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LEADING THE SUSTAINABILITY CHANGE? GEN Z BUSINESS STUDENTS NAVIGATING AMID GLOBAL DISRUPTIONS

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Abstract

The ecological crisis and Covid-19 pandemic are global disruptions that have critically changed our everyday lives, practices, consumption habits, and tourism behaviour. These global crises call for positive change towards globally responsible consumer behaviour and leadership. Considering Gen Zers' sustainability ethos, this chapter discusses Gen Z as the next 'sustainability' change by examining business students' environmental world view, environmental education level, and environmental behaviour. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from Finnish business students via a survey (n=172) and written narratives (n=70). The findings revealed that students were concerned about the ecological crisis and supported endorsing pro-ecological world view. Moreover, they reported a high level of environmental knowledge and attention to sustainability in their daily practices, especially by seeking information, recycling, and considering their consumption choices. Tourism has become an essential part of Gen Zers' lives. However, it involved contradictions as the negative implications were increasingly acknowledged. The chapter highlights that turning negative disruptions into positive change through societal transformation may enhance visions of the good life. Catalysing positive change requires solidifying Gen Zers' existing values, attitudes, and behaviours into concrete actions to be undertaken by tomorrow's consumers, professionals and leaders.

Keywords: Gen Z business students, disruption, positive change, societal transformation, environmental world view, environmental education, environmental behaviour, sustainable consumption, tourism consumption, good life

Introduction

We live amid an ecological crisis – the combination of accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss. Environmental problems have become major topics of discussion around the globe, suggesting that human activities play a significant role in degrading nature (Díaz et al., 2019; Jayasinghe & Darner, 2020). Simultaneously, the Covid-19 pandemic is undoubtedly one of the most disruptive events faced by humankind in recent times that has critically changed our everyday lives, practices, consumption, and tourism behaviour (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). These global crises are unprecedented in their level of disruption and call for positive change (Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020; Rosenbloom & Markand, 2020).

Societal transformation as a catalyst of positive change has become topical in academic discussions in recent years (O'Brien, 2018) and refers to transforming values and behaviours and shifting the prevailing sociocultural, political, and economic paradigms towards globally responsible consumer behaviour, leadership, and enhanced visions of the 'good life' (Amel, Manning, Scott & Koger, 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019). Although marketing and consumer research has frequently examined sustainable consumption and consumer behaviour (Thøgersen & Schrader, 2012), such has inadequately addressed societal transformation and visions of the good life in light of global disruptions.

While the environmental limits to economic growth have been acknowledged since the 1970s, the current power-wielding generations have been slow to effectively counter the environmentally damaging trajectories (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019). However, the new generation, dubbed Gen Z, born between the late 1990s and the late 2000s (White, 2017), seems poised to disrupt the old ways of life, leadership, and consumption. Viewed as a beacon of hope for a more sustainable future, Gen Z comes equipped with notably different values, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and behaviours than previous generations (Corey & Grace, 2019). Having been born into the digital era and growing up with increasing environmental consciousness, Gen Z takes sustainability seriously due to having a global mindset with ethical sensitivities (Corey & Grace, 2019).

This chapter examines how the ecological crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have affected Gen Z business students' environmental world view, environmental education level, and environmental behaviour concerning sustainable everyday practices and tourism behaviour. The chapter's contribution emphasises the possibility of converting global disruptions into opportunities for learning and growth, which may lead to a positive shift and enhanced visions of the good life. Considering Gen Zers' sustainability ethos, the chapter questions whether Gen Z could lead the next 'sustainability' change. The chapter concludes that catalysing positive change of societal transformation requires solidifying Gen Zers' existing values, attitudes, and behaviours into concrete actions to be undertaken by tomorrow's consumers, professionals, and leaders.

This chapter is structured as follows: First, negative disruptions and societal transformation as catalysts for positive change are presented. Second, environmental world view, environmental education, and environmental behaviour are briefly addressed to interpret and understand societal transformation. Third, research data and methodology are presented, after which research findings are discussed. Finally, the summary and conclusions are addressed with major implications of the chapter.

Turning negative disruptions into positive change

The world is at a turning point, approaching a significant disruption – a moment when ‘both mother nature and father greed hit the wall at once’ (Gilding, 2011; Muff, 2013). Fundamentally, disruption is an event that changes a system’s ongoing trajectories and prevents something from continuing as usual or expected (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2022). The ecological crisis is a significant negative disruption altering the normal planetary functions and traditional pursuit of economic wealth and prosperity. Yet, negative disruptions can also offer hope for positive change; disruption can be harnessed to accelerate transforming technologies and economies for sustainable development (Rosenbloom & Markand, 2020; Schipper, Eriksen, Fernandez Carril, Glavovic & Shawoo, 2021).

The ecological crisis calls for positive change – a force that can fundamentally alter the negative path. Societal transformation as a catalyst for positive change involves transforming values, beliefs, world views, and knowledge; the systems and structures, sociocultural, political, and economic relations; and technologies, practices, and behaviours contributing to the ecological crisis (O’Brien, 2018; Schipper et al., 2021). According to O’Brien (2018), societal transformation can occur in three embedded and interacting spheres: personal (values and world views), political (systems and structures), and practical (technologies and behaviour). Individual and collective values and world views shape how the systems and structures are viewed and influence what types of technologies and behaviour are considered possible to achieve positive change. The chapter discusses societal transformation through environmental world view, environmental education, and environmental behaviour.

Environmental world view, education, and behaviour

The concept of environmental sensitivity arose in industrialised countries over 30 years ago, and its importance has further increased due to the accelerated ecological crisis. Environmental sensitivity refers to an individual’s concern, respect, and empathy for the environment (Cheng & Wu, 2015). Sensitivity toward the environment is developed from experiences with nature and time spent in natural surroundings, positively correlating with an individual’s relationship to nature (Kukkonen, Kärkkäinen & Keinonen, 2018; Kyriakopoulos, Ntanos & Asonitou, 2020).

Different scales have been developed to measure environmental sensitivity, of which one of the most extensively used is the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig & Jones, 2000) measuring an individual’s environmental world view. The NEP scale includes various statements related to ecological limits to growth, anti-anthropocentrism, the fragility of nature’s balance, rejection of human exceptionalism, and belief in eco-crisis (Kukkonen et al., 2018).

As learning about environmental sensitivity is a lifelong and hierarchic process, environmental sensitivity should be promoted before conveying environmental knowledge (Kukkonen et al., 2018). Environmental education includes approaches, tools, and programs developing and supporting environmentally related values, attitudes, awareness, knowledge, and skills preparing individuals to take informed action on the environment’s behalf (Ardoin, Bowers & Gaillard, 2020). Instead of a linear path from environmental sensitivity to knowledge to action, environmental education is understood as a dynamic and complex process influencing behaviour in multiple ways (Ardoin et al., 2020).

Universities produce science-based knowledge needed to advance environmental education. Previous research has portrayed universities as institutions preparing future professionals, leaders, decision-

makers, and scholars (Ferrer-Balas et al., 2010; Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020). Recent literature has also acknowledged the importance of business schools in shaping more than business ethics and corporate social responsibility (Delgado, Venkatesh, Branco & Silva, 2020; Novo-Corti, Badea, Tirca & Aceleanu, 2018) but environmental education and management (Jabbour, 2010; Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020; Suárez-Perales, Valero-Gil, Leyva-de la Hiz, Rivera-Torres & Garcés-Ayerbe, 2021).

Although it is acknowledged that business schools must take a leadership position in addressing the ecological crisis (cf. Jabbour, 2010), research incorporating ecological issues and environmental management into business school activities is still relatively scarce (Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020). Muff (2013) has argued that if business schools wish to positively transform business and society, they must embrace a significant transformation by refocusing education to ensure educating globally responsible leaders, transforming research into an applied field, and enabling business organisations to serve the common good and engage in transforming business and the economy by actively participating in the ongoing public debate.

By developing business students' environmental knowledge, students are likely to become more concerned about the environment and motivated to engage in pro-environmental behaviour (Cheng & Wu, 2015; Kukkonen et al., 2018). As people continuously interact with their environment, nearly all human behaviour could be called environmental behaviour. Previous research has suggested that increasing individuals' environmental knowledge often results in more positive attitudes toward the environment and more responsible environmental behaviour, yet, advancing mere knowledge is insufficient for achieving change as behaviour stems from various factors, such as beliefs, attitudes, situational opportunities, and barriers (Cheng & Wu, 2015; Dunlap et al., 2000; Kukkonen et al., 2018).

Methodology

To gain an in-depth understanding of Gen Z business students' environmental world view, environmental education, and environmental behaviour, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at one Finnish business school in 2020 and 2021 as part of a basic-level course on business ethics. The survey included closed- and open-ended questions on the following themes: 1) concern about global disruptions, 2) environmental world view, 3) environmental knowledge, 4) integration of global disruptions in the business school curriculum, 5) sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits, and 6) sustainable tourism behaviour (Table 1).

The survey was administered via Qualtrics and completed by 172 business students aged 19 to 24. Most respondents were female (65%; male 35%). The closed-ended responses were analysed through descriptive methods with SPSS28 and open-ended responses with content analysis facilitated by NVivo20.

Also, written narratives (n=70) were collected from the same business students, most of whom were also female (65%; male 35%). The students were advised to write short (200–400 words) descriptions of their tourism behaviour before, during, and after the pandemic, focusing on opinions about the justification of tourism, flight or travel shame, and future travel behaviour (Table 1). The narratives were also analysed with content analysis facilitated by NVivo20.

Notably, all participants were guaranteed anonymity and asked to provide written consent granting permission to utilise their responses for research. Research participation was voluntary yet encouraged for class credit.

Table 1. Research design and operationalisation

Theme	Questions	Operationalisation
Global disruptions		
Concern about global disruptions	How concerned are you about climate change, the biodiversity crisis, and current or future pandemics?	3 closed-ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale: 1=not concerned at all to 5=extremely concerned
	Has the pandemic changed your concern about climate change and the biodiversity crisis? If so, how?	1 open-ended question
Environmental world view		
Environmental world view	How would you evaluate the following statements related to the state of the environment?	15 closed-ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (NEP scale adapted from Dunlap et al., 2000; Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020)
Environmental education		
Environmental knowledge	How would you describe your current knowledge of environmental issues and global ecological challenges?	1 closed-ended question with a 5-point Likert scale: 1=very poor to 5=very good (adapted from Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020)
Integration of global disruptions in the business school curriculum	How well do you believe your business school has incorporated global challenges into the curriculum: 1) climate change, 2) the biodiversity crisis, and 3) current and future pandemics?	1 closed-ended question with a 5-point Likert scale: 1=very poor to 5=very well (adapted from Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020)
Environmental behavior		
Sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits	How would you evaluate the following statements related to sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits?	13 closed-ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (EB scale adapted from Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020)
	Has the pandemic made your everyday practices and consumption habits more or less sustainable? If so, how?	1 open-ended question
Sustainable tourism behaviour	Do you consider tourism and travel a human right in normal circumstances? What about during the pandemic?	Written narratives
	Have you felt flight shame or more comprehensive travel shame in normal circumstances, during the pandemic, or both? If yes to any of the above, how may flight and travel shame affect your post-pandemic tourism behaviour?	

Findings

Concern about global disruptions

Gen Zers' concern about global disruptions was measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=not concerned at all to 5=extremely concerned. Although data collection occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, only one-third of respondents were extremely or moderately worried about the current or future pandemics ($M=3.05$; $SD=0.94$). Regarding the ecological crisis, 75% of respondents were extremely or moderately concerned about climate change ($M=4.02$; $SD=0.92$), while 60% indicated extreme or moderate concern about the biodiversity crisis ($M=3.70$; $SD=0.91$).

Respondents were further asked to describe whether Covid-19 had altered their concern about the ecological crisis. Approximately one-third of respondents stated that their concern had increased, while most reported no change caused by the pandemic. Those who conveyed increased concern seemed to associate their fears with an overall worry about global crises and their interconnectedness: *“When the pandemic broke, I watched a TED Talk in which an expert explained that the more we destroy the environment, the more likely new pandemics are.”*

Many also expressed that the increasing concern had simultaneously advanced their overall environmental awareness and knowledge of the ecological crisis: *“The concern over climate change and the biodiversity crisis has also increased as my awareness has grown during the pandemic.”*

Interestingly, those who reported that Covid-19 had not increased their worry about the ecological crisis identified various positive outcomes of the pandemic: It forced students to adopt more sustainable consumption, such as decreasing travelling and increasing online meetings: *“The pandemic has essentially given me hope. It has changed our way of living and facilitated future changes in everyday practices.”*

Many also stated that the pandemic had made them reconsider their consumption habits, which was seen as an asset in addressing the ecological crisis: *“Due to the pandemic, many have thought about their own consumption, which is why emissions have dropped. So, it would be good to learn to apply these tools in normal life as well.”*

Environmental world view

Gen Zers’ environmental world view was measured with the NEP scale, including 15 statements related to environmental limits to growth, anti-anthropocentrism, the fragility of nature’s balance, rejection of human exceptionalism, and belief in eco-crisis (Dunlap et al., 2000). In general, high scores on NEP scale mean that the respondents have pro-environmental orientation and ecological awareness, which is expected to lead to pro-environmental beliefs and attitudes.

The mean values for the items ranged from 1.66 to 4.68 on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (Figure 1). Items 11–15 were reversed, suggesting a human-centred or anthropocentric view towards nature; thus, a low mean (M=1.66 to 2.79) on these items represents higher environmental sensitivity. The low values on these items and a high mean value on the item ‘Humans are seriously abusing the environment’ (M=4.68; SD=0.64) indicate heightened awareness of the ecological crisis and disagreement with the view that humans should dominate nature.

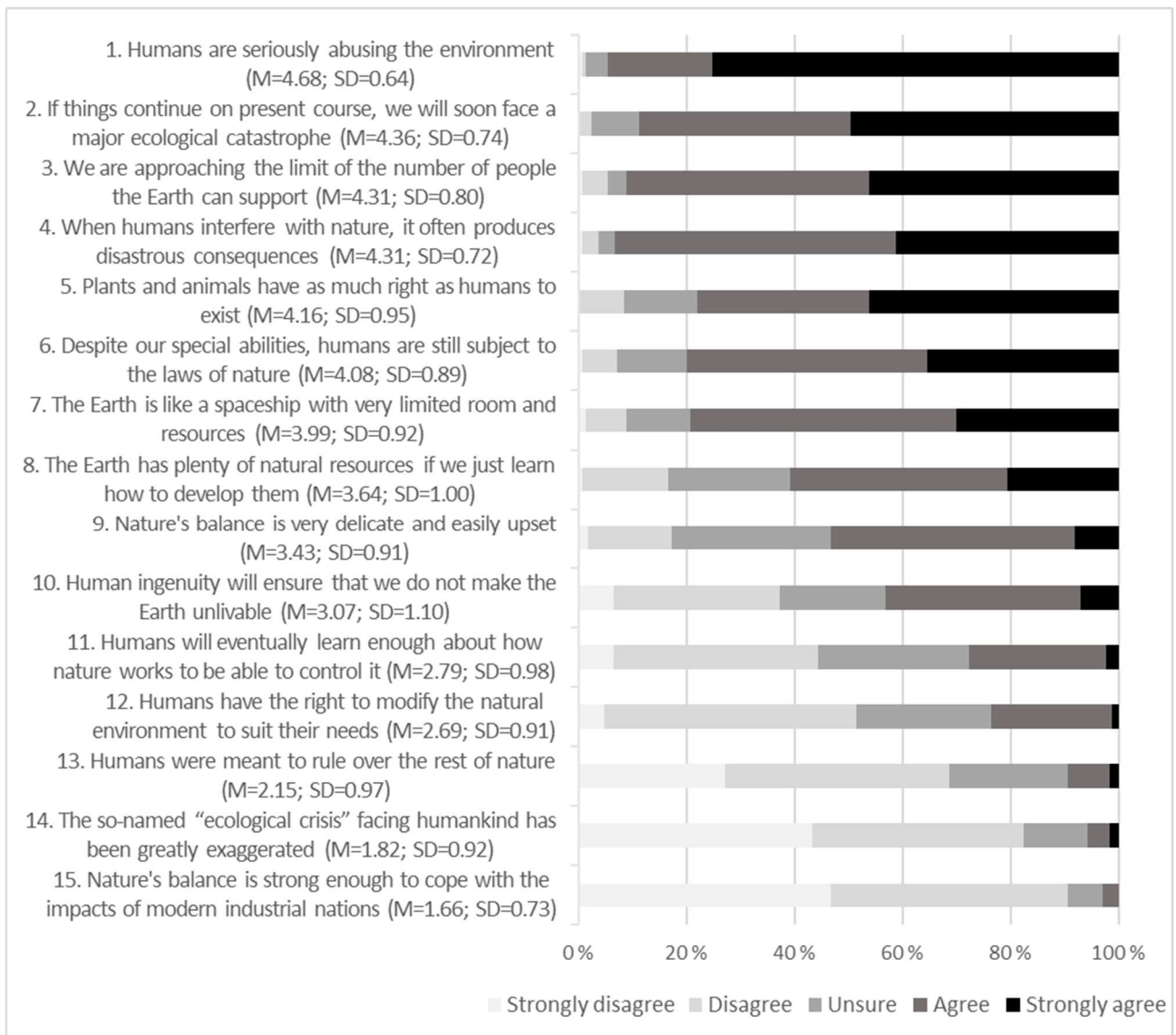


Figure 1. Gen Z business students' environmental world view according to the NEP scale

Most respondents seemed to acknowledge that with the current trajectories, the ecological limits are approaching fast – highlighted by high mean values on the items ‘If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe’ (M=4.36; SD=0.74) and ‘We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support’ (M=4.31; SD=0.80). By contrast, the high mean value on the item ‘When humans interfere with nature, it often produces disastrous consequences’ (M=4.31; SD=0.72) relates to a strong awareness of the balance of nature.

Environmental education

Concerning the level of environmental knowledge, Gen Zers described their current understanding of environmental issues and global ecological challenges to be above average (M=3.57; SD=0.64) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=very poor to 5=very good. Over 90% of respondents reported having moderate or good environmental knowledge, while 6% stated to have very good knowledge.

Students were further asked to indicate how well the business school had incorporated the global challenges of climate change, the biodiversity crisis, and current and future pandemics in their curriculum on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=very poor to 5=very well. Respondents stated that the business school had succeeded best in integrating the current and future pandemics into the teaching

($M=3.47$; $SD=0.89$) – nearly as well as with climate change-related issues ($M=3.37$; $SD=0.68$) – but did considerably worse with the biodiversity crisis ($M=2.79$; $SD=0.77$). More specifically, 53% of respondents felt that the business school had addressed the pandemics well or very well, while the result for climate change was 42% and only 16% for the biodiversity crisis.

Environmental behaviour

Sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits

Gen Zers’ sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits were examined first through closed-ended questions via the Environmental Behaviour (EB) scale (Figure 2) from Kyriakopoulos et al. (2020). Second, an open-ended question was used to further clarify whether and how the Covid-19 pandemic changed their sustainable everyday practices and consumption habits. The main changes involved more attention to sustainability and increasing daily practices adhering to sustainable ideas: travelling and vehicle usage, incorporating food practices, purchasing products and services, and managing waste. Nevertheless, most respondents reported no changes due to Covid-19. These themes are discussed according to the classification by Kyriakopoulos et al. (2020): information seeking, recycling, green consumption, and active participation.

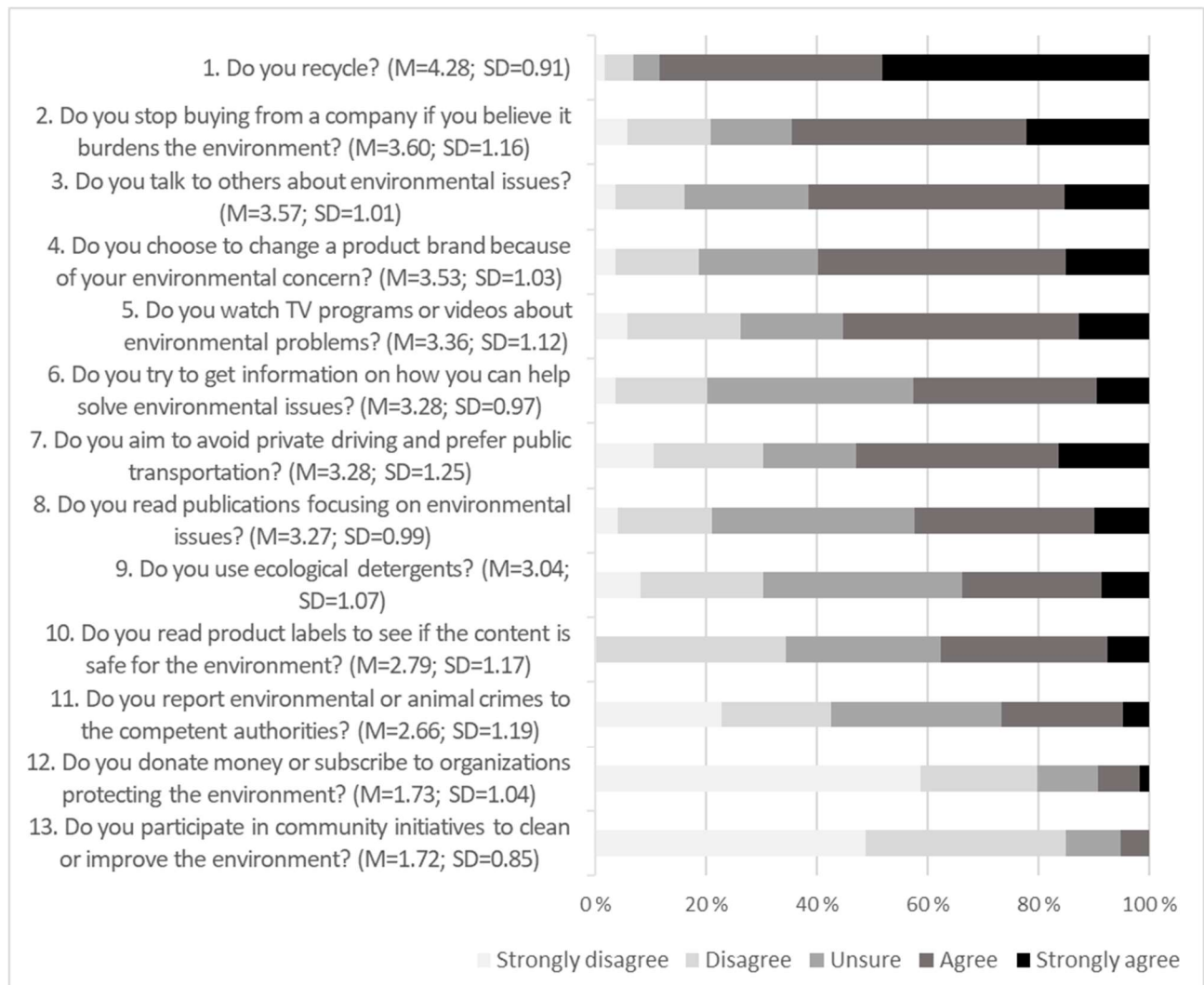


Figure 2. Gen Z business students’ environmental behaviour according to the EB scale

Information seeking is an essential step in behavioural change toward sustainable practices. Most respondents reported talking to others about environmental issues (item 3: $M=3.57$; $SD=1.01$) and watching TV programs and videos about environmental problems (item 5: $M=3.36$; $SD=1.12$), implying that respondents are keeping track of the general discussions in the media concerning the environment and society – an essential resource for sustainable transformation. Maintaining awareness and reflecting on ethical decision-making are keys to improving environmental behaviours.

Respondents were also actively seeking information about their possibilities to solve environmental problems (item 6: $M=3.28$; $SD=0.97$) or reading publications focusing on environmental issues (item 8: $M=3.27$; $SD=0.99$). The pandemic led respondents to pay more attention to products' sustainable features, thus utilising ecological information in their decision-making. Respondents described how activities during Covid-19 had brought awareness to their own practices, finding solutions to what changes are needed and how to implement them: *“I have paid more attention to purchases of unnecessary products and fast fashion.”*

Most respondents were also active in recycling, which was the most common sustainable practice already before the pandemic. Covid-19 had also driven some respondents to pay more attention to waste management. With more time at home, better planning, and less frequent shopping, some respondents reported more sustainable waste practices, including decreasing food waste and paying more attention to disposing of and sorting rubbish: *“I have used more time for sorting waste. For example. I have donated clothes to charity and taken them to second-hand shops.”*

Green consumption concerns consumption habits towards ecological products. Most respondents indicated paying attention to the consequences that products and companies have on the environment (item 2: $M=3.6$; $SD=1.16$; item 4: $M=3.53$; $SD=1.03$). However, responses to items depicting specific consumption habits, such as avoiding private driving and using ecological detergents, showed less agreement.

Regarding changing consumption practices during Covid-19, travelling and vehicle usage were the most frequently covered themes. A handful of respondents reported an increase in using private cars. While this implied that consumption became less sustainable, it was reported as a momentary response to avoid human contact in public transportation. Moreover, many described travelling less, especially on planes, and reported a decrease in using private cars due to the lockdown and restrictions on activities outside the home. In many cases, cycling or walking replaced driving a car or using public transportation: *“Practices are more sustainable. Travelling and consumption have decreased due to the pandemic. I have more time to follow and become conscious of what is going on in the world.”*

Respondents perceived considerable barriers to shopping, preventing them from visiting stores, malls, and restaurants, leading to decreased consumption. Nonetheless, meticulousness and deliberation increased, particularly when buying new clothes. Recycling, selecting domestic brands, and disapproving of fast fashion reflected an increasing focus on sustainability. Food consumption was one theme frequently connected to sustainability changes.

As a novel daily practice, cooking at home heightened awareness and attention toward sustainable food and dining. A commonly described plot was that with home dining, vegetable consumption increased; attention was directed towards food sustainability and quality, and local or domestic food

and small local restaurants were preferred: *“My consumption practices have become more sustainable because time spent at home increased, which made me do things myself, such as preparing plant-based meals.”*

When facing unexpected conditions due to Covid-19, some respondents took advantage of time as an essential resource enabling them to acquire knowledge and shift to green consumption practices in everyday life. Likewise, time spent at home meant that several respondents saved money, helping them pay more attention to quality, durability, and sustainability: *“While staying at home, I have had time to become familiar with sustainable practices in daily life and have adopted such practices in my own life.”*

The do-it-yourself capability is one resource that appeared in the data and was implemented when home-cooking allowed for more vegetable consumption, thus shifting towards more sustainable diets. More available time and changing shopping places created new opportunities: Online shopping allows browsing and searching for sustainable alternatives. ‘No more hanging around in the city centre and shops’ was mentioned to decrease ‘unnecessary’ consumption and increase sustainable practices: *“As a consequence of quitting the hang-around activity in the city centre and shops, I no longer buy clothes I do not really need.”*

Active participation covers commitment and participation in environmental initiatives. The responses showed a low level of involvement in this kind of environmental citizenship (item 11: M=2.66; SD=1.19; item 12: M=1.73; SD=1.04; item 13; M=1.72; SD=0.85). Gen Z business students representing well-educated consumers reported active participation in various covered attempts to make deliberate choices. One respondent expressed readiness to use education and competence to create sustainable solutions for businesses: *“As a student majoring in marketing, I have attempted to come up with possibilities to create sustainable business models.”*

Respondents also critically questioned whether these changes are permanent or neglected when the pandemic is over and life returns to normal. Furthermore, they speculated whether people will be determined to change their behaviour and commit to more sustainable practices in post-pandemic everyday life.

Changes in tourism attitudes and behaviour due to Covid-19

Written narratives (n=70) indicated that Gen Zers’ tourism behaviour had changed significantly due to the pandemic (cf. Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020). However, despite the main reason for restricted travel being the fear of spreading the disease, the ecological crisis was another reason for limiting international tourism.

During the pandemic, I engaged in domestic tourism only. -- at first, I was afraid that I might spread the disease to small municipalities asymptotically. -- before the pandemic, I was distressed about the carbon footprint of my flights. I love to travel, and it is tough for me to prioritise the environment over my desire to explore new destinations.

Although nobody admitted travelling in secret due to the pandemic, some respondents indicated that despite travelling, they were hesitant to share pictures on social media due to peer pressure: *“I’m active on social media but did not share any pictures during the first week because I worried about people’s reactions.”*

The narratives included value judgments (63 references) concerning tourism (Table 2), such as whether tourism can be considered a human right and the justification of travel restrictions during the pandemic. Some respondents stated that tourism is not a human right – neither during the pandemic nor under normal circumstances. The tourism industry was described as one of the largest polluters and not a necessity like, for example, producing food.

Table 2. Gen Z business students’ value judgements concerning tourism consumption

Theme	Sub-theme	Example quote
Value judgements	Tourism as an unnecessary activity	<i>Nobody needs tourism to live a good life. I am slightly annoyed if tourism is even mentioned with, for example, the right to education or not to be tortured.</i>
	Tourism as a human right	<i>It felt empty when I suddenly could not travel freely – like before. Travelling should be a human right, but it is unreasonable to demand access abroad during a pandemic.</i>
	Tourism as a privilege	<i>Tourism is not a human right but a privilege. Western countries are used to tourism and freedom. However, there are plenty of people who can only dream of traveling.</i>
Flight or travel shame	No flight or travel shame	<i>I have travelled a lot in my short life but have never been ashamed of it or had a bad conscience. And quite frankly, I am not ready to give it up either.</i>
	Felt travel or flight shame	<i>I have felt flight shame – as climate change and environmental issues are important to me. I was conflicted by the desire to travel and the impacts on the planet. During the pandemic, I felt relief that no one flew and there was no need to travel.</i>

However, most respondents considered travelling and moving from one place to another a human right while supporting travel restrictions. Interestingly, some forms of travel and tourism were more acceptable during the pandemic than others. Business travel and visiting family abroad were considered necessary, while many saw leisure travel as unnecessary. Furthermore, some respondents judged different forms of leisure tourism: Cultural and educational tourism was considered more acceptable than beach holidays: *“It is one thing to spend a week on the beach getting yourself a tan or educating yourself about places of historical and cultural significance.”*

Interestingly, some respondents called tourism a privilege rather than a right and noted that only a minority of the world population could travel due to financial issues or passport and visa requirements. Furthermore, tourism was described as a ‘lifeline, although it is just a habit’ and ‘a matter of course which has become too cheap and easy.’ One respondent proposed that travelling abroad has just become a way to add content to social media profiles. Another was surprised at how tourism is portrayed positively, even though many of his friends have changed other consumption habits for ethical reasons: *“I hope Covid-19 has provoked people to introspect and think about the profound idea of tourism.”*

Most respondents (65%) had not felt flight or travel shame (Table 2). The lack of guilt was explained by various reasons, such as travelling rarely or being so used to travelling. Moreover, some compared their tourism behaviour to friends or celebrities making even more unsustainable travel choices. These respondents also stated they would feel guilty if they travelled more frequently.

More than every third respondent (35%) had felt flight or travel shame due to the pandemic or tourism's environmental effects. The travel ban even seemed to relieve some of the worries over the ecological crisis. Also, some respondents described feeling shamed when travelling to their country of origin, which violated human rights, or facing human suffering in a tourist destination. In the latter, shame seemed to be combined with fear about one's safety rather than concern about the local security. However, experiencing this kind of suffering was suggested to intrigue personal transformations concerning global humanity.

I flew to a big city where people are extremely rich or poor, and I was ashamed to support this kind of activity. But the experience was still valuable – it was good to see it with your own eyes and draw conclusions.

Some respondents who had felt shame justified their tourism consumption with a profound need to travel and gain experiences. In some cases, tourism destination choices and the extended length of stay were used to diminish the guilt or justify travelling despite the adverse effects: *“I could not imagine going on a long-distance holiday for a week – if I fly further, I stay longer. I consider tourism choices more carefully and prefer ethical and sustainable destinations.”*

Although its ecological effects were widely acknowledged, tourism was mainly seen as a positive activity. Indeed, tourism caused conflicting feelings in Gen Z: Though tourism advances climate change and is terrible for the environment, it enables them to get acquainted with the world, gain lifelong experiences, and make memories, which is hard to bargain with. According to many, no simple solutions exist: *“I have begun to consider the emissions of tourism. It is a paradoxical issue; travelling has always been part of my life, but I want to learn to become a more pro-environmental consumer.”*

Most respondents thought that flight or travel shame would be mostly forgotten, and tourism would eventually return to normal after the pandemic. Several respondents indicated they were unwilling to give up tourism, at least not entirely. Instead, many would rather compromise everyday consumption, such as eating vegetarian food and using public transportation. Furthermore, some were willing to compensate for their tourism and travelling by carbon offsetting their flights. Interestingly, none questioned the effectiveness of such offsets for the environment: *“I will pay more for the ticket in the future to compensate for emissions, although before the Covid-19, I have never done this.”*

The minority of respondents believed that global tourism – especially international flights – would decrease in the following decades. Many were also willing to reduce tourism for the environment, while others highlighted the importance of making sustainable choices in their daily lives. Finally, some respondents indicated that the pandemic had brought about a profound transformation in the perception of tourism. While tourism was taken for granted, it has become something worth appreciating. Interestingly, some had not missed tourism as much as expected or realised travelling so much was unnecessary anyway: *“The reduction in travel has been one of the positive effects of the pandemic in terms of sustainability. Travel will be thought about more carefully in the future, which is way better for the environment.”*

Summary and conclusion

The ecological crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have critically changed our everyday lives, practices, consumption habits, and tourism behaviour. These global disruptions call for positive change in the direction of globally responsible consumer behaviour and leadership. In line with the widely

acknowledged sustainability ethos of Gen Z, this chapter discussed Gen Z as a potential 'sustainability' change. Can the seeds of sustainable intentions embedded in Gen Z be nurtured for this generation to blossom into responsible future consumers and leaders?

The chapter addressed societal transformation, involving a fundamental change in values, world views, and behaviours, and the shift in prevailing sociocultural, political, and economic paradigms. The societal transformation was considered a catalyst for positive change and discussed through the notions of environmental world view, environmental education, and environmental behaviour. These aspects were empirically examined through quantitative and qualitative data collected from Finnish Gen Z business students.

On the question of whether Gen Z could lead the next sustainability change fuelling societal transformation, the findings are somewhat contradictory. While the study highlighted Gen Zers' strong environmental world view, knowledge, and behaviour, variation was found in the level of commitment to sustainability among Gen Zers and between everyday consumption, practices, and tourism behaviour.

The findings revealed that the students were concerned about the ecological crisis and endorsed a high level of environmental world view and knowledge. According to the previous literature, awareness, beliefs, and attitudes are antecedents to behaviour but do not necessarily indicate a strong relationship with pro-environmental behaviour due to, for example, various situational opportunities and barriers (Cheng & Wu, 2015; Kukkonen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in the current study, the findings indicated strong pro-environmental behaviour. The students paid attention to sustainability in their daily practices, especially by seeking information, recycling, and considering their consumption choices. However, they reported a low level of commitment and participation in environmental initiatives, which is consistent with previous research (Kyriakopoulos et al., 2020).

The findings accentuated that tourism has become an essential part of Gen Zers' lives. Although the negative implications were well acknowledged, giving up tourism entirely was not seen as an option. Maintaining sustainability in everyday life seemed more reasonable than doing so in tourism, which many considered a gained advantage of breaking daily routines. However, Gen Zers also felt guilt and shame about travelling. Previous tourism literature has described youth as a crucial life stage in which travel provides transformative experiences: young travellers making memories and questioning their identities while transitioning into adulthood (Pung, Yung, Khoo-Lattimore & Del Chiappa, 2020). While previous generations travelled the world with a clear conscience, that opportunity is now denied to Gen Zers navigating amid global disruptions.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has changed Gen Zers' everyday consumption and tourism behaviour. Interestingly, various positive outcomes of the pandemic were identified. Covid-19 has made students reconsider their consumption habits and changed their everyday practices to be more sustainable, which was seen as an asset in addressing the ecological crisis. Moreover, the pandemic has enabled them to take advantage of time as an essential resource, enabling them to acquire knowledge and shift to even greener consumption practices. Regarding tourism behaviour, the pandemic made some consider tourism a privilege worth appreciating and others realise that frequent travel is not a necessity. Nevertheless, the students also critically questioned whether these positive changes were permanent or would be neglected when the pandemic is over and life returns to normal.

Although young generations have always been active in leading environmental movements and developments, it needs to be acknowledged that leading the change cannot be entirely Gen Zers' responsibility. This generation is facing the consequences of the global disruptions caused by previous generations and forced to find solutions to the ecological crisis. In this task, universities and business schools have a significant role in educating Gen Zers to become a disruptor generation by catalysing the necessary change (cf. Muff, 2013). This societal transformation requires future consumers, professionals, and leaders to have moral awareness, the intention to work for sustainability, and the ability and desire to take a sustainability leadership role.

Despite the fairly small sample and narrow geographic coverage, this chapter contributes to previous consumer, tourism, and generational literature by emphasising the possibility to convert global disruptions into opportunities for learning and growth, which may lead to positive change and enhanced visions of the good life (cf. Díaz et al., 2019). Moreover, integrating positive change into discussions of the ecological crisis highlights the urgency of the societal transformation. Notably, catalysing positive change requires solidifying Gen Zers' values, attitudes, and behaviours into concrete actions to be undertaken by tomorrow's consumers, professionals, and leaders, providing interesting avenues for future research.

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