

Generation Z Consumption Behavior in Emerging Markets : A Bibliometric Review of Trends, Themes, and Research Gaps

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the global research landscape on Generation Z consumption behavior in emerging markets through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in the Scopus database. Using VOSviewer as the primary analytical tool, the study constructs and interprets keyword co-occurrence networks to identify dominant research themes, thematic clusters, temporal evolution patterns, and research density distributions. The analysis shows that consumption behavior is firmly anchored at the intersection of sustainability, perception, and emerging-market retail contexts, with China, India, South Africa, Brazil, and the Russian Federation forming the most prominent country-level clusters. The findings reveal that scholarship has grown around sustainability, willingness to pay, purchase intention, and electronic commerce, while overlay visualization indicates a recent shift toward electric vehicles, environmental values, and digitally mediated consumption. Density analysis confirms that consumption behavior and emerging markets constitute the most intensively researched constructs in the literature. This study offers a structured map of the field and identifies promising directions for future research on Generation Z consumers in developing economies.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, has emerged as one of the most consequential consumer cohorts in contemporary marketing and consumer behavior research. As digital natives who have grown up immersed in social media, e-commerce, and instant connectivity, Generation Z consumers exhibit distinctive consumption behaviors that differ markedly from those of preceding generations, including heightened sustainability awareness, value-driven purchasing, and a strong reliance on digital and social platforms for product discovery and decision-making (Sayem et al., 2025).

The relevance of Generation Z consumption behavior is particularly pronounced in emerging markets, where rapid urbanization, expanding middle classes, and accelerating digital adoption are reshaping consumption patterns across countries such as China, India, Vietnam, Brazil, and South Africa (Hoang, 2026). In these contexts, Generation Z consumers are not merely passive recipients of global consumption trends but active participants who blend local cultural values with globally diffused consumption norms, particularly around sustainability, status, and digital convenience (Nyagadza et al., 2026). Understanding how consumption behavior unfolds among this cohort in developing economies is therefore essential for marketers, policymakers, and scholars seeking to anticipate the trajectory of consumer markets over the coming decades.

The growing scholarly interest in consumption behavior within emerging markets has produced an increasingly fragmented and fast-expanding body of literature spanning retailing, sustainability studies, electronic commerce, and transportation research. As this literature accumulates, it becomes progressively more difficult for researchers to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the field's intellectual structure, dominant themes, and underexplored areas. Without a systematic synthesis, scholars risk duplicating existing efforts or overlooking critical research gaps regarding Generation Z's distinctive role within emerging market consumption (Demirci Orel & Kara, 2013), (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Bibliometric analysis provides a robust and reproducible quantitative method for mapping the intellectual evolution of a research domain. By examining publication patterns, citation structures, and keyword co-occurrences, bibliometric techniques allow researchers to identify influential publications, delineate thematic clusters, trace temporal shifts, and detect emerging research frontiers (Nguyen et al., 2019). Applied to consumption behavior in emerging markets, such techniques can reveal how scholarly attention has evolved from traditional retail and pricing concerns toward sustainability, digital commerce, and mobility-related consumption such as electric vehicle adoption (Zheng et al., 2022), (Nagaraj, 2021).

Despite the expanding literature on consumption behavior in emerging markets, comprehensive bibliometric reviews that explicitly map the field's structure in relation to Generation Z remain limited. Much of the existing research addresses specific product categories or single-country contexts, such as organic food purchasing in Vietnam (Li et al., 2020), luxury consumption among Indian millennials (Wongprawmas & Canavari, 2017), or green purchase behavior in Poland (S. Jain & Mishra, 2020), without offering an integrated view of the broader intellectual landscape connecting youth consumption with emerging-market dynamics. There is therefore a clear need for a structured bibliometric mapping that captures the scope of this research area and identifies promising directions for future inquiry.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting a bibliometric analysis of global research on consumption behavior in emerging markets, drawing on publication data extracted from the Scopus database. VOSviewer is used to generate network, overlay, and density visualizations that collectively provide a multi-dimensional view of the field's intellectual structure. This study aims to identify dominant research themes and thematic clusters, trace the temporal evolution of key concepts, examine the most influential publications, and highlight emerging areas of inquiry relevant to Generation Z consumers in developing economies.

Figure 2 presents the overlay visualization, where node color reflects the average publication year of articles associated with each keyword. Darker blue and purple tones denote keywords predominantly active in earlier years of the dataset (around 2019–2020), while green and yellow tones denote more recently active themes (2022–2023). Keywords such as retailing, urban area, sustainability, and china appear in darker hues, indicating that retail context and country level sustainability research represents an earlier and more established stream within the literature (Sayem et al., 2025), (Hoang, 2026).

In contrast, keywords rendered in green and yellow, including electric vehicle, electric vehicles, commerce, willingness to pay, and emerging markets, indicate themes that have gained prominence more recently. This pattern reflects a meaningful shift toward sustainable mobility and digitally mediated commerce as emerging-market consumers, including Generation Z cohorts, increasingly engage with electric vehicle adoption and online purchasing channels (Nagaraj, 2021), (Diallo, 2012). The continued bright coloring of sustainability-related terms alongside newer mobility and commerce keywords suggests that the field is converging around environmentally conscious consumption as a unifying contemporary theme (Li et al., 2020), (S. Jain & Mishra, 2020).

This temporal pattern carries particular significance for Generation Z oriented inquiry, as the keywords that have shifted toward brighter, more recent coloring, electric vehicle, commerce, and willingness to pay, align closely with the consumption priorities most frequently attributed to this cohort: environmental responsibility, digital-first purchasing, and value-conscious spending (Nguyen et al., 2019), (Jaiswal et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the persistence of darker-toned keywords such as retailing and urban area indicates that foundational, store-based retail research has not been displaced but rather continues to coexist with these newer themes, suggesting an additive rather than substitutive pattern of thematic growth in the field (Sayem et al., 2025), (Wongprawmas & Canavari, 2017). Taken together, the overlay visualization indicates that the intellectual trajectory of consumption behavior research in emerging markets is moving toward themes that are conceptually well-aligned with Generation Z consumption patterns, even though explicit cohort-based labeling has yet to catch up with this thematic shift (Nagaraj, 2021), (Li et al., 2020)

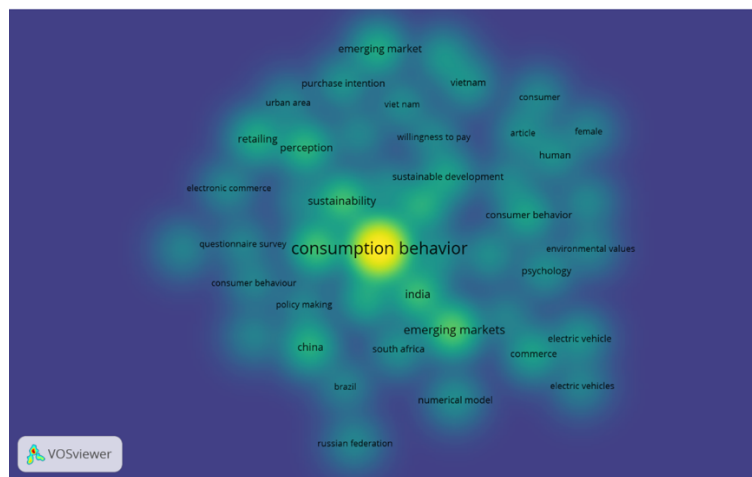


Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis

Figure 3 presents the density visualization, in which bright yellow regions indicate high concentration and research intensity, while green and blue areas reflect progressively lower density. The highest density region is concentrated tightly around consumption behavior, confirming its position as the dominant organizing construct of the field and the keyword most strongly interconnected with the surrounding conceptual domains (Demirci Orel & Kara, 2013), (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Moderate-density zones, shown in green, surround emerging markets, sustainability, india, and perception, indicating well-developed secondary research areas that attract substantial but less concentrated scholarly attention (Nyagadza et al., 2026), (Wongprawmas & Canavari, 2017). Peripheral regions, rendered in blue, encompass electric vehicle, electric vehicles, numerical model, russian federation, and policy making, suggesting that these areas, while active, remain frontier zones with considerable potential for future development, particularly as they relate to sustainable mobility and policy-oriented consumption research relevant to younger consumer cohorts (Nagaraj, 2021), (Diallo, 2012).

This density gradient, moving from a tightly concentrated yellow core to dispersed blue peripheries, mirrors a broader maturity pattern in the field: well-established constructs such as consumption behavior, emerging markets, and sustainability have accumulated dense networks of co-occurring research, while constructs more directly relevant to Generation Z, including electric vehicle and policy making, remain comparatively underdeveloped despite their conceptual proximity to this cohort's defining consumption values (Li et al., 2020), (Diallo, 2012). The low density surrounding russian federation and numerical model further indicates that quantitative, model-based approaches to emerging-market consumption remain underutilized relative to the dominant survey-based tradition, pointing to a methodological opportunity for future Generation Z studies to apply more rigorous predictive or simulation-based designs (Nagaraj, 2021), (N. Jain et al., 2023). Overall, the density visualization confirms that while the field's intellectual core is firmly established, its frontier zones, most closely associated with sustainable mobility and policy-driven consumption, represent the most promising space for advancing dedicated Generation Z research in emerging markets (Nguyen et al., 2019), (Jaiswal et al., 2022).

Citation Analysis

Table 1. Most Cited Article

Citations	Author and Year	Title	Publication
374	F. Demirci Orel, A. Kara (Demirci Orel & Kara, 2013)	Supermarket self-checkout service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty: Empirical evidence from an emerging market	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
362	L. Lundblad, I.A. Davies (Lundblad & Davies, 2016)	The values and motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption	Journal of Consumer Behaviour
274	H.V. Nguyen et al (Nguyen et al., 2019)	Organic food purchases in an emerging market: The influence of consumers' personal factors and green marketing practices of food stores	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health
206	R. Zheng, Z. Li, S. Na (Zheng et al., 2022)	How customer engagement in the live-streaming affects purchase intention and customer acquisition, E-tailer's perspective	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
186	S. Nagaraj (Nagaraj, 2021)	Role of consumer health consciousness, food safety & attitude on organic food purchase in emerging	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

		market: A serial mediation model	
181	P. Kaur, A. Dhir, R. Bodhi, T. Singh, M. Almotairi (Kaur et al., 2020)	Why do people use and recommend m-wallets?	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services
171	Q.T. Pham, X.P. Tran, S. Misra, R. Maskeliunas, R. Damaševičius (Trung et al., n.d.)	Relationship between convenience, perceived value, and repurchase intention in online shopping in Vietnam	Sustainability (Switzerland)
164	L. Li, Z. Wang, L. Chen, Z. Wang (Li et al., 2020)	Consumer preferences for battery electric vehicles: A choice experimental survey in China	Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment
164	L. Witek, W. Kuźniar (Witek & Ku, 2021)	Green purchase behavior: The effectiveness of sociodemographic variables for explaining green purchases in emerging market	Sustainability (Switzerland)
121	S. Bhardwaj, A. Kumar Kalia, S. Sushil (S. Jain & Mishra, 2020)	Luxury fashion consumption in sharing economy: A study of Indian millennials	Journal of Global Fashion Marketing

Source: Scopus, 2026

Discussion

The findings of this bibliometric analysis provide a comprehensive portrait of the intellectual landscape surrounding consumption behavior in emerging markets, with direct implications for understanding Generation Z consumers in these contexts. Taken together, the network, overlay, and density visualizations reveal a field that is both empirically mature in its retail and demographic foundations and dynamically evolving toward sustainability and digitally mediated consumption. The consistent prominence of consumption behavior, emerging markets, and sustainability across all three visualization modes confirms that the field's core architecture remains anchored in country-specific, survey-based investigations of how developing-economy consumers form attitudes and purchase decisions (Sayem et al., 2025), (Nyagadza et al., 2026), (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

A particularly significant finding concerns the growing scholarly attention devoted to electric vehicles, willingness to pay, and electronic commerce as emerging extensions of consumption behavior research. The overlay visualization demonstrates that these themes are among the most recently active in the dataset, signaling a temporal shift toward sustainability-oriented and technology-mediated consumption choices that are particularly salient for Generation Z, a cohort characterized by strong environmental values and digital-first purchasing habits (Nagaraj, 2021), (Diallo, 2012), (Jaiswal et al., 2022). This evolution suggests that researchers are increasingly moving beyond conventional retail-satisfaction questions toward examining how younger, digitally fluent consumers in emerging economies negotiate sustainability, status, and convenience simultaneously (Li et al., 2020), (S. Jain & Mishra, 2020).

The density visualization reinforces these observations by showing that while the conceptual core remains tightly organized around consumption behavior and emerging markets, peripheral zones such as electric vehicles and numerical model are gaining momentum, indicating fertile but still underexplored territory for

Generation Z-focused inquiry (Nagaraj, 2021). The strong presence of country clusters, particularly China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and the Russian Federation, reflects the substantial volume of single-country empirical studies that have driven the field, but also indicates a relative scarcity of comparative, cross-national studies explicitly centered on Generation Z cohorts (Wongprawmas & Canavari, 2017).

The citation analysis further clarifies which contributions have most shaped the field's trajectory. High-citation works on emerging-market service quality (Sayem et al., 2025), sustainable fashion motivations (Hoang, 2026), and organic food purchasing (Nyagadza et al., 2026) continue to anchor the literature, while more recent influential studies on live-streaming engagement (Demirci Orel & Kara, 2013) and electric vehicle preferences (Nagaraj, 2021) illustrate the field's expansion into digital and mobility-related domains that are especially pertinent to younger consumers. The cross-disciplinary reach of consumption behavior research is also evident, spanning retailing, food policy, transportation, and technology forecasting, confirming that emerging market consumption scholarship has established a broad and diverse footprint (Nguyen et al., 2019), (Zheng et al., 2022).

Theoretically, these findings indicate that consumption behavior research in emerging markets stands at an important juncture for Generation Z scholarship. The convergence of traditional retail and sustainability frameworks with digital commerce and mobility-related consumption creates opportunities for theoretical integration specific to this cohort. At the same time, the relative scarcity of studies explicitly labeled around Generation Z, as opposed to millennials or general consumer samples, points to a meaningful research gap that future studies should address through cohort-specific, comparative, and longitudinal designs (Witek & Ku, 2021).

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that consumption behavior in emerging markets has developed into an extensive and methodologically diverse research field, within which Generation Z-specific scholarship remains comparatively nascent. The bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed publications shows that the literature is strongly centered on the relationship between consumption behavior, emerging markets, sustainability, perception, and purchase intention, with retailing and survey-based empirical traditions anchoring the field's intellectual core.

The results also indicate that the field has expanded beyond traditional retail and pricing concerns. Recent studies increasingly connect consumption behavior with electronic commerce, willingness to pay, and electric vehicle adoption, demonstrating that current scholarship is progressively engaging with the digital and sustainability-oriented preferences that characterize Generation Z consumers in developing economies.

The citation analysis confirms the continuing influence of foundational emerging-market retail and sustainability studies, while the presence of more recent highly cited works on live-streaming commerce and electric vehicle preferences shows that the field is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and responsive to digitally mediated consumption patterns.

Overall, this study provides a systematic map of the intellectual structure, dominant themes, and emerging directions in consumption behavior research relevant to emerging markets. Future studies should give greater attention to explicit Generation Z cohort comparisons, cross-national designs, and the intersection of sustainability, digital commerce, and mobility consumption, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of how this generation is shaping long-term consumption trajectories in developing economies.

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