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Article

Sustainability Orientation of Generation Z and Its Role in Their Choice of Employer—A Comparative Qualitative Inquiry of India and United States

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Abstract: This article critically analyses and compares the sustainability orientation of Generation Z in India and the United States and examines its role in their employer selection, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Our qualitative study employs the Narrative Inquiry method and includes 30 participants—15 from India and 15 from the United States—aged between 19 and 26 years, who are either currently employed or preparing to enter the workforce within the next few years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. The findings of our research show that subjective norms and contextual realities can play a significant role in shaping Generation Z's personal attitudes towards sustainability and their perceived behavioural control in making important life decisions, such as choosing an employer. These findings contribute significantly to the literature on Generation Z's sustainability orientation and bear important implications for the higher education sector and employers.

Keywords: sustainability; Generation Z; choice of employer



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1. Introduction

This article critically analyses and compares the sustainability orientation of Generation Z in India and the United States (US) and the role it plays in choosing their employers, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Although the sustainability orientation of the Gen Z cohort is well-known (Gomes et al. 2023), research has shown that context might play a role in mediating this orientation (Dabija et al. 2020). Additionally, previous research has also shown that such orientation does not necessarily translate to the same extent when it comes to decision-making about important life choices (Starczewski et al. 2023). The role of sustainability orientation of Gen Z in their decision-making regarding choosing their employers has rarely been explored. Our research aims to critically analyse and compare the sustainability orientation of Gen Z in India and the United States and also analyse the role it plays in their decision-making when choosing their employers. Is there a contextual difference between Indian and American Gen Z individuals regarding such orientation and decision-making?

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Hemsworth et al. 2024), the three factors that affect an individual's behaviour and actions are perceived behavioural control (PBC), subjective norms (SN), and personal attitudes (PA). What are Generation Z's personal attitudes towards practicing sustainability, and how are they influenced by subjective norms—that is, by how they perceive the attitudes of others, particularly those of their peer group? Ultimately, it comes down to how much control they believe they have over the circumstances that determine their behaviour. With this study, we hope to better

understand how they respond to sustainability concerns through their decision-making, not just in low-stakes personal habits or consumption behaviours, but in major life decisions like choosing their employer.

The findings of our research make a very important addition to the literature on Gen Z sustainability orientation and show that subjective norms and contextual realities can play a significant role in shaping Gen Z's personal attitudes towards sustainability as well as their perceived behavioural control when making important life decisions such as choosing an employer. The findings also have important implications for higher education institutions, which play an important role in shaping attitudes, awareness and assertiveness towards sustainability, while highlighting the huge role played by informal education via social media and life experiences. The findings also inform employers about the extent to which sustainability can be used as a strategy to attract, engage, and retain Gen Z. The paper is structured into sections covering context, a review of existing literature on sustainability and Gen Z, findings, discussion of the findings, and conclusion.

2. Context

Why Generation Z, and why India and the United States? Let us address them one by one.

Although there is a slight conflict over whether Gen Z includes those who were born between 1995 and 2010 (Turcic 2022) or 1997 and 2012 (Eldridge 2024), there is no conflict over the fact that Gen Z constitutes nearly 30% of the world's population and is expected to account for 27% of the workforce by 2025 (Qureos 2024). This percentage is expected to grow further in the coming years. Therefore, for employers, they represent a huge and attractive set of future workers who need to be attracted and engaged. Currently, nearly two-thirds of Gen Z individuals are disengaged and looking to leave their current employers.

In addition, Gen Z is the most digitally savvy and social-media-consuming generation ever. All statistics regarding Gen Z show that they heavily consume content from various social media platforms at an average of 4 h a day (Briggs 2022). Therefore, informal influences via social media on them are substantial. Research also proves that they are vastly different from previous generations. Having lived through transformative times, they exhibit different mindsets, attitudes, and behaviours (Sengupta 2020). As a generational cohort, they value sustainability (Dabija et al. 2020; Burlea-Schiopoiu and Popovici 2024) and are driven by value and purpose in terms of their work (Francis 2022).

India and the United States not only have large Gen Z populations but also possess some of the largest and best higher education systems, respectively. India has the world's second-largest higher education system, with the most number of universities and the second-largest student intake, next only to China and the US (British Council 2024). The higher education system in the US is rated as the best in the world, considering the number of prestigious universities of global acclaim it houses (Tucker 2024).

India has by far the largest number of Gen Zs anywhere in the world, with roughly 375 million, making up nearly a third of the total population (Business Insider 2020), while the US has nearly 69.3 million Gen Zs (Statista 2023). Often dubbed the 'global talent powerhouse,' India is by far the largest supplier of talent in the world (UKIBC 2023). Approximately one million Indians join the workforce every year, providing educated and English-speaking talent. Indian talent has often been seen as an answer to solving the global talent crunch. Many of them are likely to be Gen Zs now, and hence including them in the study becomes even more compelling.

India and the US are also two of the largest economies in the world, each significant in different aspects. Therefore, a comparison of Gen Z individuals from these two countries presents an interesting case for academics, employers, and global leaders worldwide.

3. Literature Review

Generation Z has been called the 'most disruptive generation' ever by a Bank of America report that conducted a thematic survey of 14,500 consumers over 16 years in 2020,

along with data from Google trends, Euromonitor, and the UN. The reason for calling them the most disruptive generation ever is that this cohort's income is set to increase fivefold compared to millennials by 2031, significantly enhancing their economic power beyond that of previous generations. Generation Z wields power like no other generation, with 9 out of 10 Gen Z individuals residing in emerging economies, and a fifth living in India alone (McKeever 2020).

This generational cohort is also known as the 'woke generation' because they do not refrain from voicing their opinions on issues that they feel deeply about, such as racial injustice, climate change, and LGBTQ rights. They use social media liberally to discuss and debate social and political issues. Gen Z is more open to embracing diverse perspectives and like to network in online communities driven by a shared purpose (Mahapatra et al. 2022). Research evaluating the influences that affect Gen Z reveals that while governmental initiatives have little impact on Gen Z, social platforms, environmental awareness, and environmental consciousness result in the adoption of green practices (Agrawal et al. 2023).

Theoretical underpinning: The sustainability orientation of Gen Z can be explained through theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen 2009) and more accurately through the Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Ajzen (Ajzen 1985). According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, individual behaviours and actions are determined by three variables, namely, personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This study examines how Generation Z's personal attitudes align with practicing sustainability, how subjective norms, i.e., their perception of others' attitudes, especially their peer group, influence them, and the extent of control they perceive they have over the situations that affect their actions. Through this study, we will try to address how they act on their sustainability concerns by the choices they make, not just in purchasing and consumption behaviours but also in crucial life decisions such as choosing an employer.

3.1. Sustainability Orientation of Generation Z

For Generation Z, access is important, not ownership. They were born into a world that started adapting to models of accessibility rather than possession. Generation Z has seen the transition from ownership to accessibility such as renting cars, furniture, and houses rather than owning them. Sustainability and climate change issues are therefore top-of-mind concerns for Generation Z. They are a generation that has lived through the COVID-19 pandemic and has therefore seen first-hand the restorative power of nature when human beings are kept away from plundering natural resources, even for a short period of time.

Overall sustainability concerns are on the agenda for all generational cohorts and the demand for sustainably sourced goods is growing. In the UK alone, the market for ethically and sustainably sourced goods has quadrupled in the last 20 years, reaching GBP 41 billion in 2019 (Close 2021). A survey on the fashion industry by McKinsey and BOF in 2020 pegged sustainability as the number one challenge and the single biggest opportunity for the industry (BOF and McKinsey and Company 2020).

Generation Z has much to contribute to this eco-awareness. A study published in the Lancet Planetary Health journal in 2021 in which 10,000 young people aged 16–25 years from ten countries participated, revealed anxiety about climate change and disappointment in governmental response to this crucial issue (Hickman et al. 2021). Given this anxiety, concern, and awareness about climate change, this generational cohort is at the forefront of sustainability efforts.

Most Generation Z shoppers prefer brands that are sustainable and are willing to shell out more in order to buy sustainable products. They also wield a certain power over their parents in making them buy and consume sustainable products. Their influence on Gen X has increased Gen X's purchase of sustainable products by 24 percent in 2019 (Petro 2022).

As much we know by now that the sustainability orientation of Gen Z is quite strong and definitely stronger than previous generations, is this understanding of sustainability uniform worldwide, or does context play a role in determining the nature and depth of

this orientation? This, in turn, might significantly influence the decisions they make in their lives. Our research explores the sustainability orientation in two very different yet significant regions of the world—India and the US.

3.2. Sustainability and Employer Branding

Even before sustainability became a buzzword, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was an idea organizations reluctantly adopted, not just in response to governmental intervention but also due to increased public attention, including job seekers. In India, the CSR policy that mandated CSR spending by corporations ensured organizations became cognizant of their responsibilities towards people and society (Satpathy and Ali 2022). A study combining surveys and group discussions with 48 Vietnamese Gen Z individuals examined what emerging economies should do to attract and retain Gen Z talent in their organizations. They found that a strategic approach to CSR that integrates CSR into organizational policies is imperative to attract Gen Z talent into the workforce (Ngoc et al. 2022).

In a study conducted by Deloitte in 2021, 49 percent of Generation Z individuals stated that their personal ethics play a role in their career decisions. Although environmental concerns may not be one of the top reasons for choosing a job, they are definitely one of the reasons for leaving a job. Along with inclusivity, doing the right thing to protect the environment is a main concern for Gen Z, and they constantly view organizations from that lens. Twenty-eight percent of all respondents in a survey of millennials and Gen Z individuals said that they supported brands that were environment friendly with an equal number saying they denounced brands that were harmful to the environment (Deloitte 2021a). This study examines the effect of employer branding on Generation Z students' attractiveness and employer choices at unicorn start-ups in Indonesia.

In a study on 200 Gen Z respondents in Indonesia regarding employer branding attractiveness, interestingly the dimension that influenced employer attractiveness the most for Gen Z was ethics, diversity, and CSR activities, and not salary incentives (Prameka et al. 2021). Climate change and protecting the environment have been the most important concerns for Gen Z, as reflected in all surveys conducted on the cohort.

3.3. Sustainability Approach of Companies

Companies are waking up to the need for sustainable practices mostly driven by consumer choices. Even though companies understand the need for sustainable product development and sustainable packaging, the bottom line is how sustainable production links with company performance. A study conducted on 500 firms in India over a ten-year period (2008–2018) found no causality between company sustainability performance and corporate firm performance (Jha and Rangarajan 2020). Simply put, these companies see no financial benefit in embracing sustainability. This is also why 'greenwashing' is becoming a common phenomenon across the world. Greenwashing refers to the superficial commitment to sustainability to attract consumers by labelling products as eco-friendly or green when no effort has gone into sourcing or producing these products in a sustainable manner. While companies want to satisfy consumer needs for sustainable products, they are not willing to make any fundamental changes to produce built-to-last products or replace environmentally unfriendly practices. A study comparing sustainable development efforts of companies in the US vis-à-vis Indian companies found that while a greater percentage of US companies disclose sustainability information, comparatively more information is disclosed as per GRI's G3 guidelines in sustainability reports by Indian companies (Tuli 2013).

3.3.1. Environmental Dimension of Sustainability

The ubiquitous three-pillar or three-circle depiction of the three goals of sustainable development—environment, economic, social—seems to have come about through the Brundtland Report and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. However, there is a lack of theoretical development of the concept, even though it has gained signifi-

cant traction over the years and has become synonymous with the tenets of sustainable development in the literature. The coinage ‘sustainable development’ makes its appearance in a report titled ‘World Conservation Strategy’ published by IUCN in collaboration with UNEP and WWF in 1980. The report alludes to considering the economic, environmental, and social aspects when discussing a conservation strategy (Purvis et al. 2019), likely the origin of these three objectives of sustainable development.

All three dimensions of sustainability are interrelated and must be addressed in an integrated manner to protect the planet and make it liveable for future generations. The environment not only provides resources to run the economy but also absorbs the emissions and waste generated by it. Abuse of natural resources such as land, water, and air will have a long-term negative impact on economic growth and well-being. The environmental dimension of sustainability focuses on the use of natural resources in a sustainable manner. This involves sustainable consumption and production of goods, sustainable management of natural resources and working on alleviating the adverse effects of climate change. While Gen Z is more aware of climate change issues compared to earlier generations, there seems to be a gap between awareness and action. While they may better understand climate and sustainability concerns, having been born into a world that is witnessing the negative effects of ignoring these issues, their ability to act on such concerns may not be equally strong. According to a World Economic Forum article, in the US, more than 40% of Gen Z individuals rate climate change as one of the top three issues the world is facing, yet only 20% say they minimize their waste and only 37% think they reduce their energy and utility usage (Kreacic and Cooper 2022). Similarly, while 95% of Gen Z individuals say they are willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, they admit being swayed away by fast clothing to stay trendy and on top of fashion trends since these are cheaper and easily available. However, Gen Z more than any other generation is promoting apparel rental or collaborative apparel consumption. In their study, McCoy et al. (2021) state that Gen Z’s intention to embrace apparel renting comes from their desire to contribute to the sustainability cause and from family and friends endorsing it.

3.3.2. Economic Orientation of Sustainability

The primary goal of any business is to grow, meet its financial goals, be profitable, and create value for its employees and shareholders. With the changing economic, social, and environmental landscape, it has become imperative for organizations to also look at sustainable development and growth. The role of strategic thinking in building a competitive business that finds value in investing in sustainable practices and ensures that the bottom line stays positive cannot be overstated. A number of aspects must be considered in building such a business, including cleaner and sustainable production, waste-free packaging, and efficient last-mile delivery, in keeping with the legislation and policies of sustainability. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that investments in these areas are financially viable. Several research studies have advocated that sustainable production may not show profitability in the short term but proves to be profitable in the long term, with additional benefits of positive effects on the environment and enhanced visibility as a socially and environmentally conscious business (Andersson et al. 2022).

3.3.3. Social Orientation of Sustainability

Human beings are at the centre of the sustainable development agenda, which is why the social dimension of sustainability is of utmost importance. The social dimension of sustainability has moved on from focusing solely on poverty and employment to intangible indices such as happiness, satisfaction, equity, diversity, and quality of life (Talan et al. 2020). A conceptual framework of social sustainability proposed by Israeli researchers Efrat Eizenberg and Yosef Jabareen suggests that it comprises four interrelated concepts—equity, safety, eco-presumption, and urban forms (Eizenberg and Jabareen 2017). A just and safe environment that mitigates risks from social, spatial, structural, and physical threats and provides sustainable spaces to inhabit will go a long way in ensuring social sustainability.

3.4. Influence of Sustainability Orientation on Gen Z Decision-Making

Numerous studies have examined generational differences in environmental consciousness in the areas of green marketing, green tourism, apparel industry, etc. A study conducted in 2022 on Gen Z tourists travelling to Canterbury, New Zealand, indicates that Gen Z tourists are more likely to engage in sustainable practices including indulging in local food compared to previous generations. The study divided the 615 participants, segregated by generational demographic, into three segments based on environmental attitudes and behaviour toward travel—environmental, mixed-bag environmental, and low-environmental. The study found that approx. 82% of Gen Z respondents fall into the environmental or mixed-bag environmental categories, which came quite close to Gen X, with approx. 80% falling into these categories (Prayag et al. 2022). The findings of this study also corroborated earlier studies that used the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), employed since the 1970s to evaluate pro-environmental attitudes and orientations, suggesting that Gen Z exhibits stronger eco-centric views than earlier generations.

Let us now look at the different market segments where sustainability plays a key role. A recent study on young Bahraini women consumers also shows that they have generally positive attitude towards sustainable consumption, although their awareness regarding sustainability remains variable, although it is growing (Mehrotra et al. 2024). If we look at the fashion and apparel industry, an empirical study on US Gen Z consumers that advances the Theory of Planned Behaviour specifically on the use of Collaborative Apparel Consumption shows that “attitude plays a full mediating role between environmental knowledge, the need for uniqueness, and intention to use apparel rental services, while playing a partial mediating role between fashion leadership and intention to use apparel rental services” (McCoy et al. 2021). Coming to the food industry, a study on the sustainability expectations of Gen Z consumers with regard to food showed that while 92.8% of the US Gen Z consumers are concerned about the environment, they differ in their level of consciousness (Su et al. 2019). The study divided the Gen Z consumers into three groups—sustainable moderates, sustainable believers, and sustainable activists. Sustainable activists, comprising almost half of the entire population, believed in healthy eating choices more than the other two groups. Another study on Gen Z Indian and Polish individuals on their choice travel destinations and linkages to environmental concerns concluded that while Gen Z wants to make green tourism choices, they are seldom ready to shell out more money on eco-friendly places. However, they are certainly swayed more by the perceived green image of a destination (Nowacki et al. 2023).

Besides consumption decisions, another very significant decision is the choice of employer. Unfortunately, not much work has been done exploring the role that sustainability orientation of Gen Z plays in determining their choice of employers. A 2021 study on 291 students in Poland found that Gen Z women are especially concerned about the sustainable development activities carried out by prospective employers, as they are more ecologically conscious than Gen Z men (Rzemieniak and Wawer 2021). Another study conducted in Vietnam shows that Gen Z individuals are concerned more about the intangible aspects offered by the employer, such as workplace ethics and focus on CSR, compared to tangible ones like pay and bonuses (Thang et al. 2022). Although these studies are related, they primarily highlight the concerns or expectations that Gen Z might have towards their employers regarding sustainability practices or commitment to sustainability. However, they do not explore whether their choice of employers is determined by their sustainability orientation. Do context and subjective norms play a role in determining not only the depth of their sustainable orientation but also their personal attitudes and perceived behavioural control when making decisions about choosing their employers? Our research aims to fill this gap and thereby contribute to both theory and practice.

4. Materials and Method

Our research is a qualitative study that uses Narrative Inquiry method. By employing this approach, we were able to gather comprehensive data in a natural setting while

simultaneously keeping our attention on the opinions and experiences of the participants. Its interpretative character enabled us to make our own interpretations of the facts. To summarise, narrative research has facilitated the collection of data derived from real-life experiences and has also assisted in understanding the conclusions drawn from interpretations as opposed to explanations (Polkinghorne 1988; Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Gudmundsdottir 1997, 2001; Cresswell 2003; Moen 2006).

Data were collected using in-depth Interviews. A total of 30 participants took part in the research, 15 from India (refer to participant profile Table 1) and 15 from the US (refer to participant profile Table 2). All participants were aged between 19–26 years and belong to the Generation Z cohort. Some of them are already working or are going to work in a couple of years. The sample size was decided by the following the principle of data saturation (Fusch and Ness 2015). The saturation was reached at the 10th interview in each case. Beyond the 10th interview, no new data or themes emerged. However, for the purpose of rigor, a ‘stopping criterion’ of 3 more interviews was added to the original 10, taking the total interviews conducted to 13 for this research (Hagaman and Wutich 2017).

Table 1. Participant Profile (Indian Gen Zs).

| Participant Code (Assigned) | Age | Academic Qualification | Current Engagement (Student/Employed) | If Student, Then Going for Employment in How Many Years | If Employed, Then in Which Industry Sector |
|-----------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| IN_1 | 26 | M.B.B. S. | Studying and Working | NA | Health Sector |
| IN_2 | 22 | Bachelor of Hotel Management | Working | NA | Hospitality |
| IN_3 | 21 | BE in Computer Science | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_4 | 21 | BE in Computer Science | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_5 | 24 | Bachelor of Veterinary Science | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_6 | 22 | Master’s in journalism and communication | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_7 | 24 | Master’s in mass communication | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_8 | 19 | BE in Mechanical Engineering | Studying | 2 Years | NA |
| IN_9 | 21 | Bachelor of Business Economics | Studying | 2 Years | NA |
| IN_10 | 23 | Bachelor of Psychology | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_11 | 24 | M.B.A, Master of Arts-Clinical psychology | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_12 | 21 | BE Computer Science | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_13 | 25 | Bachelor of Design | Working | NA | IT-UX Design |
| IN_14 | 24 | Master of Arts | Studying | 1 Year | NA |
| IN_15 | 22 | Master of Arts, Clinical psychology | Studying | 1 Year | NA |

Table 2. Participant Profile (United States).

| Participant Code (Assigned) | Age | Academic Qualification | Current Engagement (Student/Employed) | If Student, Then Going for Employment in How Many Years | If Employed, Then in Which Industry Sector |
|-----------------------------|-----|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| US_1 | 24 | Graduated | Employed | NA | Banking |
| US_2 | 23 | N/A | Employed | NA | Health Care |

Table 2. Cont.

| Participant Code (Assigned) | Age | Academic Qualification | Current Engagement (Student/Employed) | If Student, Then Going for Employment in How Many Years | If Employed, Then in Which Industry Sector |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| US_3 | 18 | Freshman | Student/Employed | NA | Hospitality and tourism. |
| US_4 | 21 | Freshman | Student/Employed | NA | Hospitality and tourism. |
| US_5 | 19 | Sophomore | Student/Employed | NA | Hospitality and tourism. |
| US_6 | 25 | Graduated with a B.A. in Elementary Education | Employed-School District | NA | Education |
| US_7 | 21 | Senior | Student/Employed | NA | Retail/Walmart |
| US_8 | 18 | Freshman | Employed/Student | NA | Sales/Lowes |
| US_9 | 19 | Freshman | Student | 4 years | Sports Medicine |
| US_10 | 25 | Certification Program | Employed | NA | Education |
| US_11 | 19 | No | Employed | NA | Food Industry. |
| US_12 | 18 | no | Employed | NA | Food industry |
| US_13 | 18 | Freshman | Student | 5 years | Art |
| US_14 | 19 | Freshman | Student/Employed | NA | Sports Marketing |
| US_15 | 19 | Sophomore | Student | 2 years | IT |

4.1. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, consistent with [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) recommendations, was used in an open-ended manner to make sense of the participant's narratives. Researchers must go through several stages in order to develop a theme analysis, according to [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) approach. Finding probable themes requires transcription of the interview and reading and rereading of the transcripts. From the transcript analysis, broad themes arose and were formalized. Further investigation of those codes was done at the second level of analysis to find overarching, higher-level themes. The quotes were recognized as being consistent with the overall themes during the third stage of the analysis.

4.2. Research Ethics and Confidentiality

It was entirely voluntary to participate in the study. Prior to the interview, the participants signed a consent form after being informed of their rights. With the participants' consent, interviews were taped and kept on a password-protected computer that the researchers alone could access. Entire participant confidentiality was guaranteed, and all research ethics were adhered to throughout the investigation to preserve participant anonymity. Data were stored on a password-encrypted computer. Peer debriefing was utilised to improve the accuracy of accounts, and stories that had been restored were returned to their respective owners to verify the authenticity of the research ([Cresswell 2003](#)).

5. Results

5.1. Findings about Indian Generation Z

Thematic analysis of the data generated from in-depth interviews with Indian Gen Z members resulted in the generation of eight themes (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Codes and Themes (Indian Gen Zs).

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes | | |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Something green | Sustainability is caring for environment using 3 Rs—Reduce, reuse, recycle | Theme 1: Sustainability is Environmental | | |
| Healthy for environment, people, and nature | | | | |
| Green to sustain | | | | |
| Protection of environment | | | | |
| Recycling of materials | | | | |
| Reuse of recycled materials | | | | |
| Minimize use of plastics | | | | |
| Adidas and Woodland give paper bags | | | | |
| Protect ecosystem | | | | |
| Less endangering flora and fauna | | | | |
| Reduce automobiles that use fossil fuels | Reducing carbon footprint | Theme 2: Challenging and Existential | | |
| Detoxification of planet | | | | |
| Renewable energy | | | | |
| Sustainability and development are oxymorons | Sustainability is challenging | | Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain | |
| Sustainability is costly and time-consuming | | | | |
| New trend | | | | |
| Differs from person to person | | | | |
| Important for survival | Existential and making future proof world | | | Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain |
| Plays a major role | | | | |
| Save resources for future generations | | | | |
| Judicious use of resources | | | | |
| Future not present focused | | | | |
| Protect planet | Sustainability for surviving | Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain | | |
| Existential need | | | | |
| Need to protect and maintain | | | | |
| Turtles are dying, save turtles | | | | |
| Plastic is hazardous | Sustainability for Thriving | | Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain | |
| Reduce global warming | | | | |
| Reduce CO ₂ emissions | | | | |
| Global warming and climate change | | | | |
| Climate Crisis | | | | |
| Finite resources | Sustainability for maintain | | | Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain |
| Depleting natural resources | | | | |
| We will run out of things we require | | | | |

Table 3. Cont.

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes | |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| School topic environmental studies | Little or no formal education on sustainability | Theme 4: Sustainability is self-taught (Education-gap) | |
| Read on Quora | | | |
| Someone in Bangalore uses plastics to make roads | | | |
| Taught within CSR model | | | |
| Course about sustainable development | | | |
| Mother practices sustainability at home | Learnt through experience | Theme 5: Self-Sustainable behaviour | |
| Not much in college | | | |
| Little knowledge | | | |
| Use shampoo bars instead of bottled ones | Reuse | | |
| Carry a cotton bag for shopping | | | |
| Use Tote bag instead of animal skin bag | | | |
| Reuse old garments, wear at home, then use as duster | | | |
| Reduce waste | Reduce | | |
| Use less plastic | | | |
| Not pollute water | | | |
| Reduce use of plastic cutlery | | | |
| Avoid water spillage at home | | | |
| Waste management | Recycle | | Theme 6: Expectations Gap |
| Use bamboo toothbrush | | | |
| Want others to behave in a sustainable way | Advocate Sustainability | | |
| Convenience based | | | |
| Selfish thinking won't help anyone | | | |
| Just Awareness is not enough—ban plastics | | | |
| Advocate sustainability | | | |
| Share videos on social media | | | |
| Stop people from littering | | | |
| Do not buy more than you need | Low sustainability behaviour among senior generations | | |
| Old people are not exposed to sustainability | | | |
| My grandmother has no idea | | | |

Table 3. Cont.

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| When I am in good stage, I will do | | |
| Not much of a deciding factor now | | |
| Sustainability will be a criterion for me, but first priority is to secure a job | | |
| Make judgements once part of the company | Job insecurity and unemployment trumps sustainability | |
| Evaluate sustainability practices of company once part of it. | | |
| Fear of ethical dilemma, too much stress | | Theme 7: Expectation versus Reality |
| Can make a difference once part of the company | | |
| Character of employer matters | | |
| Look for an employer who preferably uses sustainable practices | Expect employers to be sustainable compliant | |
| Sustainability is definitely my criteria | | |
| Companies should adopt basic sustainable practices | | |
| No not really | | |
| No conscious effort to collect sustainability related information about prospective employers | No conscious effort to research information about employer sustainable practices | Theme 8: Concerned but not conscious |
| Not about sustainability | | |
| Not made conscious deliberate effort but sustainability is super important. | | |
| Greenwashing or genuine efforts | Concerned about greenwashing | |

Theme 1: Sustainability is Environmental

Indian Gen Z members interpret sustainability as something that has to do with saving the environment. When asked what they understand by the word sustainability most of them refer to aspects like sustaining green cover, protecting the environment and the ecosystem, minimizing use of plastics, and minimizing damage to the flora and fauna.

‘Sustainability is anything that helps protect the environment and consuming resources in a way that there will be enough for the future generations as well. We need to protect our environment and conserve the ecosystem (IN_5)’

They emphasize on the 3Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle and thereby reducing the carbon footprint.

Theme 2: Challenging and Existential

Sustainability is an existential challenge according to the Indian Gen Zs. They feel sustainability is future not present focused and important to save the planet from extinction, saving it for the future generations. Judicious use of resources, especially the natural resources is significant according to them.

‘Sustainability does matter. We need green to sustain and a green planet to survive in this world (IN_2)’

They also feel that sustainability is rather a new trend and at times is costly and time consuming.

Theme 3: Sustainability is important to survive, thrive and maintain

Further emphasizing on the importance of sustainability, Indian Gen Zs feel that sustainability is important for us to survive, thrive and maintain the human race and planet earth. Sustainability is a survival issue as they feel irreversible damage to environment and wildlife has the potential to lead the planet earth towards extinction.

‘So, the next 100 years the average temperature in our country may be around 40 to 42 degrees Celsius. So, we have to look into the factors like reducing CO2 emissions and other ways to protect the environment (IN_4)’.

The attribute climate crisis to lack of attention paid to sustainability and recommend reducing use of plastics, reducing CO₂ emission and warn about the finiteness of the natural resources which if not used in a sustainable way, may become unavailable in the future.

Theme 4: Sustainability is self-taught (Education-gap)

Indian Gen Z bring to the fore that the formal education system does not educate them about sustainability. Baring a random course in school or in university, there is no systemic effort to educate the next generation on what is sustainability and why it is important. This exposes a huge lacuna in the education system in the country, something that needs to be addressed immediately.

‘In school we were taught a subject called environmental studies wherein we studied about pollution harming the environment. I have seen my mother practice sustainability at home. But there was not much in college (In_1)’

‘We studied about the CSR model, but that is the only thing close to sustainability that we have studied in our college. Even while studying CSR model I felt we were being brain-washed or like being told about the direction that we were supposed to choose (IN_6)’.

Most of the sustainability is self-taught for this generation. They have learnt this through experience, through social media or watching their parents avoiding plastic bags or through other media channels.

Theme 5: Self-Sustainable behavior

Despite lack of formal education on sustainability, their own experience has made them care about it. And most of them in their own small ways engage in some or other kinds of sustainable behavior. This may be in terms of carrying own shopping bag, use of Tote bag, or using the old garments as duster in the household or using the white side of one-side printed sheets for taking notes or scribbling (reuse).

‘I try to use less plastic. I also segregate my waste at home (IN_15)’

‘I always turn-off my car at a traffic red light. Whereas 99% of the people keep running the engine of their cars blasting loud music from their stereos and honking mindlessly (IN_12).’

This may also be in terms of reducing water wastage at home, reducing use of plastic cutlery, using less plastic, etc., (reduce). And it may also be in terms of intelligent waste management in their home, turning organic wastes into garden manure, or using bamboo toothbrushes, etc., (recycle).

Theme 6: Expectations Gap

This theme reveals a sort of expectation gap among Indian Gen Zs when it comes to sustainability. While they actively advocate sustainability, they find older generational members not aware or caring enough for the same.

‘I always see my family members or friends leaving lights or fans on in a room that is no longer in use. I keep telling them to switch-off the lights or air-conditioners when they are not using it any longer (IN_10)’.

Gen Z members share videos on sustainability, do not buy more than they need and want others to behave in a sustainable manner. But at the same time, they feel that behaviour of most people is not positive towards sustainability. It is still a lot based on individual convenience. They feel that just awareness is not enough, and also selfish behaviour of people will not help.

Theme 7: Expectation versus Reality

In terms of choice of employer, while they expect their future and present employers to be sustainability compliant, sustainability is yet not their first criteria or a compulsory criterion for choosing their employer. They expect their employers to adopt at least basic sustainable practices and would like to preferably choose an employer who are sustainable and incorporate sustainability in their practices.

‘Well, I think company where I work should have some ethical standards when it comes to sustainability, but I do not have that as a essential criteria for choosing my employer. I have an educational loan and getting a job is my first priority (IN_9)’

‘I feel I will have more credibility to advocate sustainability to my employer once I am a part of the company and have proven myself (IN_11).’

‘It is not based on sustainability but more on the kind of work that I would like to do, that would be in turn good for my career progress (IN_12)’

Having said this, the job insecurity literally trumps sustainability concerns. Although sustainability orientation of the employers is a criterion for them, yet it is not the deciding factor while choosing an employer. Their first focus is on securing a job. Most of them feel that once they have secured a job and solidified their position within the company, they will evaluate the sustainability practices of their employer and try to make a difference.

Theme 8: Concerned but not conscious

This theme further highlighted the conundrum of the Indian Gen Zs when it comes between caring and determining the sustainability orientation of their employers. They appear to be concerned about aspects like greenwashing by many businesses and would like their employers to be genuine about sustainability.

‘I know my dream companies that I wish to work for since I want to focus on Psycho Oncology and work with people suffering from cancer. I have searched good deals of information about these companies, but not much on their sustainability practices (IN_14).’

But since sustainability is still not the deciding factor for them to choose their employers there is no conscious effort on their part to research information about employer’s sustainable practices.

5.2. Findings about American Generation Z

Thematic analysis of the data generated by the in-depth interview of the American Gen Z members resulted in generation of seven themes (refer to Table 4).

Table 4. Codes and Themes (US Gen Zs).

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Maintain something over a period | Preserving | Theme 1: Sustainability is environmental, social balanced with economic development |
| Preserve something | | |
| Make it last | | |
| Able to sustain and support process over time | Fulfilling present needs without compromising future | |
| Effort to take care of next generation | | |
| Ability to provide for future generations | | |
| Helps to thrive the society | | |
| Fulfilling present needs without compromising future generations. | Balancing social and economic wellbeing | |
| Ensure balance between economic growth | | |
| Environmental care | | |
| Social well being | | |
| Environmental and social responsibility | | |

Table 4. Cont.

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To survive | Survive and for a better future | Theme 2: Sustainability ensures stable present and better future |
| For our future | | |
| To be more agile in future | | |
| Better world | | |
| For taking care of needs of future generations | | |
| Take care of planet and future generations | | |
| Harming the planet | | |
| To meet our future needs | | |
| Need earth for a long time | Preserve scarce resources | Theme 3: Sustainability is taught and experienced |
| Depleting natural resources | | |
| Learn to use resources better | | |
| Risk of depleting our resources | Formal education covers sustainability | |
| Formal education | | |
| Sustainability oriented curriculum | | |
| Learned about UN SDGs | | |
| Interested in learning more. | Learnt through experience | |
| Learning through experience—beach cleanup | | |
| Community campaign and volunteering | | |
| Learnt about using food scraps in university as orientation leader | Leading a healthy lifestyle | Theme 4: Self-Sustainable behaviour |
| Healthy Lifestyle | | |
| Sustainable lifestyle | | |
| Recycling | | |
| Conserving energy | | |
| Reducing my wastes | | |
| Reuse and recycle as much as I can | | |
| Preserve energy and water in daily life | | |
| Reusable water bottles | Reduce, reuse, and recycle | |
| Everyone to do their part | | Take responsibility for sustainability |
| Community effort to take care of planet | | |
| Everyone has their own opinion | | |
| Expect family and friends—at least become aware | Become aware | |

Table 4. Cont.

| First-Order Codes | Second-Order Codes | Themes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How they treat employees | Sustainable work environment | Theme 6: Employers need to have sustainability values and practices |
| Work environment | | |
| Sustainable for my lifestyle | | |
| Consider an employer’s sustainable orientation | | |
| One who respects employees and community | | |
| Reasonable expectations | Values alignment | |
| Same beliefs and values about sustainability | | |
| Work for a company that aligns with my personal values | | |
| Sustainability should be one of their strengths | | |
| Committed to making a positive impact on the environment | | |
| Social, economic and environmental—3 dimensions of sustainability important | Social, economic and environmental | |
| Should be socially and environmentally responsible | | |
| Watching out for the community—DEI | | |
| Look how they impact the society environmentally and socially | Watching out on how companies have social and environmental impact and promote economic justice | Theme 7: Conscious effort to research information about employer sustainable practices |
| Yes, I do make a conscious effort. Mental health is important | | |
| Do they promote social and economic justice | | |
| As much as I can | Research about sustainability practices | |
| best do my part | | |
| Research companies about their sustainability practices | | |

Theme 1: Sustainability is environmental, socially balanced with economic development
 The American Gen Zs have a much broader understanding of sustainability. They interpret sustainability in the literal sense of preserving something for the future, making it last and ability to sustain and support something for a long time. Sustainability for them is fulfilling the present needs without compromising the future, trying to take care for the future generations.

'Sustainability is the effort to take care of the future generations, ensuring a balanced economic growth while focusing on environmental care and social wellbeing (US_3).'

'Sustainability for me is when there is balanced use of resources. The economic and environmental dimensions would be like caring for the community, good ethics, creating a safe environment for their customers and making responsible profits (US_12).'

Sustainability is not only environmental protection and care for them. American generation understand sustainability as social and economic wellbeing of the individuals. In other words, ensuring a balanced economic growth.

Theme 2: Sustainability ensures a stable present and better future

Sustainability is not only an existential need according to the American Gen Zs, but also a way to secure a better future for all.

'Okay this might sound weird, but I like reusable water bottles. Like I said, I think it takes leadership for somebody to say hey I'm gonna take this seriously as we live in a world

where we are trying to figure out why we have all these chemicals that are causing several health problems (US_7).'

'Sustainability is an important agenda for the world, it is crucial because it addresses the challenges of climate change, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and social inequality. By adopting sustainable practices, we can strive for a better future, preserve the planet's resources and create more equitable society (US_15).'

Not harming the planet, preserving the depleting natural resources is considered significant by them. Taking care of the planet and of the people, while making profit encompasses why they consider sustainability as important.

Theme 3: Sustainability is taught and experienced

Formal education is doing a lot in terms of prepping American Gen Zs about sustainability. The university and school curriculums are mapped to UN sustainable development goals. Most Gen Zs who were interviewed reported having been provided a good understanding of sustainability in their schools and colleges.

'Yes, we have been taught about sustainability in our college and that has influenced my idea about it as well, to be more responsible. Just help others and adjust our living for making a better environment and society (US_12).'

'Yes, this type of education influenced my understanding of sustainability and inspired me to want to adapt these behaviors. It provided a broader perspective in the interconnectedness of environmental. Social and economic systems as well as importance of balancing these dimensions for long-term well-being (US_15).'

American Gen Zs have also learnt about sustainability through their experience like beach cleanup campaigns or learning about using food scraps in university as orientation leader. Many have also worked as volunteers that have helped them learn about sustainability.

Theme 4: Self-Sustainable behavior

American Gen Zs do exhibit sustainable behavior in their day-to-day lives. First and foremost,

they consider having a healthy lifestyle as a self-sustainable behavior. They think healthy lifestyle is a sustainable lifestyle.

'I try to reuse and recycle as much as I can. I also make an effort to preserve energy and water in my daily life (US_4).'

'I do consider my behavior sustainability-oriented because of the practices that I use to sustain. To be more sustainable—spiritually through my relationship with God, cognitively with the knowledge that I acquired from my university and socially through my family and my own experiences. My love for art helps me manage my stress and worldly preciousness for the world ((US_13).'

Additionally, they also practice reduce, reuse, and recycle in their day to day lives wherever possible. Whether it is in terms of reducing their waste, using reusable plastic water bottles, or trying to preserve energy, they believe everyone must do their part to be sustainable.

Theme 5: Practicing sustainability with everyone's responsibility

American Gen Zs believe that although everyone has and can have their own opinion on sustainability, yet sustainability is everyone's responsibility. People should own up responsibility for their role as a way to make their communities more sustainable.

'Sustainable Development is critical for our planet. If we don't care for our planet who else will? I expect my family and friends to care about sustainability and practice it in their small way, since it gives us a sense of purpose and we need efforts to create a more sustainable future (US_8).'

'I believe everyone should be responsible by themselves when it comes to sustainability, since it improves the overall quality of life and a better future for all of us (US_8).'

They expect at least their friends and family members to become more aware about sustainability, practice and support the same in their daily lives.

Theme 6: Employers need to have sustainability values and practices

When it comes to the decision about choosing employers American Gen zs want to only work for employers who have similar beliefs and values on sustainability as they have personally. They want their employers to have sustainability as part of their core agenda and strength and a company that is committed to making a positive impact.

‘I look for how they treat their employees, what kind of work environment they have, the turnover rate and why employees are leaving when I choose my employer (US_1).’

‘I collect as much information as I can about my employer’s sustainability practices. I place importance on social issues such as poverty, inequality and access to basic amenities like clean water and education. I guess that will be more social and environmental (US_2).’

‘As a black woman myself, I think employers should care about social sustainability. They should care about black rights and must consider black history an important part of America’s history. I advocate critical rights and whenever I have applied for a job if the employer has asked me to take-off black rights and social sustainability from my resume, I have always told them that I am not for their position (US_6).’

‘The work environment needs to be non-toxic, whether they pay annual insurance, and how they treat their employees in general. Besides, what they do for the community and preserve the environment. These all are very important for me (US_7).’

They believe that their employers should address all three aspects of sustainability—social, economic and environmental. In other words, they should be socially and environmentally responsible while trying to make economic gains. They also want employers to provide them a sustainable working environment, that is not only sustainable with respect to their lifestyle but a company that respects its employees.

Theme 7: Conscious effort to research information about employer sustainable practices

Since sustainability orientation of the companies is an important criterion in them choosing them as employers in the first place, they make a conscious effort to research information about their sustainability practices.

‘When it comes to job you don’t want to do something that is not right for you. You probably want to do something long-term that you can be proud of when it comes to business reputation. I look for a more financially stable environment, job profile, commute distance, the work that they do for community and how long they have been in business (US_14).’

‘Yes, I do research about sustainable practices of my employers. I work at a restaurant and environmental sustainability is really important for our industry. I do want to know that the restaurant with whom I work, do they care for employees and the environment (US_11).’

They are watching out on how companies have social and environmental impact and promote economic justice. They also check how much a company promotes and supports mental health, equal work opportunities and a non-discriminatory work culture that does promote DEI.

6. Discussion

Our findings show that both Indian and American Gen Z individuals consider sustainability important and integral to their beliefs and value systems. Further, both Indian and American Gen Zs agree that sustainability and caring for the environment are everyone’s responsibility. They also agree that sustainability is an existential need and a way to preserve the future while caring for the present. Gen Z as a cohort is far more oriented towards sustainability than previous generations (Dabija et al. 2020; Ribeiro et al. 2023).

While the formal education system may not have impacted them in the same way when it comes to learning about sustainability, the informal system has influenced them

in the same way. Both Indian and American Gen Zs have learned about sustainability through their own experiences and social media. Research conducted on Indian students also showed that the majority felt the “hidden” informal curriculum taught them more about sustainability than the “formal” program (Millicent et al. 2022). Another study showed that social media content plays a big role in developing sustainable habits and sustainable consumption behaviours among Gen Zs (Confetto et al. 2023). Similarly, another study showed that eco-friendly sustainable practices by a popular coffee shop chain had a positive impact on the Gen Z’s brand attachment, brand advocacy, and brand loyalty (Ko and Jeon 2024).

Our findings also show that both Indian and American Gen Zs engage in sustainable behaviours in their daily lives. They believe that sustainability is everyone’s responsibility and actively advocate for it through their participation as volunteers in community events and by sharing content on social media. Additionally, they strive to raise awareness about sustainability among their immediate circles, such as parents, family, and friends.

Having said this, we also found significant differences between Gen Zs in India and the United States in terms of their sustainability orientation and practices, especially when it comes to choosing their current and future employment.

Our findings show that Indian Gen Zs have a very narrow view of sustainability, equating it solely with environmental and green planet aspects. In contrast, American Gen Zs have a much broader view of sustainability, considering social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, as well as caring for the wellbeing of the individual and supporting the community. Research literature also shows evidence that sustainability perceptions of Indian Gen Zs are heavily skewed towards environmental aspects (Michel et al. 2023; Palanichamy et al. 2024). Similarly, studies indicate that American Gen Zs understand sustainability beyond just environmental concerns (Spearman and Loose 2023).

Our findings show that Indian Gen Zs have mostly self-taught themselves about sustainability. Formal education has played a minimal role in educating them on sustainability, with most learning occurring through personal experience and social media. In contrast, our findings show that American Gen Zs have been prepared well about sustainability through the formal education system, receiving good understanding about sustainability through their schools and colleges. Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are the third largest in the world in terms of student intake, behind China and the US. Despite this, sustainability has yet to be embedded into their curricula. It was only in 2020 that the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed a framework for sustainable campuses, which is still far from being fully implemented. Most of the progress made has been limited to cosmetic paperwork (Rana et al. 2023). Literature shows that compared to this, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been incorporated into research, courses, and community involvement programs at institutions throughout the United States since 2015. The SDGs are now commonplace for many college students, owing to the concerted efforts of faculty and staff, new curricula, partnerships, and local advocacy campaigns (Alaoui 2021; Leiserowitz et al. 2011). This also explains the earlier difference between Indian and American Gen Zs regarding their perspectives on sustainability—the former have a narrower view, while the latter understand it in all its dimensions.

While sustainability is considered important by Indian Gen Zs, it is still not a deciding criterion for them in terms of choosing employers. Their focus is first on securing a job, and they aim to make a difference once they have secured and strengthened their position within a company. Research also shows a values-action gap among Indian Gen Zs when making important decisions about their life. Although they may engage in low-stakes sustainable practices in their daily lives, sustainability does not yet serve as a deal-breaker in high-stakes decisions for various reasons. A Deloitte survey showed that when it comes to making major decisions, only about a third of Gen Zs in India have boycotted companies that have not paid their taxes or have supported politicians who have spoken-out or will enact policies to reduce income inequality (Deloitte 2021b). A follow-up survey

conducted three years later found that a significant portion of Indian Gen Zs are aware of the environmental impact of their consumption but often do not act in accordance with their values (Deloitte 2024a). The same survey also highlighted that Indian Gen Zs are particularly concerned about unemployment and economic growth, more than their global counterparts. This situational factor plays a significant role in why Indian Gen Zs are still not able to place sustainability as a deciding criterion in choosing their employers, despite it being a part of their belief and values, as is evident from our findings as well. In contrast, American Gen Zs are far more assertive about their choice of employer. There is a compatibility of beliefs and values regarding sustainability among American Gen Zs and it is considered one of the deciding criteria when choosing an employer. They want their employers to promote social, economic, and environmental justice, provide a sustainable workplace and promote DEI. This finding is supported by research that shows a significant portion of Gen Zs in the US are making career and consumer decisions based on their concerns about climate change and sustainability (Deloitte 2024b). Indian Gen Zs do not make a conscious effort to research the sustainability practices of a company when searching for information about potential employers. This may stem from the fact that sustainability orientation and practices of the companies are still not deciding factors in their employment choices. In contrast, American Gen Zs make a conscious effort to research the sustainability aspects of their future employers as much as they can. Not surprisingly, a study published in The Lancet Regional Health–Southeast Asia showed that India is behind on most of the SDGs (Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health 2023). Compared to that, the United States seems to be doing much better, with studies showing that students, local leaders, and community members across various sectors are driving a growing movement in the United States to fully utilise the ambitious global plan to address poverty, hunger, inequality, and climate change in order to create a better America for everybody (Kleinfox 2024).

Looking through the lens of the Theory of Planned behaviour underpinning this research, both Indian and American Gen Zs have a favourable personal attitude (PA) towards sustainability and believe in advocating sustainability to others, although they have a very narrow perspective of sustainability, equating it with only environmental issues (refer to Table 5).

The subjective norms (SA) however are different for Indian and American Gen Zs; while Indian Gen Zs have not gained much from their university education to gain knowledge, awareness, and assertiveness with regards to sustainability, the American Gen Zs on the contrary have been positively impacted by their higher education. This also explains their in-depth understanding and wider perspective regarding sustainability. The informal experiences, especially social media, have, however, influenced both Indian and American Gen Z individuals. The current poor job market scenario has caused stress among Indian Gen Zs. This reduces their perceived behavioural control (PBC) among Indian Gen Zs, and they believe that they do not have enough leverage at the moment to place sustainability as one of the deciding criteria when choosing their employers. They believe that this leverage will increase once they secure a job and consolidate their position within the organization. In contrast, the PBC among American Gen Zs is different; they believe that sustainability should be one of their criteria when choosing their employers. University education and the ecosystem as a whole have made them much more assertive about sustainability choices in their lives and careers. The PA, SA and PBC have together shaped the awareness, assertiveness, and orientation of Gen Z towards sustainability in general and in determining its role in their choice of employers, in particular.

Table 5. Theory of Planned Behaviour and Sustainability Orientation of Indian and American Gen Zs.

| Factors | Indian Gen Zs | American Gen Zs |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personal Attitude | <p>Personal attitude is favourable towards Sustainability, although they have a narrow view of sustainability, equating it with only environmental aspects.</p> <p>Believe in adopting sustainable practices and advocate sustainability in general to others.</p> | <p>Personal attitude is favourable towards sustainability. They have a much broader understanding of sustainability, covering all (social, environmental, and economic) aspects of sustainability.</p> <p>Believe in adopting sustainable practices and advocate sustainability in general to others.</p> |
| Subjective Norms | <p>Social approval of sustainable behaviour and embedding them in important life choices is low.</p> <p>The context where university education is not contributing much to building their knowledge and awareness regarding sustainability, family, and social pressure of securing a job after completing an education and a relatively tougher job market conditions influence such norms.</p> <p>Social media and informal experiences balance these norms and expectations to an extent.</p> | <p>Social approval of sustainable behaviour and embedding them in important life choices is high.</p> <p>The context where university education is aligned to United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are contributing much to building their knowledge and awareness regarding sustainability, combined with their generational concern for sustainability influence such norms.</p> <p>Social media and informal experiences further strengthen these norms</p> |
| Perceived Behaviour Control | <p>Believe in advocating sustainability to others and that engaging in personal sustainable habits in their day-to-day life is everyone's responsibility.</p> <p>But when it comes to high-stake decisions related to their career and choice of employers, they believe that they do not have enough leverage now. Hence whether the practices of their employers are sustainable it does not influence their choice.</p> <p>They believe that they will have greater leverage once they are part of the company and believe that they can then try to change things from within,</p> | <p>Believe sustainability is everyone's responsibility and each one is responsible for making themselves aware.</p> <p>They believe in engaging in not only low-stake sustainable habit but also believe in placing sustainability as one of the important criteria for selecting employers in the future.</p> |

7. Conclusions

Previous research has shown that Generation Z as a cohort has higher sustainability orientation than previous generations. The results of our study significantly advance the body of knowledge on Gen Z's sustainability orientation by demonstrating the influence of contextual realities and subjective norms on Gen Z's perception of behavioural control over critical life decisions, such as choosing an employer, as well as their personal attitudes towards sustainability. The findings, in addition to emphasising the significant role played by informal education via social media and life events, also have crucial implications for higher education institutions, which are key players in influencing attitude, awareness, and assertiveness towards sustainability. Employers can also learn from the data how much sustainability can be leveraged as a strategy to attract, engage, and retain Generation Z workers. Companies that promote sustainability can create strong employer and consumer brands. Irrespective of whether Gen Z intends to use sustainability as a criterion for choosing employers, they value sustainability in their daily lives and appreciate companies that engage in sustainable practices. Therefore, it is and will continue to be a great opportunity for companies to attract, engage, and retain Gen Z talent. Our research has limitations in terms of certain contextual realities that influence Gen Z's perceived behavioural control on sustainability, and these might change in the future. Future research can focus on studying

Gen Z orientation towards sustainability and the extent to which they assert this in terms of their choice of employers as they progress in their careers. This will be particularly relevant for Indian Gen Zs to examine whether they are willing to assert themselves on sustainability aspects once they cemented their respective positions in their companies.

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