INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH CULTURE SOCIETY
Monthly Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed Journal
Volume - 10, Issue - 10, October - 2026
ISSN(O): 2456-6683
[Impact Factor: 9.241]
IJRCS

DOIs:10.2017/IJRCS/202610007 --:-- Research Paper / Article / Review

Sustainable Value Creation in Emerging Markets: Leveraging Short-Form Video Marketing and Gen Z Engagement for Circular Commerce in Chennai City

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Abstract: *This research investigates the impact of short-form video marketing (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) on Generation Z consumers' trust, engagement, and adoption of circular fashion in Chennai City. With the rapid growth of urbanisation and fashion consumption in developing countries like India, environmental concerns have escalated, driving a shift toward circular business models such as upcycling and thrift re-commerce. Utilising a quantitative empirical design, primary data was collected from 120 Gen Z consumers across major commercial and residential hubs in Chennai using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. Descriptive analysis reveals that Instagram Reels is the dominant platform for fashion discovery (60.0%), with 90.0% of respondents encountering sustainable fashion content at least weekly. Transparent storytelling—specifically behind-the-scenes upcycling footage (Mean = 3.61) and verified eco-certifications (Mean = 3.55)—significantly enhances overall Green Brand Trust (Overall Mean = 3.53) and mitigates greenwashing scepticism. While short-form videos foster positive purchase intentions (Overall Mean = 3.20), structural adoption barriers remain significant (Overall Mean = 3.29), led by high price premiums relative to fast fashion (Mean = 3.47) and functional quality/hygiene doubts (Mean = 3.24). The study concludes that transparent digital video content effectively bridges the green trust gap, but pricing and quality assurances must be addressed to drive widespread circular fashion adoption among Gen Z consumers in emerging economies.*

Key Words: *Short-Form Video Marketing, Gen Z, Circular Fashion, Green Brand Trust, Upcycled Clothing, Emerging Markets, Chennai City.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Many of the world's leading businesses are shifting away from traditional "take-make-dispose" business models toward sustainable practices that promote resource conservation and waste elimination. Experiencing rapid economic expansion, countries like India face increasing environmental pressures from urban growth and fashion retail development. In response, retail brands are adopting strategies such as upcycling textile waste, implementing closed-loop recycling systems, promoting second-hand clothing sales, and using compostable packaging. These efforts help brands lower their environmental impact while strengthening competitive differentiation. At the core of this transition is Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012). This cohort is characterised by digital nativity, environmental awareness, and high expectations regarding corporate ethical standards. Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z consumers actively consider environmental impact when making purchase decisions. Nevertheless, heightened eco-consciousness frequently fails to convert into active eco-friendly buying decisions—a discrepancy commonly described as the intention–behaviour gap (Bhatt & Sharma, 2023). Factors such as high price premiums, durability doubts, and greenwashing scepticism frequently prevent Gen Z from adopting eco-friendly options.

Short-form video platforms popular among Gen Z, such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, provide an effective medium to address consumer doubts. These platforms allow brands to showcase upcycling production processes and transparently display material costs. While research exists on short-form video marketing generally, empirical evidence regarding its application to circular fashion in emerging urban markets remains limited. Therefore, this study examines the impact of short-form video marketing on circular fashion adoption among Gen Z consumers in the commercial and cultural centres of Chennai City.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

To understand how Gen Z consumers move from environmental awareness to circular fashion purchases, it is necessary to examine digital engagement alongside behavioural adoption barriers. Prior literature spans three main domains: short-form video engagement, green brand authenticity, and circular fashion adoption barriers.

- **Gen Z Digital Engagement and Short-Form Video Marketing:** Gen Z relies heavily on mobile social platforms for product discovery and evaluation. Verma (2026) noted that 63% of Indian Gen Z consumers prefer online shopping platforms, with Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts being the leading channels for clothing discovery. Short-form video content plays a key role in shaping consumer considerations. According to Dabija et al. (2020), delivering green marketing messages through short-form video builds long-term customer trust and loyalty. Rather than responding to traditional advertising, Gen Z consumers connect with authentic visual stories that reflect genuine brand sustainability values (Bjerre, 2022).
- **Green Marketing, Brand Perception, and Authenticity:** Brand transparency is essential in shaping green purchase decisions. Chen and Chang (2013) demonstrated that perceived green value and authentic brand imagery significantly increase green purchase intentions. Open and clear brand messaging alleviates consumer scepticism while curbing suspicions of deceptive eco-claims (Aagerup & Nilsson, 2016). In regional retail environments, Archana and Shree (2024) highlighted that integrated online-to-offline communication influences customer perceptions when modern retail formats align with digital campaigns in Chennai.
- **Circular Apparel Adoption and Value-Action Disconnect:** Even though young buyers display favourable sentiments toward environmental responsibility, a pronounced disconnect often persists between their expressed values and real-world shopping actions (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Key obstacles include high retail prices, limited store access, and doubts regarding garment durability. Karuna and Arthana (2024) observed that majorities of surveyed shoppers cited high cost, lack of store availability, and perceived lack of durability as primary barriers to purchasing sustainable clothing. While practical factors like cost and convenience strongly influence fashion choices, targeted social media communications can help bridge this gap and encourage active participation in circular fashion adoption.

Literature Synthesis: Extensive research confirms that Gen Z consumers engage readily with short-form digital green marketing. However, physical and structural barriers continue to hinder actual adoption. Empirical evidence remains limited regarding how transparent short-form video content can systematically overcome consumer friction in emerging urban markets like Chennai.

3. OBJECTIVES:

1. To gauge Gen Z consumption patterns and engagement with short-form video fashion content in Chennai City.
2. To evaluate the impact of transparent video storytelling (behind-the-scenes upcycling and cost breakdowns) on green brand trust.
3. To examine the effect of short-form video engagement on purchase intentions toward D2C upcycled apparel and thrift re-commerce.
4. To identify key barriers affecting circular fashion adoption among Gen Z, including price sensitivity, quality concerns, and greenwashing scepticism.

4. RESEARCH GAP:

While digital marketing approaches and circular economy concepts in India have been studied generally, empirical investigations into short-form video marketing as a specific driver of circular commerce remain scarce. Existing literature often addresses global consumer behaviour or corporate disclosures broadly, without evaluating how platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts influence local fashion choices. This study addresses these theoretical and empirical gaps by targeting young consumers (ages 18–25) across diverse commercial and residential hubs in Chennai City—including dense retail zones (T. Nagar, Pondy Bazaar, Sowcarpet), lifestyle districts (Anna Nagar, Nungambakkam, Besant Nagar), traditional commercial areas (Mylapore), and major shopping malls (Royapettah, Velachery).

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a descriptive, quantitative, empirical research design to examine the relationship between short-form video marketing, green brand trust, and circular fashion adoption in Chennai City.

- **Target Population & Sampling:** The target population comprises Generation Z consumers residing in Chennai City who regularly view short-form video content. Using a non-probability convenience sampling technique, a valid sample of $N = 120$ respondents were collected.

- **Data Collection Instrument:** Data was gathered via a structured electronic questionnaire (Google Forms) divided into five sections: screening/demographics, consumption patterns, green brand trust, purchase intentions, and adoption barriers. Construct items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).
- **Statistical Analysis:** Data were analysed using SPSS/Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used for demographic and usage variables. Central tendency and dispersion (Mean and Standard Deviation) were calculated for Likert items.

Ethical Considerations: This empirical study was conducted in accordance with institutional research ethics principles for studies involving human subjects. Before completing the survey, all Gen Z respondents were informed of the study's scope, research objectives, and voluntary participation model. Informed consent was obtained electronically via the initial section of the Google Forms questionnaire before participants could access the survey items. To ensure participant privacy, all responses were fully anonymised at the point of collection, and no personally identifiable information (PII) was recorded. Data were aggregated solely for academic statistical analysis.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION :

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents ($N = 120$)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)
1.1 Age		
Under 18 years	8	6.7%
18–24 years	78	65.0%
25–30 years	34	28.3%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
1.2 Gender		
Female	64	53.3%
Male	56	46.7%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
1.3 Educational Qualification		
Bachelor's Degree	65	54.2%
Graduate / Professional Degree	26	21.7%
High School Diploma	23	19.2%
Currently in High School	6	5.0%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
1.4 Employment Status		
Student	67	55.8%
Employed	39	32.5%
Unemployed	11	9.2%
Home Maker	3	2.5%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
1.5 Family Income		
Below ₹10,000	32	26.7%
₹10,000 – ₹30,000	51	42.5%
₹30,001 – ₹50,000	29	24.2%
Above ₹50,000	8	6.7%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
1.6 Marital Status		
Single	107	89.2%
Married	13	10.8%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**

INTERPRETATION: Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the 120 respondents from Chennai City. The sample consists predominantly of Generation Z individuals aged 18–24 (65.0%) and single respondents (89.2%). Gender distribution is balanced (53.3% female, 46.7% male). Educational attainment is high, with 54.2% holding a Bachelor's degree. Correspondingly, students make up 55.8% of the sample, while 42.5% report a monthly family

income between ₹10,000 and ₹30,000. Overall, the sample represents an educated, digitally connected young demographic whose moderate disposable income contributes to price sensitivity regarding sustainable fashion.

Table 2: Short-Form Video Consumption Patterns ($N = 120$)

Category	Category	Frequency (N)
2.1. Preferred Platform for Fashion		
Instagram Reels	72	60.0%
YouTube Shorts	35	29.2%
Moj / ShareChat / Other Indian platforms	8	6.7%
None	5	4.2%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
2.2 Daily Time Spent		
Less than 30 minutes	14	11.7%
30 minutes – 1 hour	41	34.2%
1 – 2 hours	43	35.8%
More than 2 hours	22	18.3%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**
2.3 Sustainable Content Exposure		
Daily	35	29.2%
3–4 times a week	39	32.5%
Once a week	34	28.3%
Rarely / Never	12	10.0%
Total	**120**	**100.0%**

INTERPRETATION: Table 2 outlines respondents' media consumption behaviour. Instagram Reels is the leading platform for fashion discovery (60.0%), followed by YouTube Shorts (29.2%). Over 54% of respondents spend more than one hour daily watching short-form videos. Sustainable fashion content reach is high: 61.7% encounter upcycled or thrift fashion videos at least 3–4 times a week, and 90.0% view such content weekly. These figures confirm that short-form video platforms provide effective reach among Gen Z in Chennai.

Table 3 – Transparent Content & Green Brand Trust ($N = 120$)

Construct Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Behind-the-Scenes Upcycling	2 (1.7%)	8 (6.7%)	38 (31.7%)	58 (48.3%)	14 (11.7%)	**3.61**	**0.82**
Price Breakdown Transparency	3 (2.5%)	12 (10.0%)	42 (35.0%)	48 (40.0%)	15 (12.5%)	**3.52**	**0.91**
Verified Eco-Certifications	4 (3.3%)	14 (11.7%)	38 (31.7%)	46 (38.3%)	18 (15.0%)	**3.55**	**0.95**
Micro-Creators vs. Celebrity Ads	2 (1.7%)	13 (10.8%)	48 (40.0%)	43 (35.8%)	14 (11.7%)	**3.46**	**0.85**
Overall Green Brand Trust Index						**3.53**	**0.71**

INTERPRETATION: Table 3 illustrates the effect of transparent video content on green brand trust. The overall construct mean of 3.53 reflects positive brand trust. Behind-the-scenes upcycling content received the highest score (Mean = 3.61), with 60.0% agreeing it strengthens trust. Verified eco-certifications (Mean = 3.55) and cost breakdowns (Mean = 3.52) effectively address greenwashing concerns and establish brand authenticity. Content from authentic micro-creators was rated higher than celebrity endorsements (Mean = 3.46), underscoring the value of relatable visual evidence in building consumer trust.

Table 4 – Engagement & Sustainable Purchase Intentions ($N = 120$)

Construct Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Social Content Sharing & Engagement	5 (4.2%)	18 (15.0%)	49 (40.8%)	36 (30.0%)	12 (10.0%)	**3.26**	**0.93**
D2C Brand Purchase Likelihood	6 (5.0%)	22 (18.3%)	48 (40.0%)	32 (26.7%)	12 (10.0%)	**3.11**	**0.97**
Instagram Thrift vs. Fast Fashion	5 (4.2%)	22 (18.3%)	46 (38.3%)	35 (29.2%)	12 (10.0%)	**3.14**	**0.95**
Willingness to Adopt Circular Items	5 (4.2%)	19 (15.8%)	42 (35.0%)	38 (31.7%)	16 (13.3%)	**3.31**	**1.01**
Overall Engagement & Intention Index						**3.20**	**0.72**

INTERPRETATION: Table 4 presents engagement behaviours and purchase intentions regarding circular fashion. The overall construct mean of 3.20 indicates a moderate positive inclination. Willingness to choose circular fashion alternatives after viewing convincing video content scored highest (Mean = 3.31), while 40.0% of respondents actively share upcycling content on social media (Mean = 3.26). Video exposure also encouraged interest in purchasing from Instagram thrift stores (Mean = 3.14) and D2C upcycled brands (Mean = 3.11). A neutral response segment of roughly 38% represents potential for conversion through targeted marketing.

Table 5 – Adoption Barriers to Circular Fashion ($N = 120$)

Construct Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
High Price Barrier	5 (4.2%)	16 (13.3%)	38 (31.7%)	43 (35.8%)	18 (15.0%)	**3.47**	**0.97**
Quality, Sizing & Hygiene Doubts	5 (4.2%)	22 (18.3%)	41 (34.2%)	39 (32.5%)	13 (10.8%)	**3.24**	**0.96**
Greenwashing Skepticism	6 (5.0%)	22 (18.3%)	42 (35.0%)	35 (29.2%)	15 (12.5%)	**3.22**	**1.00**
Limited Local Store Availability	5 (4.2%)	22 (18.3%)	42 (35.0%)	37 (30.8%)	14 (11.7%)	**3.22**	**0.97**
Overall Adoption Barriers Index						**3.29**	**0.80**

INTERPRETATION: Table 5 evaluates key obstacles to circular fashion adoption. An overall construct mean of 3.29 confirms notable adoption friction. High price relative to fast fashion is the principal barrier (Mean = 3.47), agreed upon by 50.8% of respondents. Doubts concerning garment quality, sizing, and hygiene follow (Mean = 3.24). Greenwashing scepticism (Mean = 3.22) and limited physical store availability in Chennai City (Mean = 3.22) further restrict adoption, leading many consumers to choose fast fashion for convenience and cost savings.

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

- **Dominance of Instagram Reels and High Daily Exposure:** Instagram Reels is the leading channel for fashion discovery among Gen Z in Chennai (60.0%), followed by YouTube Shorts (29.2%). Over 54% of respondents spend more than an hour daily watching short-form videos, and 90.0% encounter sustainable fashion content weekly.
- **Visual Evidence Drives Green Brand Trust:** Transparent behind-the-scenes upcycling content yielded the highest trust score (Mean = 3.61). Price breakdowns (Mean = 3.52) and verified eco-certifications (Mean = 3.55) effectively reduce greenwashing scepticism, with micro-creators proving more persuasive than traditional celebrities (Mean = 3.46).
- **Moderate Purchase Intention with Conversion Potential:** Video exposure generates a moderately positive purchase intention (Overall Mean = 3.20), led by willingness to adopt circular items after watching convincing content (Mean = 3.31). A neutral segment of 38%–40% represents a key audience for conversion.

- **Price Premiums as the Primary Adoption Obstacle:** High prices relative to fast fashion emerged as the primary barrier to circular fashion adoption, cited by 50.8% of respondents (Mean = 3.47).
- **Quality and Retail Accessibility Friction:** Concerns regarding garment durability, fit, and hygiene (Mean = 3.24), alongside limited store availability in Chennai City (Mean = 3.22), lead consumers to default to convenient fast-fashion options.

8. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH :

- **Geographic Sample Expansion:** Future research can extend beyond Chennai City to Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities to analyse regional differences in price sensitivity and media consumption.
- **Longitudinal Tracking of Actual Purchases:** This study evaluated purchase intentions and engagement. Subsequent research could track actual sales conversions over time using longitudinal or experimental methods.
- **Category Comparative Analysis:** Scholars can apply this framework to other retail categories, such as upcycled accessories, sustainable footwear, and refurbished electronics.
- **Impact of Emerging Video Technologies:** Researching dynamic content formats—such as live-stream commerce and shoppable short-form video features—could offer further insights into closing the intention–behaviour gap.

9. CONCLUSION:

This study confirms that short-form video marketing serves as an effective driver of green brand trust and consumer engagement for circular fashion in Chennai City. Transparent storytelling—such as raw upcycling footage, price breakdowns, and authentic creator reviews—builds consumer confidence and reduces greenwashing concerns. However, video marketing alone cannot fully drive the circular transition. Adoption remains constrained by structural friction, including price premiums, quality and hygiene doubts, and limited physical store access. To accelerate circular fashion adoption in emerging retail markets, direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands and thrift businesses must combine transparent digital video marketing with competitive pricing strategies, verifiable quality assurances, and expanded local retail access through pop-ups or physical store locations.

10. LIMITATIONS:

This study is subject to several empirical limitations. Geographically, data collection was restricted to Generation Z consumers in Chennai City, limiting the generalizability of findings to rural populations or Tier-2 and Tier-3 urban markets. Additionally, the study relied on a non-probability sample of 120 respondents and self-reported survey data, which may be susceptible to social desirability bias regarding eco-friendly intentions. Finally, the research focused exclusively on short-form video platforms (Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts), without evaluating static visual formats or long-form video channels.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To accelerate circular fashion adoption, D2C brands should prioritize short-form videos featuring behind-the-scenes upcycling, cost breakdowns, and micro-creator collaborations to foster green trust and address hygiene and durability concerns ($Mean = 3.61$). Furthermore, to overcome the primary price barrier ($Mean = 3.47$), retailers must introduce competitive pricing strategies, student discounts, and hybrid pop-up stores in key retail hubs to allow physical product evaluation alongside digital campaigns.

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ISSN(O): 2456-6683
[Impact Factor: 9.241]

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