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# HOW ENVIRONMENTALLY CONCIOUS ARE NORWEGIAN GEN Z?

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## 1.0 Introduction

The past decade, and therefore a large part of Gen Z coming-of-age-years, has been defined by several political and societal issues, such as the very prominent climate crisis. In fact, it is “now or never” for the climate, according to the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) most recent climate report. Unless action is taken, the planet will soon be uninhabitable, with resulting horrors like entire cities disappearing under water, extreme weather, food- and water shortage, as well as the extinction of “a million species of plants and animals” (UN News, 2022). Several young people today have therefore devoted their lives to help fight the climate crisis. With Greta Thunberg in the lead, Gen Z arranged the international movement “Fridays for Future,” a school strike dedicated to making politicians all over the world act (Fridays for Future, 2023). Climate activists have thrown soup at famous paintings, chained themselves down to roads, protested, and written opinion pieces to make their voices heard. (Gayle, 2022). The new generation buy second-hand, eat plant-based food and value nature. We are repeatedly told that Gen Z are the green-collared flower children the world so desperately needs right now, but how realistic is this depiction really? NHO’s latest “Ung”-research, a study investigating what people ages 15-29 worry about, show that young Norwegian’s concern for the climate change has decreased with over 10% since 2020 (Piene, 2022). Additionally, as stated by market research firm Mintel, our generation beats all other age groups when it comes to buying new clothes, mostly from fast fashion brands, yet 70% of us still claim that sustainability is key when purchasing fashion (Kale, 2021). As these are some quite contradictory factors, it becomes obvious that there is more than one side to the story of Gen Z’s “green” way of life. Are we all Greta Thunberg-clones, or is it a bit more complicated than that?

Based on this background, I have arrived at the thesis: “How environmentally conscious are (Norwegian) Gen Z?”. This is a question that interests me, not only because of its relevance, but also because I, by investigating this topic, hopefully will learn more about my own generation, and how the times we are growing up in are affecting us. The aim of this project is to find out just how much climate change affects the average teenager/young adult in their daily lives, as well as investigating what contributes to how they view the situation. I will make use of several articles dealing with topics of climate change and young people, as well as conducting my own research through a survey. Considering the noticeable decrease in worry seen in the NHO’s Ung-research, I would like to find out why this is, and what could have contributed to the change.

## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 Contents

The “young generation” have long been branded as disruptive. Whether it is disobeying our parents, disturbing the peace, or refusing to conform to old traditions and values, rebellion is something that, for long time, has been associated with teens and young adults (Vadala, 2018). We see this in Hamlet’s Romeo & Juliet, the star-crossed lovers defying their feuding parents to be together, in the hippie movements in the 1960- and 70’s, to the punky 80’s, to pick a few examples. Yet sometimes those who we think will be future disruptors and regime-critics, can surprise – instead of becoming rebellious idealists, they might just turn out a whole lot plainer than expected.

New, liberal worldviews is something that has defined the youth of every generation; Gen Z, the generation of people born between 1997 and 2012, has for a long time been branded as being extensively “woke” – we are way more liberal and open than our parents when it comes to several political and societal aspects (Richardson, 2021). Since the day we were born, our generation has carried a rather demanding responsibility on our shoulders – we are the hope of the future, literally. Therefore, one would think that this would make Gen Z thorough anti-capitalists and climate activists. Yet, according to the information gathered in NHO’s 2023 “Ung”-research project, climate change is no longer the main concern of Norwegians ages 15-29 as of 2022. While the climate crisis and destruction of nature was the nr 1. thing that young people ages 15-29 worried about in 2020, the same report for 2023 (with numbers from 2022) reveals that it now has moved down to 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Fear of climate change has been replaced by a worry for the rising prizes on rents, food, and electricity (Piene, 2022). Seven out of ten young adults are most worried about their personal economy, as well as their chances of getting a job in the future. In addition, the report indicates that noticeably fewer people are worried about the effects of climate change – 58% in 2022 compared to 72% in 2020 (Piene, 2022).

### 2.2 Past research

How humans are affected by the climate crisis is a topic that has been researched in many ways in the past decade, as the reality of global warming has become more and more apparent in society and the media. Knowing that we live in a time of ecological crisis can have a deteriorating effect on young people’s mental health (Hickman et al., 2021, p. 863). Data from

the website *Verywell Mind* shows that Gen Z is the generation that is most worried about climate change (Morin & Gillespie, 2021). The article “Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey”, surveyed 10 000 people aged 16-25 in 10 different countries (Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, the UK, and the USA) on their worries connected to climate change (Hickman et. al., 2021). The research results showed that 59% of the respondents were very or extremely worried, and that more than 50% experienced each of the following emotions: sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty (Hickman et. al., 2021, p. 1). Yet a recent Danish study reveals that even though there is an increase in consumers’ concern for the climate crisis and global warming, there is found to be a huge gap between the buyers’ mindset and their actions (Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). An example of this can be found in the fashion industry, where the public’s massive demand for cheap, quickly produced clothing items keeps the fast fashion business up and running (Rønholt & Overgaard, 2020). Fast fashion has a significantly negative impact on both nature and people, as the industry lets out massive amounts of harmful emissions and toxic pollution, harming not only the local community where the clothes are produced, but also the planet (Stanton, 2023). According to an analysis presented by Business Insider, the fast fashion industry produces 10% of the worlds’ carbon emissions, which is the equivalent amount to the entire European Union (McFall-Johnsen, 2019). In addition, 85% of all textiles used in the production ends up in dumps each year, something that has a catastrophic effect on the environment and people, as most brands use synthetic fibres in their clothing that can take hundreds of years to biodegrade, polluting oceans and local water sources (Maiti, 2022). In the article “Individualist-Collectivist Differences in Climate Change Inaction: The Role of Perceived Intractability”, Xiang et al. writes that “despite increasing pressure to deal with climate change, individuals have been hesitant to respond effectively ... “we consume as much as we always did, drive as much as we always did, eat as much meat as we always did.” (Xiang et al., 2019). This shows that parallel to people’s worry is an inability to act, which seems especially visible in young adults.

In his article “COVID-19 led to a decline in climate and environmental concern: evidence from UK panel data”, Liam F. Beiser-McGrath writes: “Using panel data from the UK, that was collected just before (November 2019) and just after (June 2020) the outbreak of COVID-19, I find that the pandemic caused individuals to significantly deprioritise climate change and the environment in absolute terms, and the environment relative to the economy.” In a study from

2022, Beiser-McGrath finds that the pandemic caused individuals “to significantly deprioritise climate change and the environment in absolute terms, and the environment relative to the economy (p. 1). These findings indicate that in times of severe economic stress, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and environmental aspects are thoroughly deprioritized. Therefore, one could wonder if this is similar for the younger generation. The previously mentioned UNG-research shows that topics like future economy is one of the main concerns among young Norwegian adults in 2023, while in 2020, before the pandemic had started, it was climate change. However, this may only be a small part of a bigger picture.

Something that largely contributes to our world views and behaviour is social media. For example, who you follow on social media platforms will likely influence your actions in some way (Kowalewicz, 2022). Many influencers with large audiences, whether their posts are fashion-, food-, beauty- or lifestyle-related, tend to create sponsored content about a brand or product to make money (Zapal, 2022). This may contribute to contradicting values – while one part of society preaches sustainability and a green lifestyle, another constantly bombards us with product advertising and sponsorship while flashing their new 3,000£ wardrobe, leaving the consumer confused – which is the acceptable behaviour?

This way, social media not only impacts the buying choices of multiple individuals, but additionally contributes to the presentation of overconsumption and materialism as something normal and desirable.

## 3.0 Choice of method, theories & ethics

### 3.1 Research method

During the research process of this article, and considering I had a limited amount of time to finish my project, I benefited from secondary data and sources. Working with this type of data meant I had to learn to be critical towards my sources and consider the credibility of each one. I also collected information of my own through a survey. I have used both qualitative and quantitative research, which gave me a great advantage during my writing process. This is because the variations of sources contributed to a more detailed image of the topic I was investigating. Given the topic of the project I was especially interested in data from questionnaires and surveys concerning young people’s views on issues like the climate crisis & sustainability as a factor in fighting it. I have used research data on young people from all over Europe, but with a focus on Norwegians. Attitudes might vary across countries,

depending on local factors like for instance national economy, politics, as well as social aspects.

Given the aim of this article, I conducted a survey among Norwegian students to learn more about their attitudes and choices regarding environmentally conscious choices, and what impacts their patterns as consumers. In the survey I asked four questions in Norwegian. These questions were: “How many times did you travel by airplane last year?”, “How many new (not second-hand) clothing items have you bought the last 30 days?”, “Is buying sustainable/environmentally friendly important to you? (For example, environmentally friendly brands, thrift shops, etc)”, and “If you had known that a product was produced in a way that was harmful to the climate, would this have affected your choice in buying it?”. To answer the questions, one could choose between four alternatives: on the first two, the alternatives ranged between 0, 1-3, 4-6, or more. On the third question, one could choose between four answers: “Not important”, “Don’t know”, “Pretty important”, and “Very important”. The answer-alternatives for the last question varied from “I had not bought it”, “Depends on what it (the product) was”, “Don’t know”, and “No, I had bought it anyway”.

My original intention was to publish the survey in the Oslo Cathedral school’s Facebook group, called “KattaÅrboka”. This group has 2000 members, though several of these have graduated, as the page was created about 11 years ago in 2012. After a few weeks I had gotten only 19 answers, however, I then realized that I had not posted it onto KattaÅrboka, but on my personal Facebook page. I have 112 friends on Facebook, which is quite a different number compared to the 2000 members in KattaÅrboka. As this means I didn’t get as many answers as I maybe could have, it functions as a source of error. However, I decided to post the survey on KattaÅrboka as well about a week later, in hope of getting some more answers. After publishing it there, I waited a week before deciding to check it. The survey had now gotten 71 answers, 52 more answers than earlier, which is quite a big contrast. I decided to draw a line at 71 answers so I could begin to analyse the results.

### 3.2 Validity

When dealing with information in this way, one must include possible sources of error. Since there may be significant differences between the attitudes and behaviour regarding sustainability and climate among people from different countries, this may be the reason for some variations in the results I gathered from the secondary data. On the other hand, we are

all influenced by the same international trends, due to social media and an increasingly global consumers' market.

Validity refers to whether a test like a survey measures what it aims to measure. My ambition was to measure how environmentally conscious Norwegian youth really are, and I therefore made a survey with four questions about green attitudes and consumption. To increase the participation in the survey I deliberately kept the numbers of questions low – however, I believe I should have asked a couple of more questions to get better data. When making the survey I chose to focus on practice rather than attitudes, because attitudes could be difficult to measure (Haraldsen, 1999). However, I believe I should have asked a few more questions more specific about attitudes related to topics like climate change. For example, the aspect of buying new clothes might not have anything to do with being sustainable for some. Instead, the amount of new clothes a person buys could depend on, for example, family or personal economy, as well as financial priorities – one could spend money on other things than clothes, without this having anything to do with one's climate awareness. Another example of something which does not necessarily have to be a realistic depiction, is the question investigating Katta students' flying habits, as it is impossible for me to know if these answers are entirely factual or not. It could be possible that some of the respondents picked a lower number to seem more environmentally friendly, or that they did not remember completely how many times they had flown and therefore picked the number which seemed more likely to them.

In my survey, the sources of error can vary – everything from the fact that not everyone who has a user and whom is a part of KattaÅrboka, are active on Facebook, to the ones answering the surveys usually being the ones interested in the topic of the survey – for example climate change – which can result in biased answers (Haraldsen, 1999). One should also take into consideration the aspect of bots and fake accounts on Facebook, though I do not find it likely that they could in any way have impacted the results to my survey.

Despite there being some difficulties in both the collection of data and the conduction of the survey, I overall believe that the data is valid and useful in relation to my thesis question.

### 3.3 Theories

In this part of my article, I will make use of several psychological and sociological theories, as this is something I find relevant when investigating how people view themselves in relation to the current situation. I believe that a big part of how we react to a crisis – in this case, the

climate crisis – has to do with psychology and how the human brain works. By taking advantage of these theories, I will hopefully come closer to an answer to my thesis question.

### 3.3.1 Cognitive dissonance theory

When looking at how a person reacts to the climate crisis, it is important to understand how most people feel convinced that they are acting in a way that is morally right or acceptable. In the article *How your brain stops you from taking climate change seriously* (2019), N. Akpan writes that various psychological barriers play a big part in peoples' inaction towards the climate crisis. One of these barriers is known as *cognitive dissonance*. Cognitive Dissonance Theory, originally developed by the American psychologist Leon Festinger, suggests how a contradiction of beliefs and behaviour causes a state of tension in a person (Wikipedia, 2023). This phenomenon is something I find to be relevant when looking at how and why most people react to the reality of the climate crisis the way they do. Festinger's 1957 theory describes how the inconsistency between beliefs and action generate an uncomfortable feeling in a subject, the "cognitive dissonance state", which is described as a feeling of unease and guilt (Vaidis & Bran, 2014). Thanks to the discomfort this state causes, people tend to rationalize the decision that caused them to feel this way – even if this is something that goes against their own beliefs – hide their beliefs or actions from others, or even avoid conversations about the topic (Tzeses, 2020). A classic example of someone who experiences cognitive dissonance is the smoker – he or she knows about the dangers and health risks of the habit, yet continues to do it, which may result in feelings of guilt. To resolve the discomfort they feel, the smoker might for example try to justify the habit, by telling himself that "it isn't dangerous to have cigarette once in a while", or even looking for alternative information that puts smoking in a more positive light, like that more people die in automobile accidents than of lung cancer, or that smoking is great for weight loss (Tzeses, 2020). This is because most people are more willing to change their minds about an issue (e.g., that smoking isn't bad for one's health), than changing their habits (stop smoking), because the first option is easier to cope with (Akpan, 2019). When there is an inconsistency between attitudes and behaviours, something must change to eliminate the dissonance (McLeod, 2023). People tend to stick to their beliefs, even if they are proven wrong. This perfectly explains our complete inaction when it comes to the climate crisis – similarly to smoking, we know we are at risk, and what needs to be done to reduce this risk is clear enough, yet we continue our old behaviour, either out of stubbornness or denial (Akpan, 2019).

Changes in climate and ecosystems are detectable and proven by scientists, and most people are aware that there is a real risk – yet the ability of an average individual to act on this knowledge is minimal, due to these psychological barriers (Ross et al., 2021, p. 1). Cognitive dissonance is the reason why so many put their faith in climate change-denying conspiracy theories, why so many ignore the facts and continue their usual behaviour, and why it took world leaders three decades to act from the first report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was published in 1988, until the 2015 Paris Agreement was entered into force on November 4, 2016 (Akpan, 2019).

### 3.3.2 Gifford's "Dragons of Inaction"

In his article "The Dragons of Inaction – Psychological Barriers That Limit Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption" (2011), Robert Gifford at the University of Victoria writes:

*"Although many individuals are engaged in some ameliorative action, most could do more, but they are hindered by seven categories of psychological barriers, or "dragons of inaction..."*

Gifford describes these "dragons of inaction" as psychological barriers that hinder people from changing their behaviour to be more sustainable and climate friendly (Gifford, 2011). According to Gifford, these seven psychological phenomena are limited cognition (humans are less rational than many believe, and therefore struggle to worry about future situations), ideologies, comparisons with others (people usually tend to imitate the behaviour of their neighbour, in that way never breaking the negative pattern), reduced costs ("once one has invested in something, dispensing with it is more difficult than it would have been had one not invested in it", e.g., if you drive a fossil fuelled car) disbelief, perceived risks (what kinds of risks do change of behaviour hold?), and limited behaviour (the belief that there is only so much one can do to have an actual impact) (Gifford, R., 2011, p. 292). Another big "dragon" is ignorance, which in this context means a general lack of knowledge – most people are familiar with the risks of climate change, but do not really have an idea of what to do with the information they have been given (Akpan, 2019). Many young people today may feel hopeless or believe that they are incapable of contributing to change, and in that way being subconsciously hindered from acting.

### 3.3.3 Optimism bias

Another form of psychological barrier is one called "the optimism bias", which refers to people's tendency to overestimate the possibility of things turning out in a positive way, compared to our tendency to underestimate the possibility of things turning out in a negative

way (Wikipedia, 2023). In the article “Temporal pessimism and spatial optimism in environmental assessments: An 18-nation study”, Gifford and his team surveyed 3,200 people across 18 nations. They found that a majority, those from 15 countries, believed that climate change was not a local problem, even though this was proved to be incorrect (Gifford, Scannell et al., 2009). This may be because of optimism bias – although global citizens expect climate conditions to worsen in general over the next years, they don’t believe the area they live in will be affected as badly as other places, according to Gifford. Because of a highly biased world view, young people today might underestimate the consequences of climate change. A big contributor to this could be what information a person views on social media, where content is usually steered by the algorithms (O’Brien, 2022). People usually don’t like to hear information such as “The world is ending”, therefore, social media platforms tend to offer them a slightly more positive outlook, even if this may be deceiving.

#### 3.3.4 The collective action problem

Many scientists and experts disagree about whether individual climate action matters in the bigger picture, or if making a real difference is only possible through collective action/structural change. Because of the severity of the climate crisis, as well as it being a global problem, many believe there is nothing they can do about alone, a phenomenon also called the “collective action problem”. This theory is based on how “people sometimes do not act because they perceive that they have little control over the outcome”, conflicting interests with others in the group, or that their individual actions will not have much impact (Gifford, 2011, p. 293), even when the ones in question would be better off cooperating (Wikipedia, 2023). In the article “Climate Change Mitigation and the Collective Action Problem”, Steven Brechin writes that “Global climate change has become the collective action problem of our era” (2016, p.1). We would all benefit from attempting to turn the negative development of the climate crisis around yet struggle to do so because of our conflicting interests (Dowding, 2013).

#### 3.3.5 Social learning theory

Humans are social animals and tend to imitate each other to fit in. Social learning theory emphasises the cruciality of observing and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and reactions of others (McLeod, 2023). Proposed by the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, the theory considers how observational learning impacts peoples’ behaviour. The individuals that are observed, and thereafter imitated, are the ones in charge of influencing a person. These are usually the people one surrounds oneself with daily, like parents, friends, or teachers at

school, but it could also be someone unfamiliar, like a fictional character or a person on social media (e.g., influencers). In modern society influencers are usually the ones who decide what is socially acceptable, trendy, or cool, and what isn't (Wertz, 2022). This can especially impact younger people, as they tend to be more impressionable and "idolize" certain people they follow on social media. If a person with a large following on social media regularly posts about new things they have bought, or how they are traveling the world in their private jet, this will have an impact on the people who receive these posts – they will want the same things, in that way imitating the influencer. As mentioned earlier, brands are becoming increasingly aware that they have a higher chance of consumer engagement if they hire a person with a large following to promote their product (Chopra et al., 2020, p. 1).

### 3.4 Ethics

Due to my use of surveys as a part of my research material, I had to take into consideration the ethical aspect of this method. As the survey was answered anonymously through Google Forms, I could in no way gather sensitive information about the individuals who answered. I also made it clear to the informants that the questionnaire was anonymous, and that I couldn't know who had answered it. Although the questions, and therefore the answers, to my survey could be seen as political, it would be impossible for me to present the results gathered in a way that could be harmful to a person's privacy and identity. Therefore, I believe that this part of my project faces no ethical issue.

## 4.0 Reflections from data collection

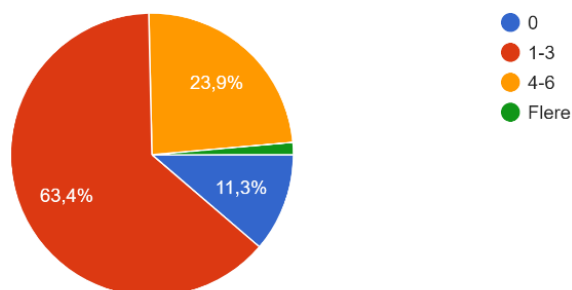
I conducted a survey on Facebook in which 71 people participated. Something that did not go exactly according to the plan is the earlier mentioned source of error in which I mistakenly posted the survey to my own Facebook page, instead of KattaÅrboka. This could potentially have contributed to the results I gathered, as I do have some friends from other schools, and my original idea was to only look at the opinions of students at Oslo Cathedral school. However, as Katta is the only school I know of where the students actively use Facebook in an education-context, I doubt this is likely.

## 5.0 Material analysis

Because I used Google Forms to create the survey, the results are presented as four pie charts. Statistical charts are typical quantitative presentations of data, and are beneficial when working with large numbers, as I have in my survey. Quantitative data is defined as data that can be counted or measured (Fullstory, 2023). This type of data is used when one is trying to measure the quantity of an issue or estimate the “what” or “how many” aspects of a research question (Dewitt Wallace Library, 2023), something I find relevant when looking at the prevalence of climate consciousness among students at Katta. I have applied a descriptive analysis where I simply present the frequency of the different answers in the pie charts, which I believe give the reader a good overview of the main tendencies of the findings. Descriptive analysis is the process of using statistical techniques to describe or summarize a set of data, which makes the data in question easier to interpret and understand, while at the same time filtering out less meaningful information (Bush, 2020).

Diagram 1) Number of flight-travels in the past year

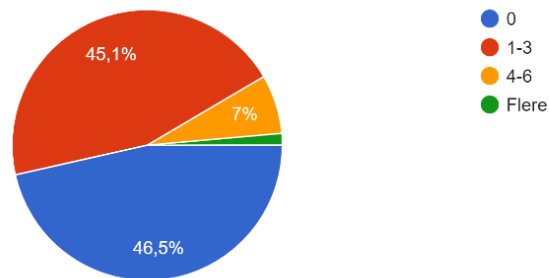
Hvor mange ganger reiste du med fly i fjor? (Tur/retur teller som en reise)  
71 svar



## Diagram 2) Number of new clothing items bought the last 30 days

Hvor mange nye (ikke fra bruktbutikk) klesplagg har du kjøpt de siste 30 dagene?

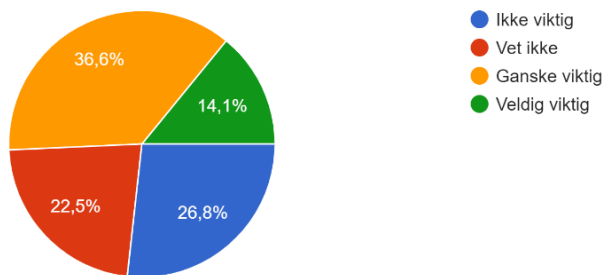
71 svar



## Diagram 3) Importance of sustainable consumption

Er å kjøpe bærekraftig/miljøvennlig viktig for deg? (Feks. miljøvennlige merker, bruktbutikker osv)

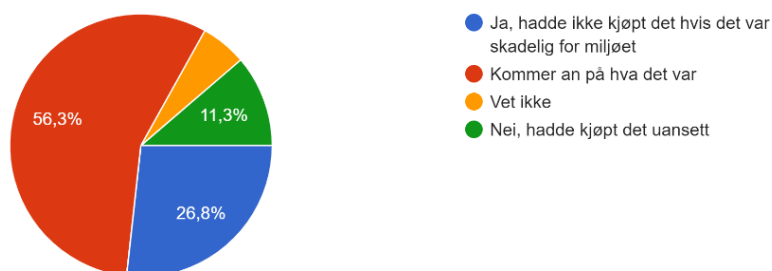
71 svar



## Diagram 4) Impact of knowledge about how a product is made on decision to buy it

Hvis du hadde fått vite at et produkt ble produsert på en miljøskadelig måte, hadde dette påvirket din avgjørelse om å kjøpe dette produktet?

71 svar



## 5.1 Results

In the first diagram, which deals with the question “How many times did you travel by flight in the past year?”, most respondents (63,4%) said they had traveled by flight 1-3 times in the past year. 11,3 % had not flown at all, 23,9% had flown 4-6 times, and a small number

reported that they had flown more than 4-6 times the last year. According to “Framtiden i våre hender”, the average Norwegian takes 2,7 flight trips in a year (Hermstad, 2014). The results from my survey seem to reflect the main tendencies in the data from the Norwegian population. This might just be a consequence of the fact that the students at Katta still live at home, and therefore follow the mainstream travel pattern. However, there are no indications of the students avoiding travelling by plane.

The second diagram illustrates the distribution of answers on question two: “How many new (not second-hand) clothing items have you bought the last 30 days?” 46,5 %, reported that they had not bought any new clothing in the past 30 days, while 45,1%, reported having bought 1-3 new items. A small number, 7 %, said they had bought 4-6 new clothing items, while 1,4% had bought more. In the media, buying second-hand is presented as an increasing trend, especially among young people, yet we buy less than one single used garment a year (Lassen, 2020). Even though the interest in buying vintage/second-hand is higher among the younger generation, the consumption of used items does not hinder them from buying new products. In fact, 86% of all clothes purchased in Norway are brand new, usually straight out of the fast fashion-retails (Lassen, 2020). The same study also revealed that there was no clear connection between buying second-hand and buying less new clothes – the ones who bought a small number of used clothing garments bought a little less new ones than the ones who did not buy anything used at all. Most of the participants in my survey had bought 0 brand new clothes the last 30 days. This could indicate that students at Katta are more aware of their consumption than the average Norwegian teen. Even so, the amount of clothes one buys could depend on different factors and does not necessarily have anything to do with being better for the climate – it could be based on everything from economy to personal interests, trends, and other preferences.

Norwegians buy 23,5 new clothing items a year on average, according to research by SIFO (Lassen, 2020). It is difficult to compare my results with the numbers from SIFO because I do not know whether the period the informants report from (February 2023) is a realistic depiction of their monthly consumption or not. However, since February comes after the annual January sale, I believe it might be a month where people tend to buy less clothes than in other parts of the year. Therefore, the results from the survey most likely reflect a standard Norwegian shopping pattern.

The third diagram illustrates the answers to the question “Is buying sustainable/environmentally friendly important to you?”, to which the answers are more divided than previously. 14,1% said that buying sustainable/environmentally friendly was “very important” to them, while 26,8% said that it was *not* important. 36,6% said it was “pretty important”, and 22,5% answered that they didn’t know. Taken together, around 50 % thinks that buying sustainable/environmentally friendly is very or pretty important, while almost 30 % believes it is not important, and the rest have not really made up their mind. These findings reflect the results from a recent Norwegian study, where 47 % of the youngest consumers said they wished to buy greener products. The same study revealed that just 30% of the population shared this ambition (Orkla, 2023).

The final diagram illustrates the answers related to whether the knowledge about how a product is made has impact on the decision to buy this product or not. Over half of the respondents (56,3%) answered that the purchase would “depend on what it was”. This is a contrast to the answer on the previous question, where the majority believed it to be “pretty important” to buy in a sustainable manner.

26,8% responded that they had *not* bought the product, while 11,3 % said that they had bought it anyway. 5,6% said they didn’t know if they had bought it or not. The reflections we do when we are shopping probably depend on the products we are planning to buy and the money we plan to spend. However, I find it interesting that more than 25% would not have bought products produced in a climate-harmful way, while 11% did not care at all. Compared to the answers on the previous question it seems like the general ideal to buy environmentally friendly has more support than avoiding products produced in a harmful way.

Overall, the survey results seem to reflect patterns we see among the average Norwegian population, in terms of flight travels and amount of clothes bought. Despite Katta’s reputation of being a “radical school”, the results suggest something different. This could be an indicator that the image of Gen Z as substantially more environmentally friendly than their parents’ generation, is a rather unrealistic depiction. However, when it comes to the answers related to buying environmental-friendly products in general, they might differ more between the generations.

## 6.0 Further reflections

### 6.1 Discussion

When it comes to my thesis question, which is “How environmentally conscious are Norwegian Gen Z?”, my findings indicate that Gen Z are not substantially more environmentally conscious than the rest of the population.

### 6.2 Do the chosen theories match the data findings?

Previously in the text, I presented several theories related to my thesis question. The cognitive dissonance theory is based on the feeling of discomfort one experiences when there is an inconsistency between values and behaviour, like when a person who worries about climate change simultaneously buys clothes from a fast fashion company. In the survey data, I find that the students who answered buy approximately the same amount of clothes as the average Norwegian, yet the majority claim that making environmentally friendly choices is important to them. This I believe could be an example of cognitive dissonance – there is a visible disconnection between actions and values. The theory of the seven “dragons of inaction”, deals with psychological barriers as something that hinders individuals from changing their behaviour and become more environmentally friendly. I believe barriers like the ones described in this theory could be relevant when trying to explain my findings. For instance, the dragon regarding people’s desire to buy goods (reduced costs) and have the same things as the people they are surrounded by (comparisons with others), but also because none of us are 100 percent rational in our decision-making (limited cognition). Both could be relevant when explaining my findings.

“Optimism bias” theory refers to people’s tendency to put too much faith into the possibility that things will turn out in a good way, instead of potentially turning out in a bad way, e.g., climate change. In the survey, the data findings do not seem to reflect a great fear of potential damages, instead I believe the results indicate a general indifference in people’s attitudes. This is not entirely surprising, as the respondents live in one of the world’s richest countries, where worrying about future climate horrors does not seem to be a general priority. Because optimism bias makes people doubt the likelihood of bad things happening to them, it might be a struggle to acknowledge the imminence of climate change, and even if one does acknowledge it, the ability to act on this information may be small. Therefore, one could look

at the survey data as a result of this bias, however there may be several factors playing a part in what a person answers and why.

The collective action problem seeks to explain why people sometimes don't act because they believe their actions will not have any impact, or they have conflicting interests with others in a group. In many ways, climate change is the collective action problem of our era – because both politicians and citizen across nations have opposing interests in what to do with the issue, there ends up being a general lack of action. In my survey, a majority flies up to 3 times a year, buys 1-3 clothing items per month, and are not too conscious about environmentally harmful production. These attitudes could be explained as a collective action problem, i.e., a situation where personal interests are prioritized over the common good.

Social learning theory suggests that behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others (McLeod, 2023). According to psychologist Albert Bandura, people observe behaviour both directly, through social interactions with others, and indirectly, by observing behaviours through different forms of media, which again affects how they themselves behave (Cherry, 2022). Friends, family, media, and influencers will all potentially impact on the behaviour and attitudes of the respondents. As previously mentioned, buying second hand is a trend among the young generation. One can observe this trend among many students at Katta. It is hard to determine whether this reflects green values or rather a wish to fit in – or maybe both.

## 7.0 Summary

This project has been a great learning process to me and has given me much knowledge about a topic that has interested me for some time. Being able to work with something consistently over a long period has given me experience which will probably come in handy in the future, and I feel much more comfortable writing in English than I did before. However, I know now that there are a few things I could have done differently throughout the process.

### 7.1 What could I have done differently?

Something that I think affected both my work and the quality of the survey is the time it took me to find a thesis question. Because I went back and forth a lot before settling on a topic, I wasted time I could have spent on the project, and which may or may not have affected the

result. As previously mentioned, there are also several aspects about my survey I could have done differently, especially regarding the choice and formulation of the questions.

### 7.2 How could I have taken the research further?

When it comes to taking my research further, I could potentially have posted the survey somewhere that had a bigger target group and a greater variation in respondents. This could for example be other schools, or online forums. There is also the option of interviewing a smaller fraction of people from my school to get more in-depth knowledge about the topic. When the aim is to understand the attitudes and priorities of others, interviews might represent a better alternative than surveys with defined categories. In interviews one gets the chance to ask follow-up questions and the informants could reflect on their answers in order to give better answers.

### 7.3 Summary of the most important findings

The most interesting result of this project is the findings indicating that Gen Z does not seem significantly more environmentally conscious than the older generations, which suggests that most young people are in fact not as rebellious or environmentalist as they are often presented to be in the media. This is interesting because Gen Z is a generation that will likely experience the consequences of the climate crisis in their own lifetime. From one perspective, this apparent indifference could be seen as irresponsible and thoughtless. However, the lack of action could also be explained as an expression of cognitive dissonance or optimism bias because the severity of the climate crisis becomes too much to handle for most people. This might especially be the case for Gen Z, as we still have our own hopes and dreams for the future.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

1. Hvor mange ganger reiste du med fly i fjor? (Tur/retur teller som en reise)
  - 0
  - 1-3
  - 4-6
  - Flere
2. Hvor mange nye (ikke fra bruktbuikk) klesplagg har du kjøpt de siste 30 dagene?
  - 0
  - 1-3
  - 4-6
  - Flere
3. Er å kjøpe bærekraftig/miljøvennlig viktig for deg? (F.eks. miljøvennlige merker, bruktbuikker, osv.)
  - Ikke viktig
  - Vet ikke
  - Ganske viktig
  - Veldig viktig
4. Hvis du hadde fått vite at et produkt ble produsert på en miljøskadelig måte, hadde dette påvirket din avgjørelse om å kjøpe dette produktet?
  - Ja, hadde ikke kjøpt det hvis det var skadelig for miljøet
  - Kommer an på hva det var
  - Vet ikke
  - Nei, hadde kjøpt det uansett