

# GENERATION Z AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: MOTIVATORS TO PURCHASE BEAUTY AND PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

GERAÇÃO Z E O CONSUMO SUSTENTÁVEL: MOTIVADORES PARA  
A COMPRA DE PRODUTOS DE BELEZA E CUIDADO PESSOAL

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Recebido em: 15 de novembro de 2022

Aprovado em: 4 de janeiro de 2023

Sistema de Avaliação: Double Blind Review

RGD | v. 20 | n. 1 | p. 03-27 | jan./jun. 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25112/rgd.v20i1.3147>

## **ABSTRACT**

Sustainability is an increasingly relevant issue, especially for young adults that are deeply informed on topics of their interest, and also position themselves on social networks. Brands and companies currently offer a wide variety of sustainable products aimed at this cohort, whose attitudes are favorable to sustainable practices, however not frequently translating it into behavior. Considering this context, the present study conducted 13 in-depth interviews to explore motivational factors to beauty and personal care sustainable products purchase among 18-25 y.o. young adults from Sao Paulo, Brazil. Internal, social and external factors were mapped and subsequently analyzed in two codification cycles, complemented by an additional literature review. Results reinforce the importance of both normative and cultural social factors in this process, as well as embedded complexity in social reality of which this cohort is part of. This reality encompasses two simultaneous social environments (physical and digital), in which youngsters from Z generation interact, influence and are influenced as well. Comparing these environments indicated how social factors influence sustainable purchasing in each case.

**Keywords:** Sustainability. Marketing. Young Adults.

## **RESUMO**

Sustentabilidade é um assunto de crescente importância, principalmente para jovens adultos que se informam com profundidade sobre seus temas de interesse e se posicionam nas redes sociais. Embora marcas e empresas ofereçam uma variedade de produtos sustentáveis, buscando endereçar a atitude positiva de jovens adultos às práticas sustentáveis, frequentemente essas atitudes não se refletem em comportamento de compra. Considerando esse contexto, 13 entrevistas em profundidade foram realizadas para explorar os fatores que motivam jovens adultos (18 – 25 anos) de São Paulo, Brasil, a comprarem produtos sustentáveis de beleza e cuidado pessoal. Fatores internos, sociais e externos foram mapeados e posteriormente analisados em dois ciclos de codificação, complementados por uma revisão de literatura adicional. Os resultados reforçaram a importância de fatores sociais normativos e culturais no processo de compra sustentável, bem como a complexa realidade social vivenciada por esses consumidores. Esta realidade compreende dois ambientes sociais simultâneos (físico e digital), nos quais os jovens da geração Z interagem, influenciam e também são influenciados. Uma comparação entre esses ambientes indicou como os fatores sociais influenciam a compra sustentável em cada caso.

**Palavras-chave:** Sustentabilidade. Marketing. Jovens Adultos.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The world currently faces an unprecedented environmental crisis, voiced by the scientific community in the last decades (UNITED NATIONS, 2021) and affecting how society perceives organizations' responsibilities. Covid-19 pandemic has widened the inequality gap and fueled social demands throughout the globe (STANFORD SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW, 2021a). Young people are considered the most deeply affected by the crisis, as well as those with more potential to bring energy and innovative solutions to the table (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021a). Youth activism is on the rise, demanding action towards climate change and social inequality from both public and private sectors (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021b).

In response to consumer pressure, companies across various industries have increasingly invested in meeting these demands, with environmental, social and governance (ESG) reports valued more than ever in the business community (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021c). Brazilian beauty and personal care categories have increasingly expanded sustainable offerings and is expected to further invest in the field, notably with sustainable and ethical attributes, inclusion and diversity (EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL ANALYSIS, 2020). Representing a large and thriving R\$ 122.4 billion retail market in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), this category is led by Natura and Co multinational, followed by Unilever and Boticário. Recent examples addressing sustainability from these companies are vegan and cruelty-free make-up and a diverse skincare palette (EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL ANALYSIS, 2020).

Influencing fast-pacing consumer markets, young adults from generation Z represent roughly the age bracket of 18-25 years old (ARNETT, 2007), a life phase of wide-open possibilities and experimentation in which people are generally exploring possibilities before adopting more permanent attitudes and settling into more enduring choices (ARNETT, 2014). This cohort is also understood in generational conceptual base according to its distinct sociological aspects (MANHEIN, 1952; PILCHER, 1994) that highlight 'Generation Z' being first generation of people born into a highly-developed Internet world, the so-called 'digital natives' (TURNER, 2015) and the first real global generation (BENCSEK *et al.*, 2016). Inseparable from digital technologies, they are 'always on', eager to communicate and willing to influence the world (PILCHER, 1994; TURNER, 2015; BENCSEK *et al.*, 2016). Purchase behavior and consumption have been proven in existing literature to vary not only depending on consumer's life phases, but also accordingly to different generation characteristics, pointing out to benefits in considering both when studying consumers (PARMENT, 2013).

Young adults or emerging adults represent a life phase of wide-open possibilities and experimentation in which people are generally exploring possibilities before adopting more permanent attitudes and

settling into more enduring choices (ARNETT, 2007; ARNETT, 2014). Therefore, this life phase, containing characteristics from the transition to adulthood, presents a greater openness to try and diverge. Modern life changes, such as the rise of marriage and parental age and education expansion, have extended the transition period between the end of adolescence and the beginning of an adult life, turning it into this distinguishable phase (ARNETT, 2014). The 'emerging adulthood' may be therefore understood as a separate life course period, which is heterogeneous and less structured. Nevertheless, five key aspects are more prominent in this life stage, according to Arnett (2007, p. 69): "the age of identity explorations, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities".

This age cohort is also included in 'generation Z', as defined by Manhein's "The Problem of Generations" (1952). Generational current approaches age groups in society observing both their inherent differences as well as their relations to historical time (PILCHER, 1994). Although there is important information in understanding age groups in terms of life course, the life phases perspective, a sociology of age highlights different sociological aspects (PILCHER, 1994) pertinent to the understanding of present study's target. 'Generation Z' may be defined as composed by those born between the mid '90s and the late 2010s, being the first generation of people born into a highly-developed Internet world, the so-called 'digital natives' (TURNER, 2015) and the first real global generation (BENCSEK *et al.*, 2016). Inseparable from digital technologies, they are 'always on', eager to communicate and willing to influence the world (PILCHER, 1994; TURNER, 2015; BENCSEK, *et al.*, 2016), a characteristic highly important in the context of sustainability. This generation also displays more diverse references, as a reflex of their own make up: racially, sexually and culturally (TURNER, 2015).

The objective of the present study is to understand further motivational factors for sustainable purchase behavior in this key populational cohort, young adults from generation Z. Ryan and Deci (2000) define motivation as including "all aspects of activation and intention", while Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) defines intention as encompassing all motivational factors towards behavior. In summary, motivation is a vital subject, given it constitutes the closest antecedent to consumers' actual purchase behavior (GROENING *et al.*, 2018).

Since motivational factors vary according to each researched context (AJZEN, 1991), the present study aims to uncover the key motivational factors that drive Brazilian youngsters to purchase sustainable beauty and personal care products. A large and thriving category in Brazilian fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), beauty and personal care industry amounted to a R\$ 122.4 billion retail market in 2020, growing 4.7% vs. 2019, with mass markets representing 81% of this total value (EUROMONITOR INTERNATIONAL, 2020). The present study took place in Sao Paulo, economic center of Brazil, a key country in Latin America with a population of 213 million people, a gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$ 1.445 trillion and a gross

national income (GNI) per capita of US\$ 7,850 in 2020 (THE WORLD BANK, 2021). Previous studies have already highlighted the importance of studying sustainable consumption in the Brazilian context (TELOCKEN *et al.*, 2017; PACHECO *et al.*, 2019).

Considering previous quantitative studies have found contradicting results in motivation to sustainable purchase (FISHBEIN; AJZEN, 1977; PICKETT-BAKER; OZAKI, 2008), chosen methodological design consisted in a qualitative approach to further explore underlying factors and avoid ready answers based on what is socially expected. In-depth interviews were conducted with the support of an interview guide, designed to elicit contradictions and inconsistencies in the sustainable purchase process. Topics ranged from personal opinions on sustainable practices and responsibilities to more specific issues, regarding recurring choices of purchase and consumption of sustainable products.

The next chapter explores the conceptual bases that support this work, followed by methodological design, primary findings, and conclusions. Besides pointed internal, external, and social factors, one of the most important contributions of this paper was comparison of social factors between different social environments, namely physical and digital ones.

## **2 MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND SUSTAINABLE PURCHASE BEHAVIOR**

Motivational factors are here considered as antecedents to sustainable purchase behavior and divided into internal, social and external, according to an existing framework by Liobikiene and Bernatoniene (2017). An analysis of motivational factors from existing literature has been used as the basis for proposing these three dimensions. Internal dimension encompasses attitudes, values, concern, consciousness, perceived effectiveness. Also, social dimension includes social pressure, family and friends influence, moral responsibility. Lastly, external dimension contains information and knowledge, price, convenience, brand, quality and supply (LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017).

Encompassing attitudes, values, concern, perceived effectiveness and consciousness, **internal factors** also include one's own orientation towards social and/or environmental welfare (LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017). Literature analysis indicate that this dimension is mainly expressed in its environmental orientation, as observed previously in marketing and consumer behavior theories' historical emphasis. Examples within selected context include attitude towards environmental consequences (RAMAYAH *et al.*, 2010), environmental concern (PAUL *et al.*, 2016; EMEKCI, 2019; SADIQ *et al.*, 2021; ZAREMOHZZABIEH *et al.*, 2021), concern for the environment and society (HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020) and environmental consciousness (KIM; CHUNG, 2011; RITTER *et al.*, 2015; MISHAL *et al.*, 2017; ZAREMOHZZABIEH *et al.*, 2021).

Addressing more immediate elements to influence purchase decision, **external factors** include aspects such as information and knowledge, price, convenience, brand, quality and supply (LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017; SHARMA, 2021). Information and knowledge on sustainability issues were proven to influence ethical purchase (PAUL *et al.*, 2016) and appear in several sustainable purchase behavior studies. Some related constructs are knowledge of green products (LIOBIKIENE *et al.*, 2016), environmental knowledge (EMEKCI, 2019), information availability about environmental and social impact (HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020) and green information quality (KUMAR *et al.*, 2021). Although information access has been found to play a part in overall sustainable purchase behavior, research on the category of organic cosmetics pointed to no relevant mediation effect of consumer degree of knowledge on green brand credibility, what could be due to low involvement with this product category (KUMAR *et al.*, 2021).

An intermediary layer is represented by **social factors**, as it encompasses cultural aspects, norm, orientations, external pressure and feelings of moral duties or responsibilities. Concepts of collectivism and man-nature orientation have been found in existing literature to be significant and well-established cultural aspects, relevant within sustainable and green purchase behavior context, either influencing directly purchase intention or indirectly through other variables (WANG *et al.*, 2016; NGUYEN *et al.*, 2017; SREEN *et al.*, 2018). The concept of collectivism come from Hofstede's cultural framework on countries national values, presented in five cultural dimensions, in which each country was scored (HOFSTEDE, 1984; HOFSTEDE *et al.*; 2010; MINKOV; HOFSTEDE, 2012). Also, norm-related constructs have been extensively used in consumer behavior studies, including in sustainable purchase contexts, where they have been found to present substantial impact on behavior (CIALDINI, 2001).

Firstly, collectivism is considered a cultural attribute that highlights, in a society-level, the type of integration individuals may experience in social collectives, how they define themselves in relation to them, the reasons lying behind being (or not being) part of them, as well as who is considered to be on the inside (OYSERMAN; LEE, 2008). Given that both individualism and collectivism coexist in societies, differences present themselves as saliences and priorities (BREWER; CHEN, 2007). Additionally, man-nature orientation (MNO) reflects a mindset in which humans are a part of nature and are therefore expected to act in harmony with it (KLUCKHOHN; STRODBECK, 1961). It expresses a perception that humans should understand nature's own ways and assume a posture of protection and adaptation, instead of domination (KLUCKHOHN; STRODBECK, 1961; WANG *et al.*, 2016; SREEN *et al.*, 2018). Given its personification of a positive relationship with nature, man-nature orientation has been hypothesized to positively influence sustainable purchase intention and behavior, as individuals would be more likely to engage in consumption that isn't harmful to the environment.

Normative constructs have been extensively used in consumer behavior studies, including in sustainable purchase contexts, where it presents substantial impact on behavior (CIALDINI, 2001). Within conceptualizations related to social regulation, subjective norm and social norm are frequently used in consumer behavior studies. It has been confirmed as a significant variable in several consumer behavior studies, including those within sustainable purchase (KIM; CHUNG, 2011; JOSHI; RAHMAN, 2017; ZAREMOHZZABIEH *et al.*, 2021). Newer conceptualizations of subjective norm, such as social norm, express broader social standards, related to what's socially acceptable or not in one's behavior (BAMBERG; MOSER, 2007; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020). Existing literature makes a distinction between social descriptive norm and social injunctive norm. The first relates to perceived prevalence of a certain behavior in a given situation, which has been found to affect behavior in a more direct and less rationalized manner. Meanwhile, injunctive norm express moral rules, which behaviors are perceived as approved or not socially (CIALDINI, 2001).

The internalization of social norm by the individual, expressed as a feeling of moral obligation and personal standards, is here comprised in personal norm or moral norm. Depending on the context, the moral and ethical aspect of norm may not be relevant, however that is probably not the case for sustainable purchase behavior, where moral considerations are usually present (CONNER; ARMITAGE; 1998). It is important to note that, when this internalized norm is present, their influence usually replaces the direct one of subjective or social norm (THOGERSEN, 2006). Key constructs representing internalized norm are personal norm, moral norm and ethical obligations and ideologies (SCHWARTZ, 1977; MOSER, 2015; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020). Personal norm has been found to influence altruism in attitude-behavior (SCHWARTZ, 1977), to moderate the relationship between pro-environmental belief and sustainable purchase behavior within cosmetics product category (JAINI *et al.*, 2020), to influence the purchase of sustainable personal care (MOSER, 2015; JANSSON *et al.*, 2010) and of organic food (DEAN *et al.*, 2012; LIU *et al.*, 2020).

### 3 METHOD

A qualitative approach with in-depth interviews was selected as a **research strategy** to uncover the motivating factors for sustainable purchase behavior of beauty and personal care products among young adults. Interviews took place in late second trimester of 2022. Due to COVID-19 pandemic concerns, which have pushed researchers worldwide to replace face-to-face with computer-mediated interviews (WALKER *et al.*, 2021), they were conducted online through Google Meet video conferencing tool. Previous

research has indicated that results quality, depth, and reliability remain the same in synchronous online interviews when compared to in-person (DEAKIN; WAKEFIELD, 2013).

Young adults 18 to 25 years old represent the **unit of analysis** in this research, having been considered a relevant target for research in the context of sustainability (MONTAGNINI *et al.*, 2016), as well as an important cohort in Brazilian total and economically active population (IBGE, 2018; IBGE, 2010). Within this cohort, emphasis was given to university students, as higher levels of education have been found to relate to broader knowledge regarding sustainability (KIM *et al.*, 2013) and consequently correspond to more realistic responses (VERMEIR; VERBEKE, 2008). In light of previously mentioned information, this study's participants were selected using a purposive technique (ETIKAN *et al.*, 2015).

The **selection** of participants obeyed the following criteria: 1) be a part of the unit of analysis population; 2) live in Brazil; 3) study at a university, 4) buy beauty and/or personal care categories on a regular basis (at least once every trimester). Given the exploratory nature of the present study, as well as feasibility, the selection was concentrated in Sao Paulo state. This choice reflected its relative importance in Brazil, accounting for roughly 20% of Brazilian young adults 18-25 years old (IBGE, 2021).

Participants were first contacted through the research team networking, receiving an invitation by email and/or cell phone with information on the research and a digital consent form. The last was digitally signed and sent to the interviewer before the interviews took place. Interviews were then conducted online by videoconferencing application Google Meet and recorded with the declared consent of participants who had previously signed the digital consent form.

Primary data collection comprised a set of thirteen **in-depth interviews**, totaling over 8 hours and 207 pages of transcripts (on average, 40 minutes per interview), with the total number of participants being defined by saturation. Considered a "gold standard" for purposive sample sizes in different qualitative research methods (SAUNDERS *et al.*, 2018), saturation was here considered as the moment new themes quit emerging from data collected (GIVEN, 2015). At this point, research team stopped contacting young adults and sending out invitations for new interviews.

A pre-arranged **pilot** with one participant from the target population took place before other interviews to test the interview guide. The outcome of this pilot was not included in the final results. However, learnings from it were used to improving the conversational flow and order of topics in the interview guide, which was revised and later used in final interviews. The interviewing group comprised thirteen Brazilian young adults, both male and female, living in São Paulo state and students from four different universities (Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing, Fundação Getulio Vargas, Pontifícia Universidade Católica and Universidade de São Paulo). Most participants reported living in a household with different family generations, especially with one or two parents and siblings. Virtually all mentioned

examples of sustainable practices, especially recycling, and sustainable purchase. Product categories mentioned encompassed food (organic, vegan, local), fashion (traceable origin) or cosmetics (cruelty-free, vegan, natural, less packaging).

Interviews were supported by an **interview guide**, which was crafted based on previous motivational factors identified in the literature review on sustainable consumption regarding different contexts (BARBAROSSA; DE PELSMACKER, 2016; LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017). Interview guide began with an overall introduction on the present research followed by a question on subject's own definition of sustainability, most relevant and urgent sustainability issues and its relation to consumption. Next, participant was asked about the use of beauty and personal care and, in case it was not mentioned, sustainable product versions and which characteristics make these products sustainable. Lastly, an open question on motivational factors believed to drive or inhibit sustainable purchase of beauty and personal care was followed up on. Motivational factors were then explored as to their relevance, context and related influences that framed their existence. Important motivational factors, selected from literature review and divided into internal, social and external factors (LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017) were used as references in such follow-up questions by the interviewer.

Interviews were recorded and its transcripts were analyzed using MAX QDA software, for coding process. **Data analysis strategy** was based on basic coding by Miles *et al.* (2014), comprising two cycles that use clustering techniques to enable focus on the most meaningful material to achieve analyzable units. A variable-oriented approach was applied, aiming to identify both the motivational factors previously listed in existing literature as relevant in sustainable purchase and consumption of FMCG, as well as additional ones. Relevant motivational factors previously identified in existing literature were not only used to feed interview guide but also constituted provisional coding references for analysis. In primary cycle coding, pre-identified codes aggregated raw data, while other valuable insights were clustered into new preliminary codes. A new literature review was used to complement theoretical basis and support second cycle analysis. In this phase, interviews were thoroughly analyzed and codes were confirmed or revisited, to better support data analysis and findings. Final list of codes and references for motivational factors to sustainable purchase were summarized in Figure 1.

The next section explores findings on such motivational factors and relationships with identified constructs from existing literature.

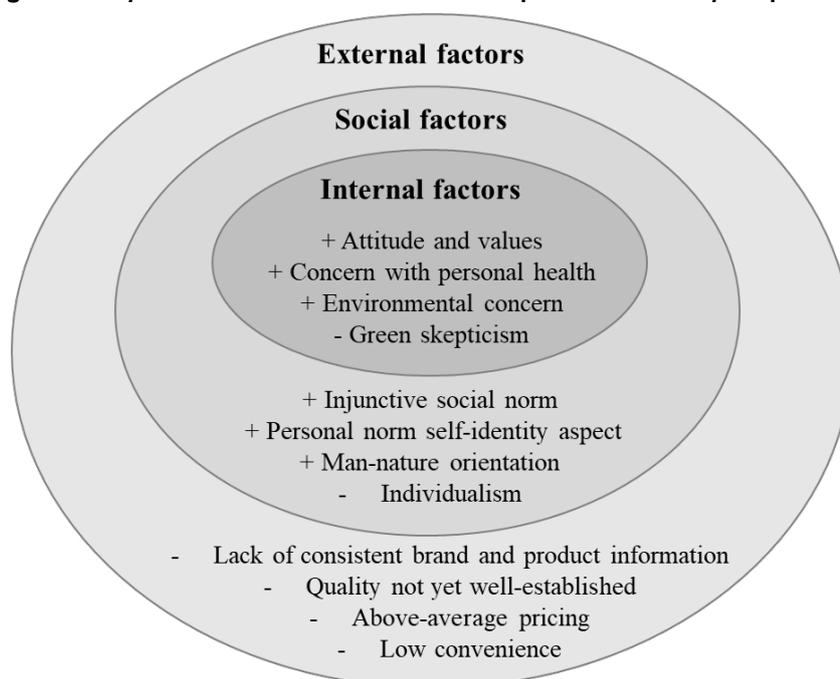
**Figure 1 – Motivational factors to sustainable purchase**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>Internal</b>	Attitude towards sustainability	MISHAL et al., 2017; HSU et al, 2017; SREEN et al., 2018
	Environmental concern and consciousness	PAÇO et al., 2013; RITTER et al., 2015; PAUL et al., 2016; MISHAL et al., 2017; EMEKCI, 2019; SADIQ et al., 2021; ZAREMOHZZABIEH et al., 2021
	Health concern and consciousness	BLOCH, 1984; VACCARI et al., 2016; LIOBIKIENE; BERTONIERE, 2017; SADIQ et al., 2021
	Green skepticism	MOHR et al., 1998; ALBAYRAK et al., 2011; LYON, MAXWELL, 2011; LEONIDOU; SKARMEAS, 2015; NGUYEN et al., 2019; SZABO, WEBSTER, 2021
<b>Social</b>	Collectivism	CHO et al., 2012; SREEN et al., 2018
	Man-nature orientation	CHAN, 2001; PAÇO et al., 2013; WANG et al., 2016; DIYAH; WIJAYA, 2017; SREEN et al., 2018; AFRIDI et al., 2021
	Personal norms	MOSER, 2015; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020; LIU et al., 2020
	Social norms	HSU et al, 2017; SREEN et al., 2018; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020; ZAREMOHZZABIEH et al., 2021
<b>External</b>	Confidence and Credibility	LIOBIKIENE et al., 2016; KUMAR et al., 2021
	Convenience level	RITTER et al., 2015
	Information and Knowledge	KANCHANAPIBUL et al., 2013; RITTER et al., 2015; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020; KUMAR et al., 2021
	Quality and price	MOSER, 2015; RITTER et al., 2015; HSU et al, 2017

## 4 FINDINGS

In-depth interviews with young adults resulted in key motivational factors within product categories of beauty and personal care, which were summarized in Figure 2, using an adaptation of the framework proposed by Liobikiene and Bernatoniene (2017).

**Figure 2 – Key motivational factors for sustainable purchase of beauty and personal care**



Source: Author, adapted from LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE (2017)

### 4.1 INTERNAL FACTORS

Within internal factors, the most relevant ones identified during interviews were attitude and values, personal health, environmental concern and green skepticism. Notably, **attitude and values** were present in young adults' speeches and influenced positively sustainable purchase, as well as **environmental concern**. Also presenting a positive influence was the **health** factor, which was identified as a powerful tool in motivating transition from regular products to sustainable ones. Participant RSS traded regular beauty and personal care products for sustainable ones in a health pursuit: *"I'm going to be honest. The first thing that made me want to change my cosmetics was not an environmental factor, even though it was very relevant to me. It was really a health factor. (..) It began as a 'selfish' reason to later become a broader reason."* Interviewee MAA mentioned buying a natural shampoo for the first time due to same reasons: *"I felt my*

hair became better. It was zero parabens and very good." And said sustainable benefits were a welcome plus: "It's less chemicals going down the drain, also less to contaminate (the environment)." Mentions to natural ingredients and healthier components were often the first associations with sustainable products, confirming literature on health occupying an important place within beauty and personal care (BLOCH, 1984; LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017; SADIQ *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, **green skepticism** was frequently mentioned as a key barrier, expressing consumers' distrust of green and sustainable communication and claims in beauty and personal care products, brands and corporations. Skepticism is defined as a cognitive response to a given context, therefore depending on green and sustainable contextual elements, such as content and format of communication (MOHR *et al.*, 1998; LEONIDOU; SKARMEAS, 2015). Overall perceptions could be expressed by JAA's statement: "There are a lot of brands that say and don't do. The consumer really has to go after (information), research if the brand, in fact, does what it says." According to her, the unrestrained usage of sustainability claims has undermined its credibility: "It seems like a pre-made speech that all companies vocalize, but there's no way to know if, in fact, they do it." In a couple of cases, participants even took it as a personal responsibility to warn others of greenwashing, advising against the brand to close relations, as a negative word-of-mouth or electronic word-of-mouth. Notably, greenwashing was considered a much bigger problem than simply not addressing sustainability issues, as JGH said: "In my point of view, it's ok to use a brand since there's no greenwashing". Many young adults concluded it's considered acceptable to buy from a brand that doesn't have sustainable practices, as long as it doesn't deceptively state so.

#### 4.2 EXTERNAL FACTORS

Key external factors, namely **price, quality** and **convenience**, are almost basic marketing enablers, however within beauty and personal care products they became prominent as inhibitors for sustainable purchase (DIDDI *et al.*, 2019). Above-average pricing was mentioned as frequent for sustainable products and sometimes a detractor from purchase, as TSP reflects: "Although a lot of people like the idea of sustainability, in Brazil money is an issue." She summed up two key barriers to sustainable beauty and personal care purchase: "Both the pricing and not having it available at the point of purchase get in the way." Not finding sustainable products easily at usual points of purchase has also been mentioned by others, as NGG: "Sustainable products have more difficult access. Either you buy it online at their website or you have to go to a specific store. If I need something quick, I'll go to the drugstore and sometimes there isn't any." Also, quality is not default when it comes to smaller players in sustainable beauty and personal care, as RSS put it: "I'm a little afraid of buying natural cosmetics from unknown brands, which I have no idea about its origin."

Another inhibiting factor mentioned by participants was incomplete or incongruous brand sustainability **information**, making consumer research a time-consuming activity. Having been commonly referred to during interviews, it confirms existing literature and previous studies in which consumers related not having the time for such extenuating information search (MEYER; SIMONS, 2021). Interviewee stated that simply searching on official channels for brand information is not enough to reduce suspicion of greenwashing, according to JAA: *"If I'm going to do it right, I'll have to sit and search, investigate and really understand the matter."* She then gives the example of contradictions she has found in deodorants products from the same brand, generating suspicion that sustainable versions were just like regular ones: *"You check the ingredients and they are very alike. The production chain is probably not that different, since it's the same brand, it's the same company, it's the same everything. It's probably just a tiny thing that is different."* She then classifies this process of understanding if the brand is in fact sustainable as tiring and overwhelming: *"Tiring for who really wants to buy only from brands that are sustainable."* The effect of contradictory information, as well as incomplete or doubtful, has been previously linked to consumer perceptions of illegitimate brand communication (HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020; KUMAR *et al.*, 2021). Interview results have identified it as a key detractor, especially since young adults easily search and find inconsistencies in brand and company sustainability communication.

#### 4.3 SOCIAL FACTORS

Encompassing both cultural and normative aspects, social factors were frequently identified as presenting an influence in sustainable purchase behavior, either positive or negative. Within these factors, **individualism** was one of the more prominent in this context, even among those more concerned with sustainable practices. Participant JAA, for instance, was adamant in defending sustainable purchase as an individual option: *"It's an individual responsibility, each one has their own choices, knows what he/she wants and prefers. I think each one should consider if it's something worth pursuing or not."* Sustainability was usually placed after expected self-related needs were fulfilled, therefore confirming literature that negatively connects individualism to sustainable purchase (WANG *et al.*, 2016; SREEN *et al.*, 2018). However, although individualistic elements were indeed predominant and negatively associated with sustainable purchase behavior as predicted, relational collectivism was also present, with a more complex influence. Same generation relational groups were almost always either incentivizing sustainable purchase behavior or sanctioning contrary behavior. Extended family, however, was mostly mentioned as exerting opposing pressure. Interviewee TSP stated that while travelling with family, she ends up giving up some sustainable purchase choices: *"I see myself many times yielding my principles, but I can't help giving in. I don't want to fight."* There were multiple situations in which young adults felt the same type of opposing pressures.

Cultural aspect of **man-nature orientation** (MNO) showed noteworthy resonance with young adults, with frequent mentions to animal welfare, environmental protection and waste concern. Virtually all interviewees mentioned concern for animal welfare, especially citing animal testing and cruelty-free labels, an absolute must-have for beauty and personal care products. As VEE put it: *"When it comes to sustainability, I think a lot about waste issues and animal testing."* And added *"I search for products that don't do animal testing."* MAA also mentioned cruelty-free label importance: *"I always look to make sure it's not tested on animals. This comes naturally to me. I always look for it."* Also, excessive packaging and waste generation that could end up in the environment was mentioned as the main reason for buying bar shampoo. These were the associations identified to play a role in sustainable purchase, as identified in literature (DIYAH; WIJAYA, 2017; SREEN *et al.*, 2018; AFRIDI *et al.*, 2021).

Category of norm also played a significant part in young adults' purchase behavior, for the most part positively influencing sustainable choices of beauty and personal care products. Most participants related both injunctive and descriptive **social norm** in groups from the same generation, especially friends and young relatives. Cousins were the reference in sustainable cosmetics for NGG: *"My cousins are health fanatics. Natural, sustainable... they just love these products. They recommend me oils, make-up, etc..."* Notably, both injunctive social norm incentives and sanctioning were associated to these categories, especially concerning cruelty-free, with young adults occasionally reporting fear of retaliation. JKK mentioned showing some friends a mascara and being criticized for using a make-up brand that did animal testing. She confessed feeling terrible for having purchased it: *"It's true, I didn't research it before. And I was really embarrassed, trying to make excuses for it. But I took it as a life lesson."* The exception relies in few groups and notably in extended family, where cynicism towards sustainable purchase prevailed. Young adults' behaviors, then, was mainly influenced by the norm more salient at a given moment (CIALDINI, 2001).

Also, same age relational groups in digital networks were observed to present descriptive social norm, with public demonstrations favoring sustainability. TSP, for instance, mentioned how seeing acquaintances sharing her sustainable values online has reinforced her motivation to purchase sustainably: *"Many times we feel encouraged when there are more people talking about the same things. You feel motivated to do more. This cause exists and this is so cool. You're exchanging experiences and receiving tips."* It reflects a case where behavior favorable to sustainability is made salient and one's attention is focused on it, turning it into a perfect match for reinforcing sustainable behavior (CIALDINI, 2001). Online interactions, in social circles or wider networks, were reported to influence product choice, with a noteworthy mention to social influencers. They were identified by JAA as her key reference for make-up and personal care products, including sustainable ones: *"They talk about the product they're selling. That it doesn't do animal testing, it's vegan and all else, I think it ends up influencing purchase."* Some participants even see themselves

as influencers in their social circles, spreading the message of sustainable consumption (even if they don't practice it).

Moreover, the presence of **personal norm** was noteworthy within beauty and personal care purchase, confirming literature on importance of personal norm (SHAW *et al.*, 2000; HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020). Participant TSP said her main motivation to purchase sustainable products came from her sentiment of guilt: "*Guilt. Guilt that it is humans that are destroying the world like that. I wanted to feel like I was, at least, doing something.*" Although moral rules were present in statements like TSP's, personal norm self-identity façade was revealed more relevant in interviews with young adults who saw themselves as sustainable people more often reporting to purchase sustainable beauty and personal care products (SHEPERD *et al.*, 1995; CONNER; ARMITAGE, 1998). Their online social 'self' was commonly associated with a public commitment to sustainability, to which they felt having the responsibility to live up to (CIALDINI, 2001). Clearly, they also see the internet as a tool to pressure brands and demand action from companies as well.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Young adults possessed knowledge and a personal positioning regarding sustainability, with most seeing themselves as influencing family and friends to buy more sustainably, as well as demanding action directly from brands on occasion. This study's main contribution is to identify key motivational factors for sustainable purchase of beauty and personal care in a key target, systematized in an existing framework divided in internal, social and external dimensions (Figure 2).

Young adults' sustainable involvement and positioning are in line with existing literature (CHARTER *et al.*, 2002; PAÇO *et al.*, 2013; MONTAGNINI *et al.*, 2016), along with a willingness to try and experience different options (ARNETT, 2014). Similar to what was previously found in literature, sustainability theme brought up time and again an environmental focus, rather than a social one (HOSTA; ZABKAR, 2020). Participants associated the concept of sustainability, as well as sustainable product characteristics, more closely to environmental impact and protection. Although a few mentions to dignified work conditions for employees occurred, spontaneous associations almost always were restricted to an environmental focus.

When describing which sustainable characteristics beauty and personal care products could present, it didn't necessarily link to their previous definition of sustainability or shared a consensus among them, with aspects such as natural ingredients, vegan, organic, healthy, and compliant with good social and environmental practices coming up. It confirmed previous studies that unveiled distinct sustainability elements for each product category (WHEALE; HINTON, 2007; BARBAROSSA; DE PELSMACKER, 2016), as well as young adults having varied definitions of sustainable beauty and personal care products

(MONTAGNINI *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, association between personal health and sustainable purchase behavior for these categories appeared as a significant motivational factor, including for those initiating transition from regular usual products. Health concern and consciousness, expressing one's orientation to wellness and personal health, were previously linked to these categories, as well as healthy consumption lifestyle (BLOCH, 1984; LIOBIKIENE; BERNATONIENE, 2017; SADIQ *et al.*, 2021). It had also been found to be important within the Brazilian market (VACCARI *et al.*, 2016).

Difficulties related to sustainable purchase behavior were usually within external factors, with inhibitors related to basic marketing drivers, such as attending customer's regular expectations on products benefits and availability at usual point of purchase. It seems to make the case for sustainability marketing myopia (LIM, 2017; DANGELICO; VOCALELI, 2017) happening in beauty and personal care categories. An additional barrier was identified as absence of consistent and reliable information on brand sustainability actions, leading to a lack of trust among young adults who suspected greenwashing; the green skepticism. Dependent on sustainable contextual communication aspects, green skepticism was identified in this cohort to inhibit sustainable purchase behavior, confirming previous studies (ALBAYRAK *et al.*, 2011; NGUYEN *et al.*, 2019; SZABO, WEBSTER, 2021).

Observed social factors in young adults' motivation towards sustainable purchase of beauty and personal care were closely related to the type of social environment they were in, considering key actors and prevalent cultural and normative factors. Young adults often share a household with family members, with whom they interact and negotiate in the physical social environment. As some products are bought for the whole household, purchase decision takes into account the household group, what may hinder sustainable choices. Social norm varies depending on the group, however injunctive social norm prevailed, either from close friends pressuring for sustainable purchase, or relatives pressuring against.

Social factors presented specificities in digital social environment, with interactions happening not only with friends, but several relational groups and social influencers, many of them followed and respected by young adults. Descriptive social norm is highly favorable to sustainability, as connections and social influencers present their best 'self' online, complemented by injunctive norm expressed by a constant fear of public sanctioning. Also, personal norm self-identity façade prevailed, with young adults conveying responsibility to live up to their sustainable social identities. The high importance of both physical and digital social environments indicates how complex generation Z's social reality is. Consequently, social relationships, interactions and influences are complex as well. A comparison between these two social worlds is summarized in Figure 3, as an additional contribution. It reflects how culture, social norm and personal norm were found to influence sustainable purchase in both cases differently and indicate a potential area for future studies.

**Figure 3 – Generation Z social environments comparison**

	<b>Physical social environment</b>	<b>Digital social environment</b>
<b>Key actors</b>	Family, Close friends	Friends, Influencers, Relational groups
<b>Culture</b>	Relational collectivism LTO's thrift	Individualism, MNO, STO's self-enhancement
<b>Social norm</b>	Low or contrary Injunctive predominant	High and favorable Descriptive predominant
<b>Personal norm</b>	Moral rules predominant Conflict with social norm	Self-identity predominant Public compromise

Moreover, relating to managerial contributions, some valuable insights from young adults' cohort also emerged. First, sustainability is generally positively associated by them with their generation and an inspiring lifestyle, while to relinquish it is considered to be outdated. Results also suggest that, when targeting these consumers, brands and companies should reflect on their sustainability communication strategy. Starting from the basic "walk the talk", trustworthy and honest information lays the ground for building a straightforward and reliable communication with young adults, as they are more perceptive to incongruous and misleading product claims. They are also skeptical, more willing to search deeper for information and eager to influence others, turning greenwashing into a full plate for negative word of mouth.

Additionally, social networks and social influencers are generally more reliable for this target than the brand itself talking about its sustainability practices. So, there's an opportunity in partnering up with those influencers known to approach sustainable beauty and personal care with knowledge and honesty. Opening up online communication channels might be another way to go, as young adults are eager to be heard and share doubts related to sustainable beauty and personal care products. Their groups with same generation members often are the ones to offer the support they rely on to sustain sustainable purchase behavior. Sustainable purchase lifestyle seems to make them feel better about themselves, and also in their groups.

## 5.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Limitations in this study are closely related to participants group characteristics, as interviews were restricted to thirteen young adults, students from four well-known universities located in São Paulo state, Brazil. Additionally, since methodological design comprised interviews, information was dependent on self-report made by participants, as there was no other way to check if behavior in fact took place as stated.

Future studies recommendations include other qualitative explorations, diving more narrowly into beauty and personal care product categories. Considering some products might be more associated to improving one's personal appearance, such as make-up, and others more related to health, as skincare, there could be distinctive differences in trade-off involving for example self-enhancement or personal health. Also, quantitative studies could also investigate if motivational factors findings in the present study, associated with beauty and personal care sustainable purchase, are representative of young adults' population. Finally, differences found between physical and digital social environments could be investigated in qualitative studies and experiments, investigating whether this is a general theme impacting social factors across products categories.

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