0.28**	1	
Green Purchase Intention	0.52**	-0.41**	0.56**	1

The correlation results indicate that environmental concern and social norms are positively correlated with green purchase intention, while green skepticism is negatively correlated with green purchase intention. None of the correlation coefficients exceed 0.70, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern.

3.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Environmental Concern	0.29	3.42	< 0.01
Green Skepticism	-0.21	-2.87	< 0.01
Social Norms	0.37	4.56	< 0.001
Model Statistics:			
R ² = 0.48			
Adjusted R ² = 0.46			
F = 32.18, p < 0.001			

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the effects of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms on green purchase intention. The overall model is statistically significant (F = 32.18, p < 0.001), as it explains 48% of the variance in green purchase intention.

Environmental concern has a positive and significant effect on green purchase intention ($\beta = 0.29$, p < 0.01), which indicates that consumers who are more concerned about environmental issues are more likely to intend to purchase eco-friendly personal care products. Green skepticism shows a negative and significant effect ($\beta = -0.21$, p < 0.01). It suggests that doubts toward green claims reduce consumers' purchase intention. Social norms exhibit the strongest positive effect on green purchase intention ($\beta = 0.37$, p < 0.001), which highlights the important role of perceived social influence in shaping green consumption behavior among Gen Z consumers.

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined how environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms shape green purchase intention toward eco-friendly personal care products among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia. Overall, the findings support a balanced behavioral view of green consumption: intention is jointly driven by internal motivation (environmental concern), constrained by psychological resistance (green skepticism), and reinforced by external social influence (social norms). The relatively strong explanatory power of the model suggests that these three factors capture key elements of Gen Z decision-making in green personal care—where “doing good” competes with “doubting claims” while being continuously shaped by peer and online environments.

First, the positive effect of environmental concern indicates that Gen Z consumers who care more about environmental issues are more likely to intend to purchase eco-friendly personal care products. This result is consistent with the idea that sustainable consumption in everyday categories can be motivated by a sense of responsibility and perceived personal relevance of environmental conditions (Cruz & Manata, 2020; Peisker, 2023). In the personal care context, the decision is especially meaningful because these products are purchased frequently and used directly on the body; therefore, environmentally concerned consumers may interpret routine consumption choices (e.g., selecting “eco-friendly” packaging or “responsibly sourced” ingredients) as a practical way to align daily habits with broader environmental values (Jain, 2025; Lin & Niu, 2018). For Indonesian Gen Z, who are increasingly exposed to sustainability narratives through digital media, environmental concern may serve as a stable internal driver that makes green product options feel more personally consistent and socially desirable.

Second, green skepticism was found to negatively influence green purchase intention, confirming that doubt toward environmental claims can reduce willingness to buy (Khan et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2019; Syadzwina & Astuti, 2021) eco-friendly personal care products even when green options are available. This finding is particularly relevant for personal care markets where “natural,” “organic,” “eco,” and “clean” claims are common and sometimes ambiguous. Because personal care products are often marketed through influencer content and brand storytelling, Gen Z consumers may become more alert to exaggerated messaging, vague certifications, or inconsistent brand behavior. In this situation, skepticism functions as a behavioral barrier: consumers may hesitate (Nguyen et al., 2019; Saraireh, 2023; Syadzwina & Astuti, 2021), delay purchase, or choose familiar mainstream brands rather than taking perceived risks on products whose “green” attributes are not clearly verifiable. The result highlights that green consumption is not simply about pro-environmental attitudes; it is also shaped by consumers’ credibility judgments and perceived authenticity of green marketing communication.

Third, social norms emerged as the strongest positive predictor of green purchase intention, indicating that perceived expectations from peers and the broader social environment strongly shape Gen Z’s intention to purchase eco-friendly personal care products. This pattern is highly plausible given the social nature of Gen Z consumption, where product discovery and evaluation are often mediated by social media, peer reviews, and community preferences (Banytè et al., 2023; Mason et al., 2025). In personal care categories, where products are closely tied to identity, self-presentation, and lifestyle, normative influence may be especially powerful. When eco-friendly personal care is seen as “what people like me do,” green purchase intention becomes easier and more socially rewarding. In an Indonesian setting, where trends can spread rapidly via online communities and marketplace ecosystems, social norms may also reduce the perceived effort of going green by making eco-friendly personal care products more visible, more familiar, and more acceptable as default choices.

Taken together, these findings imply that green purchase intention among Indonesian Gen Z is best understood as a combination of value-driven motivation, trust-related resistance, and social reinforcement. The results also help explain why green intention may remain inconsistent in real markets: even with high environmental concern, skepticism can weaken intention, while social norms can either amplify or stabilize intention depending on what is socially encouraged in a given peer group or online community. In other words, intention increases not only when consumers care about the environment, but also when they trust green claims and perceive that green purchasing is socially supported.

Importantly, the context of eco-friendly personal care products clarifies why these relationships are meaningful. Unlike durable green products, personal care purchases are frequent and relatively low-to-mid cost, making them a realistic “entry point” for sustainable consumption among young consumers. At the same time, the category is saturated with marketing claims, which increases the likelihood of skepticism. This tension makes personal care an ideal setting to observe the behavioral balance found in this study—where concern encourages, skepticism restrains, and norms propel green purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the behavioral determinants of green purchase intention toward eco-friendly personal care products among Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, focusing on the roles of environmental concern, green skepticism, and social norms. The findings demonstrate that green purchase intention is shaped by a combination of internal values, psychological resistance, and social influence. While environmental concern and social norms positively influence intention, green skepticism serves as a barrier that weakens consumers’ willingness to engage in green consumption. These results highlight that green purchase intention cannot be explained solely by pro-environmental attitudes, particularly in product categories where marketing claims are highly prevalent.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the green marketing and consumer behavior literature by integrating positive, negative, and social drivers of green purchase intention within a single, parsimonious behavioral model. By examining these factors simultaneously, the study offers a more balanced understanding of why environmentally aware consumers may still hesitate to purchase green products. The findings also extend existing research by contextualizing green consumption within the eco-friendly personal care category, which represents a frequent, identity-relevant consumption domain for Gen Z consumers.

Practically, the results suggest that firms marketing eco-friendly personal care products should not rely solely on consumers’ environmental concern. Efforts to reduce green skepticism—such as transparent communication, credible certifications, and consistent environmental practices—are essential to strengthen purchase intention. In addition, leveraging social norms through peer influence, community engagement, and social media visibility may be particularly effective in encouraging green consumption among Gen Z consumers, who are highly responsive to social cues and collective behavior.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limits causal interpretation. Second, the sample was restricted to Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or cultural contexts. Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better capture causal mechanisms, extend the model to other product categories, or compare different generational cohorts. Additionally, future studies may incorporate moderating or mediating variables, such as trust, perceived authenticity, or price sensitivity, to further enrich understanding of green purchase behavior.

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