Gen Z Consumers' Perception of Sustainable Branding in Natural Skincare Products: The Influence of Digital Marketing and Financial Technology in Purchase Decisions

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Abstract - *This study explores how Generation Z consumers perceive sustainable branding in local skincare products and how digital marketing and financial technology (fintech) shape their purchase decisions. Using a quantitative survey approach, the findings reveal that sustainable branding emerges as the most influential factor, as authentic environmental and ethical practices foster trust, loyalty, and stronger purchase intentions. Digital marketing contributes positively by increasing awareness and engagement, although its impact on purchasing remains less decisive. Fintech, on the other hand, primarily functions as a facilitator that provides convenience in transactions rather than a direct driver of purchase behavior. The study underscores the importance for local skincare brands to integrate sustainability into their core identity while leveraging digital platforms and fintech accessibility to better connect with Gen Z consumers.*

Keywords - *Sustainable branding, digital marketing, fintech, purchase decision, Generation Z, skincare.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Various industries, including beauty and fashion, have prioritized sustainability in recent years. In Indonesia, more and more local skincare brands are adopting the concepts of "natural," "clean beauty," and "eco-friendly" in their marketing strategies. Generation Z, as digital natives, is increasingly drawn to brands that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability. They tend to have a high level of environmental awareness and support products that align with ethical and ecological values [18]. This shift in consumer consciousness encourages businesses to implement green marketing strategies by integrating environmental concerns into product design, pricing, distribution, and promotion. Green marketing not only improves brand image but also influences consumer attitudes and behaviors.

In parallel, the digital era has drastically changed consumption patterns. Digital marketing, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, has become a dominant channel for delivering sustainability narratives in engaging and creative ways. Moreover, the emergence of financial technology (fintech) such as e-wallets and pay-later services provides more convenience and flexibility in transactions, especially for younger consumers.

Several previous studies have examined the influence of sustainable branding, digital marketing, and fintech adoption on purchase decisions separately. However, research that integrates these three factors simultaneously, particularly within the context of Generation Z consumers in Indonesia's local skincare industry, remains very limited. Most studies have focused on one or two variables, such as the effectiveness of social media campaigns [7][13][14] or the impact of sustainability perceptions on green purchase intention [1][9][11], without considering the role of fintech as a mediator or catalyst in the purchasing decision-making process. In fact, integrating these three aspects is crucial to developing a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior. This research gap came up with the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Generation Z consumers perceive local skincare brands that embrace sustainability values?

RQ2: To what extent do digital marketing exposure and fintech usage influence their purchasing decisions?

Accordingly, this research aims to make a theoretical contribution by filling the existing research gap in the study of brand sustainability in the digital era, while also offering practical implications for local skincare industry players in optimizing marketing strategies that integrate sustainable branding, digital marketing, and fintech innovations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. *Theoretical Background*

2.1.1. Sustainable Branding

Sustainable branding is a marketing strategy that weaves environmental responsibility, social commitment, and long-term economic sustainability into the very fabric of a brand's identity and communication. Rather than treating sustainability as a mere trend, it embraces it as a core value that shapes how products are designed, how supply chains operate, and how brands connect with their audiences. This approach aligns with the growing awareness and ethical preferences of today's consumers, who seek brands that reflect their values [20].

The company has implemented sustainable branding strategies to create a brand image that is socially and environmentally responsible. The principles of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) incorporated into the company's branding enhance credibility and consumer trust. More and more local skincare brands are promoting sustainability through the use of natural ingredients, eco-friendly packaging, and social campaigns aligned with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles [19]. According to Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2014), incorporating sustainability practices into brand strategy can help brands increase their value by meeting consumer demand for ethical and environmentally friendly products [1].

2.1.2. Digital Marketing Exposure

Digital marketing exposure describes the level and type of consumer interaction with marketing content shared through digital channels, especially social media. It covers how often, how deeply, and how meaningfully consumers engage with different forms of digital marketing, such as influencer promotions, user-generated content (UGC), branded ads, and viral campaigns.

Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z is revolutionizing the global marketplace. Their consumer tastes, attitudes, and purchasing behaviors are heavily impacted by widespread digital connectivity and technical breakthroughs, as they are the first generation to have grown up and developed with the internet and social media. Understanding these factors is crucial for the business sector that wishes to engage with this powerful demographic. This is particularly true for the beauty sector, where identity and self-expression are intimately related [5].

2.1.3. Fintech Usage

Fintech usage denotes the adoption and application of digital financial technologies such as e-wallets, mobile payment systems, and online banking that facilitate efficient, convenient, and secure transactions. Among Generation Z, these technologies constitute an inherent component of their digitally oriented lifestyle, signifying a broader transition toward seamless and integrated digital payment ecosystems [21]. Key indicators of fintech usage encompass behavioral intention to utilize fintech services, perceived ease of use, perceived platform trustworthiness, and performance expectancy, referring to the anticipated benefits associated with fintech adoption [22]

In the context of Generation Z's purchasing behavior, fintech usage facilitates fast and secure e-commerce and social commerce transactions, both of which represent expanding segments of digital retail [23]. Its integration into digital marketing channels optimizes the purchasing process by simplifying payment, providing financing options, and accommodating both impulse and planned purchases in line with Generation Z's technologically adept and instant consumption patterns [22].

2.1.4. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological factors underlying human behavior, asserting that behavioral intentions, which are shaped by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, serve as the primary determinants of actual behavior [20].

Subjective norms further emphasize the influence of peers and social media interactions, where digital marketing exposure and social approval create perceived pressure to adopt sustainable and trendy consumption patterns [24]. Moreover, perceived behavioral control is particularly relevant in the context of fintech adoption, reflecting consumers' perceptions of technological ease, accessibility, and trust in fintech platforms as factors that either enable or constrain purchasing behavior [21].

Previous studies confirm the usefulness of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in explaining Generation Z's decision-making, as their digital fluency and sustainability orientation align closely with TPB constructs, thereby enhancing the model's ability to predict purchasing outcomes [25].

2.1.5. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) conceptualizes technology adoption through two central constructs: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness [26]. Perceived ease of use reflects the belief that a system is simple to operate, while perceived usefulness relates to the belief that the system provides benefits and enhances performance. Together, these factors shape the intention to adopt technology, which ultimately determines actual usage behavior.

Technology Acceptance Model explaining fintech adoption and its implications for purchase decisions. Transaction speed, convenience, personalized offers,

and reward systems enhance acceptance of fintech services [27]. Trust further strengthens perceived usefulness, reducing barriers in the purchasing process [21]. TAM also complements the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by elaborating on perceived behavioral control from a technological perspective. Whereas TPB frames control in behavioral terms, TAM provides cognitive evaluations of system attributes, offering a more nuanced understanding of fintech adoption [27]. These insights reinforce the assumption that fintech usage contributes meaningfully to Generation Z's purchasing behavior in digital retail contexts.

2.1.6. Green Brand Equity (GBE)

Green Brand Equity (GBE) measures how customers' awareness and perceptions of a brand affect their reactions when the brand is linked to ethical and environmentally conscious behavior [6]. GBE explains how sustainability-oriented attributes can drive consumer purchase intention emphasizes dimensions such as trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional attachment [20]. A strong GBE fosters cognitive and emotional loyalty, which is particularly important for Generation Z in the skincare industry, as they highly value authenticity and eco-ethical practices [6]. At the same time, GBE provides a strategic advantage for brands by helping them differentiate themselves in a market increasingly influenced by concerns about sustainability.

2.2. *Hypothesis Development*
2.2.1. Sustainable Branding and Purchase Decision

Grounded in the theoretical foundations of Green Brand Equity (GBE) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), sustainable branding plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. TPB highlights that positive attitudes toward sustainable consumption, shaped by beliefs in environmentally friendly and ethical product attributes, increase the likelihood of purchasing such products. At the same time, GBE illustrates how green brand associations build consumer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, turning favorable perceptions into stronger purchase intentions and actual buying behavior [6].

Empirical studies show that sustainable branding has a positive influence on purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. In the natural skincare sector, in particular, perceptions of genuine sustainability have been found to strengthen purchase intentions and translate into actual buying behavior [20].

Generation Z is more likely to trust brands that consistently communicate sustainability ideas through the use of natural products, open manufacturing practices, and active participation in socio-environmental projects. Generation Z more likely to be satisfied and loyal to brands that exhibit a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. Previous studies also show that consumers' trust and emotional attachment to a company are increased when they see sustainability favorably [10].

H1: Perceptions of sustainable branding (X_1) have a significant effect on purchase decisions (Y) among Generation Z consumers in the local skincare industry.

2.2.2. Digital Marketing Exposure and Purchase Decision

Generation Z is a digital native who is very active on social media, so the influence of online marketing content on their decision-making process is huge. Social media especially Instagram and TikTok have become important tools for local skincare brands to reach Generation Z. Marketing on brand content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok is driven by how often consumers see it. Consumers are more likely to engage cognitively and emotionally with a particular brand if they are exposed to interesting and reliable content [12]. Digital marketing through social media has proven successful in increasing perception, purchase interest, and conversion, especially in the beauty product industry [13]. According to Salwanisa and Wikartika, user content, such as reviews and suggestions, significantly influences consumers' information search process [14].

The impact of digital marketing exposure on purchase decisions can be explained through the integration of the subjective norms component of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with key principles of digital marketing communication. Subjective norms describe how perceived social pressures, influenced by peer behavior and endorsements from influencers on social media platforms, shape consumer consumption patterns [25]

H2: Digital marketing exposure (X_2) has a significant effect on purchase decisions (Y) among Generation Z consumers in the local skincare industry.

2.2.3. Fintech Usage and Purchase Decision

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior's perceived behavioral control factor (TPB) offer the theoretical underpinnings for investigating the connection between fintech usage and purchase decisions. TAM emphasizes how people's adoption of technology is influenced by perceived utility and ease of use, whereas TPB emphasizes how perceived control impacts the ability to engage in fintech-based transactions [27].

The use of fintech such as e-wallets can influence buyer choice through ease of access, payment flexibility, and transaction incentives. Purchase behavior can be accelerated and encouraged by digital payments, particularly for new users and Generation Z [15] [16]. In addition, research by Parvathy and Duraisamy shows that discounts and cashbacks, as well as other digital promotions, encourage customers to purchase goods faster [17].

H3: Usage of fintech services (X_3) has a significant effect on purchase decisions (Y) among Generation Z consumers in the local skincare industry.

2.3 Research Model

The research model **(Figure 1)** in this study illustrates the proposed relationships between three key factors perceptions of sustainable branding, digital marketing exposure, and the use of fintech and their influence on consumer purchasing decisions. These variables are expected to have a positive impact on the decision-making process, particularly among Generation Z consumers in the local skincare industry. The m82odel reflects a comprehensive view of how marketing and technological factors intersect with sustainability-driven consumer preferences. A visual representation is presented to enhance conceptual clarity and facilitate interpretation of the hypothesized relationships.
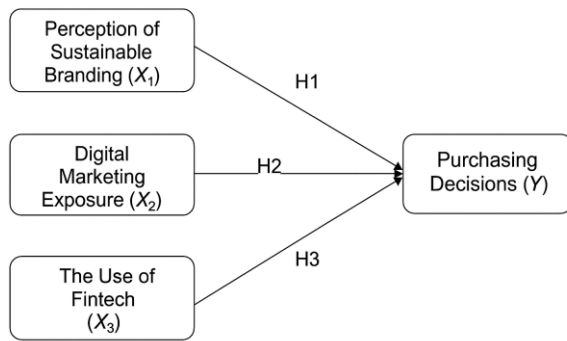

Figure 1. Research Model

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between consumer perceptions of brands and purchasing decisions for local skincare products. The quantitative approach was chosen because it is able to describe social phenomena through numerical data that can be processed statistically. In this context, the research aims to test whether perceptions of sustainability, exposure to digital content, and use of financial technology have a relationship to purchasing decisions among Generation Z.

3.2. Measurement Scale

The main instrument in this study is a structured questionnaire distributed online through Google Form. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). There is a total of 15 statement items, which are divided as follows:
• Perception of Sustainable Branding (3 items):

Measures the extent to which respondents believe the sustainability claims of local skincare brands and how they perceive skincare brands that carry sustainability values, such as the use of natural ingredients, care for the environment, and the ability to distinguish between real campaigns and greenwashing.
• Digital Marketing Exposure (5 items): Measures the extent to which social media content influences respondents' attention and decisions towards skincare brands, as well as the influence of influencers and sustainability values in the content.
• Fintech Usage (3 items): Measures the preference and habit of using e-wallets when buying skincare products
• Purchase Decision (4 items): The dependent variable that measures the tendency to buy or choose a skincare brand because of sustainability values, satisfaction with the brand, consumer loyalty, and willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

The criteria for respondents in this study were Generation Z aged at Sebelas Maret University and had experience in using local skincare products made from natural ingredients. The survey was distributed through social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp to reach the digitally active target population.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	22	3	3,3
	21	14	15,6
	20	37	41,1
	19	25	27,8
	<18	11	12,2
Faculty	FEB	62	68.9
	FMIPA & FP	8	8.8
	FISIP & FKIP	6	6.6
	Other (SV, FKM, FT, Etc)	14	15.7

3.4 Ethical Statement

This study does not involve manipulation of variables that may affect the physical or mental state of the participants. All data was collected through an online survey method using Google Forms, without requiring participants to disclose personal identity such as full name, address, or other sensitive information. All questions were voluntary and could be answered anonymously. The main objective of the study was to analyze the general perception and behavior of Generation Z consumers towards sustainable branding and the influence of digital technology in the context of purchasing local skincare products.

Participants were explained the purpose of the survey at the beginning of the form and expressed their willingness to participate. As there were no risks to participants' health, safety or privacy, and no experimental procedures or direct interventions, the study did not require formal ethics committee approval.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted quantitatively using STATA software. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the relationship between the independent variables, namely perceptions of sustainable branding, exposure to digital marketing, and use of fintech, on the dependent variable in the form of purchasing decisions for local skincare products among Generation Z consumers. The data that has been collected through an online questionnaire of 90 respondents is then processed with several statistical analysis techniques that are relevant to the research objectives. All the results of this analysis form the basis for testing the previously formulated hypotheses and answering the research problem formulation.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Var	Definition	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
PD	Consumer choice and satisfaction	3.58	0.7171	1	5
PD1	Decision to purchase	3.5	1.0304	1	5
PD2	Satisfaction after purchasing	3.74	0.8554	1	5
PD3	Loyalty toward sustainable brands.	3.71	0.9909	1	5
PD4	Likelihood of recommending	3.38	0.6412	1	5
SB	Perception of brand's sustainability values	3.52	0.7207	1.33	5
SB1	Belief that skincare with natural ingredients	3.52	0.7677	1	5
SB2	Attention to use of eco-friendly ingredients	3.34	1.0294	1	5
SB3	Perception of trust in eco-conscious brands	3.7	0.8925	1	5
DM	Exposure to skincare digital promotions	4.14	0.6412	1.8	5
DM1	Exposure to skincare promotions	4.52	0.8104	1	5
DM2	Influence of brand content	4.1	0.7939	2	5
DM3	Trust in online reviews	4	1.0277	1	5
DM4	Engagement with interactive content	3.92	0.8770	1	5
DM5	Impact of digital campaigns	4.15	1.0800	1	5
FU	Use of e-wallets and digital incentives	4.35	0.6511	2.33	5
FU1	Preference for products payable via e-wallets	4.32	0.8588	1	5
FU2	Effect of fintech incentives	4.34	0.7214	3	5
FU3	Ease of using e-wallets	4.4	0.8044	2	5

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all constructs and their corresponding measurement items. A total of 90 valid responses were analyzed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The mean values of the variables range between 3.34 and 4.52, indicating generally favorable perceptions among Generation Z respondents toward sustainable branding, digital marketing, fintech usage, and purchase decision. Standard deviations suggest moderate variation in responses across items. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' attitudes and serve as the basis for further reliability, validity, and regression analyses.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Purchase Decision	4	0.7735	Good
Sustainable Branding	3	0.7153	Acceptable
Digital Marketing	5	0.7297	Acceptable
Fintech Usage	3	0.7510	Good

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. As shown in **Table 1**, all constructs exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The construct of Sustainable Branding achieved an alpha of 0.7153, suggesting acceptable reliability for exploratory research. Similarly, Digital Marketing obtained a value of 0.7297, which also demonstrates acceptable internal consistency among its items.

Meanwhile, Fintech Usage (α = 0.7510) and Purchase Decision (α = 0.7735) recorded higher levels of reliability, falling into the category of good internal consistency. These results confirm that the items used to measure each construct are coherent and consistently capture the underlying latent variables.

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Sustainable Branding	0.0.901	1.11
Digital Marketing	0.7423	1.35
Fintech Usage	0.8147	1.23
Mean VIF		1.23

All VIF values are substantially below the commonly accepted threshold of 10, with the highest being 1.35 for Digital Marketing. The mean VIF of 1.23 further confirms that the predictors are free from multicollinearity issues. This indicates that Sustainable Branding, Digital Marketing, and Fintech Usage each contribute independently to explaining purchase decisions, thereby strengthening the validity of the regression model.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression

Variable	β	Std. Error	t	P-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Sustainable Branding	0.4286	0.0949	4.52	0.000	0.2398	0.6173
Digital Marketing	0.2339	0.1175	1.99	0.050	0.0003	0.4676
Fintech Usage	0.0351	0.1105	0.32	0.751	-0.1845	0.2547
Constant	0.9551	0.5507	1.73	0.086	-0.1397	2.0499

There is extensive empirical evidence demonstrating that sustainable branding exerts a strong positive influence on consumer purchase behavior, particularly in the skincare and broader beauty sectors. Prior studies consistently show that when brands are perceived as high-quality, ethical, eco-friendly, and authentically committed to sustainability, consumers' trust and purchase intentions increase significantly [32]. In line with this evidence, the regression results indicate that Sustainable Branding (SB) is the strongest predictor of purchase decisions, showing a significant positive effect (β = 0.4286, p < 0.001). This underscores that when consumers view a skincare brand as sustainable, transparent, and responsible, their likelihood of purchasing increases notably.

Digital Marketing (DM) also has a positive effect (β = 0.2339, p = 0.050), though only marginally significant. This suggests that strategies such as influencer collaborations and social media campaigns can encourage interest, but their influence on actual purchasing behavior may require reinforcing factors. Previous studies have consistently shown that digital content exposure, particularly through social media advertising has a strong positive influence on purchase intention. This indicates that exposure to digital content not only builds visibility but also strengthens key dimensions of brand equity that shape consumer decisions [29]. Moreover, informativeness of digital content has been highlighted as a powerful driver of purchase behavior. Informative and transparent content increases consumer confidence, reduces uncertainty, and boosts perceived value [30]

Compared to these findings, the present study shows that digital marketing exposure has only a marginal effect on Gen Z's skincare purchase decisions. This suggests that while prior research highlights strong positive effects of digital content through awareness, informativeness, and trust, in this context,

exposure alone is insufficient. Instead, sustainable branding perceptions emerge as a more decisive factor, with digital marketing playing a supportive role. Fintech usage, meanwhile, contributes primarily as a facilitator of transaction convenience rather than as a direct driver of purchasing behavior.

In contrast, Fintech Usage (FT) exerts a small and insignificant effect ($\beta = 0.0351$, $p = 0.751$), indicating that while fintech improves convenience in transactions, it does not directly drive purchase decisions. The function of fintech and digital payment systems is largely positioned as a facilitator of transactional convenience rather than a primary determinant of purchase decisions. Evidence from consumer studies indicates that digital payments help reduce psychological barriers, accelerate transaction processes, and can encourage more frequent or impulsive purchases. However, these advantages do not consistently translate into a significant influence on the fundamental decision to make a purchase [31].

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that sustainable branding exerts the strongest influence on Gen Z's purchase decisions, followed by digital marketing, while fintech functions mainly as a supporting tool. These findings highlight the importance of authenticity in sustainability initiatives, as transparent practices such as eco-friendly packaging, refill programs, and partnerships with environmental organizations foster consumer trust and loyalty. Digital marketing, particularly through social media and influencer collaborations, should be leveraged strategically to engage Gen Z with creative storytelling and user-generated content. Although fintech does not directly drive purchase intentions, it can enhance consumer experience when integrated with incentives such as cashback, loyalty rewards, or eco-reward programs. For local skincare brands, aligning sustainability values with accessible pricing and community-based engagement is essential to strengthen brand equity and build long-term loyalty in an increasingly sustainability-conscious market.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. The relatively small sample size of 90 Generation Z respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings to a wider population. The focus on local skincare products also narrows the scope, as consumer behavior could vary across industries or international brands. Since the data were obtained through self-reported questionnaires, the results may be influenced by social desirability bias or subjective perceptions. In addition, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to observe changes in consumer behavior over time. The analysis was also limited to three variables—sustainable branding, digital marketing, and fintech usage—while other influential factors such as price

sensitivity, product quality, cultural values, or peer influence were not included.

Future research could expand the sample size and diversity to improve external validity, explore other product categories and international contexts, and employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture behavioral dynamics more effectively. It would also be valuable to integrate additional variables such as perceived value, psychological motivations, or cultural influences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's purchasing decisions.

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