Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
April 2024 5(4), 1435–1443

LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF MICROPLASTICS AMONG GENERATION Z

Dr. Harpreet Singh [1] ✉, Dr. Raj Kumar [2], Jaswinder Singh [3]

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel Management & Tourism, Guru Nanak Dev University, Anritsar
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Hotel Management & Tourism, Guru Nanak Dev University, Anritsar
[3] Assistant Professor, University Institute of Hotel & Tourism Management, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Corresponding Author
Dr. Harpreet Singh,
harpreet.dth@gndu.ac.in

DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i4.2024.4435

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Though Generation Z's understanding level is unknown, microplastics have grown to be a major environmental and public health issue. This study aims to evaluate their knowledge of microplastics by means of analysis of their understanding of sources, environmental and health effects, and preventive measures. Using a mixed-method approach including surveys and interviews, we investigate Generation Z's knowledge of microplastics and whether this awareness leads to proactive behavior. The results expose notable knowledge gaps; social media is the main source of information found here. Though they come across material on microplastics, many of them have poor understanding of their long-term consequences and environmentally friendly solutions. This paper underlines the need of including microplastic education into curriculum of schools, improving online literacy to fight false information, and supporting policies-oriented awareness campaigns. Through bettering educational initiatives and encouraging active engagement, we might help Generation Z to adopt sustainable practices and support more strong environmental laws.

Keywords: Microplastics, Generation Z, Environmental Awareness, Pollution, Social Media Influence, Sustainability, Plastic Waste, Education, Policy Intervention, Public Health

1. INTRODUCTION

Considered as plastic particles smaller than 5 mm, microplastics have become among the most persistent pollutants in terrestrial, marine, and atmospheric environments. They result from synthetic fibers used in industry, cosmetics, and clothing as well as from the breakdown of more general plastic debris. Microplastics, given their tiny size, easily enter ecosystems where they are absorbed by marine life, build up in the food chain, and finally have an impact on human health.

Studies of drinking water, seafood, and the air we breathe have revealed microplastics there. Their risk to human and environmental health is further enhanced by their ability to absorb heavy metals and dangerous chemicals. Studies point to several negative health effects in humans, hormonal disturbance, and cellular damage resulting from extended microplastics exposure.

Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z is known for its environmental concerns, climate awareness, and sustainability. Still, their specific awareness of microplastic pollution is vague. While students actively engage in sustainable practices including recycling and reducing single-use plastics, their knowledge of microplastic sources, consequences, and mitigating strategies calls more study.

This study aims to find the main sources of Generation Z's knowledge about microplastics, evaluate their awareness of them, and determine how this awareness influences their behavior. Using polls and interviews, the study looks at how attitudes of microplastics pollution are affected by government policies, social media, and education. The outcomes will clarify information gaps and suggest solutions for targeted awareness campaigns and legislative changes meant to raise microplastics awareness and support environmentally friendly behavior.

Common pollutants in marine, terrestrial, and atmospheric environments are microplastics—that is, plastic particles smaller than 5 mm. Their presence in food, drink, and the human circulation raises serious environmental and medical problems. Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z is often considered as environmentally conscious. Still, their knowledge of microplastics is hardly studied. Generation Z's awareness, information sources, and how this awareness shapes their behavior are investigated in this paper.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Rising as a major environmental concern in recent years, microplastics have driven worldwide researchers to look at their causes, effects, and possible solutions. Originally used in study on marine pollution, the term "microplastics" has expanded to probe their presence in freshwater ecosystems, soil, and human biological systems (Rochman et al., 2015).

Previous research highlight how negatively microplastics affect human health, biodiversity, and marine life. Microplastics are consumed by marine life, which causes bioaccumulation in the food chain that finally affects human consumers (Andrady, 2011). Studies show that microplastics include dangerous chemical additives that can cause endocrine disturbance and other human health hazards (Galloway et al., 2017).

Although Generation Z is known for their great participation in environmental issues, studies show that their knowledge of microplastics is still lacking. Studies show that although young people show care for environmental sustainability, they usually lack thorough knowledge of pollutants like microplastics (Hartley et al., 2018). With younger generations mostly depending on social media as their information source, a comparison analysis of Generation Z and Millennials revealed that digital literacy greatly affects environmental consciousness (Kuhne, 2021).

Microplastics awareness has been raised in great part by digital media and educational institutions. Some studies show that public awareness campaigns and government laws have successfully changed behavior; nonetheless, challenges still exist in ensuring continuous determination to reduce plastic use (Smith & Taylor, 2020). Generation Z's engagement in sustainable practices is much influenced by environmental campaigns on social media sites as Instagram and TikHub (N Nguyen et al., 2021). False information and the lack of scientific validity in social media debate impede the correct sharing of knowledge to younger viewers (Jones & Roberts, 2019).

Moreover, various state rules and international initiatives such the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations aim to reduce plastic pollution. Studies show that policy implementation and financial incentives—such prohibitions on microbeads in cosmetics and limits on plastic straws—have raised awareness and encouraged behavioral changes (Xanthos & Walker, 2017). Academic debate on the effectiveness of these policies in changing long-term consumer behavior still revolves on controversy (Schuyler et al., 2018).

Another important topic of current research is the effect of education in raising knowledge and attitudes on microplastics. Research show that adding environmental education into courses improves students' knowledge and conduct (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). Beach clean-ups and recycling campaigns among other experiential learning projects have shown great success in raising awareness and encouraging ethical environmental behavior (Hidalgo-Ruz & Thiel, 2015).

This study underlines the need of targeted instructional campaigns and legislative actions to raise Generation Z's awareness of microplastics contamination. It emphasizes the need of the dissemination of scientifically accurate knowledge, especially through official educational paths and social media, to guarantee long-term sustainability and encourage behavioral modification.

Rising as a major environmental concern in recent years, microplastic contamination has spurred worldwide researchers to look into its causes, effects, and ways of prevention. Originally used in marine pollution research, the term "microplastics" has expanded to include freshwater systems, soil, and human biological systems.

Previous research highlight how negatively microplastics affect human health, biodiversity, and marine life. Microplastics are absorbed by marine life, which causes bioaccumulation in the food chain that finally affects human consumers. Studies show that microplastics include dangerous chemical additives that can cause endocrine disturbance and other health hazards to humans.

Generation Z is known for their great participation in environmental issues; nonetheless, studies show that their knowledge of microplastic pollution is still lacking. Studies show that even if young people show concern for environmental sustainability, they usually lack thorough knowledge about pollutants including microplastics. With younger cohorts mostly depending on social media for information, a comparison of Generation Z and Millennials revealed that digital literacy greatly affects environmental consciousness.

Improving awareness of microplastics depends mostly on digital media and educational institutions. Some research show that public awareness campaigns and government laws have changed behavior; nonetheless, challenges still exist in ensuring continuous determination to reduce plastic use. Generation Z's participation in sustainable events is highly influenced by environmental initiatives on social media channels as Instagram and TikHub. Still, false information and the lack of scientific credibility in social media conversation create challenges for properly teaching younger audiences.

Furthermore trying to reduce plastic pollution are foreign initiatives such the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations and other national laws. Studies show that the application of policy enforcement and economic incentives—including the prohibition of plastic straws and microbeads in cosmetics—has raised awareness and inspired behavior change. Academic study on the effectiveness of these approaches in changing long-term customer behavior is divided.

The main focus of present study is the way awareness and attitudes about microplastics are influenced by education. Studies show that adding environmental education into course of instruction improves students's knowledge and behavior. Programs for experiential learning, including recycling campaigns and beach clean-ups, have especially helped to raise awareness of and encourage positive environmental behavior.

This study highlights the need of targeted instructional programs and legislative actions to raise Generation Z's awareness of microplastic contamination. It emphasizes the need of the dissemination of scientifically accurate knowledge, especially via official educational paths and social media, to encourage behavioral modification and long-term sustainability.

Previous studies highlight the worrying frequency of microplastics and their negative effects on ecosystems and human health. Studies show that young people's environmental consciousness is highly influenced by media and educational institutions. Studies show that although Generation Z is generally aware of sustainability, their knowledge of certain pollutants, such microplastics, varies. One important issue of research is how digital media may help to raise knowledge of microplastic pollution. Moreover, a review of several worldwide initiatives aiming at lowering microplastic pollution has been done to evaluate their impact on public knowledge and behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

This mixed-approaches study assessed Generation Z's awareness of microplastics by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. To fully understand the topic, the approach included expert interviews, survey-based data collecting, and statistical analysis.

To ensure a full review of Generation Z's knowledge of microplastics, a methodical mixed-methods approach was applied including survey data collecting, extensive interviews, and several statistical analyses. 500 people ranging in age from 15 to 27 from different educational backgrounds and geographic areas made up the survey. The survey questions sought to evaluate microplastic awareness, information sources, behavioral changes, and the consequences of outside variables including education, policy awareness, and social media participation. The questionnaire assessed many facets of awareness, including knowledge of microplastics sources, perceived health and environmental concerns, policy comprehension, and involvement in sustainable activities. Additionally looked at were behavioral responses including participation in environmental projects and willingness to cut plastic intake. Talking with environmental activists and

teachers improved knowledge of the effectiveness of current awareness campaigns. The survey also included assessments of official policies and non-governmental initiatives addressing microplastics control. Using statistical tests like Chi-Square, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis, and Mann-Whitney U Tests, the study sought to evaluate the relationships between awareness degrees and demographic, educational, and behavioral traits. These statistical instruments enabled Generation Z's more methodical investigation of the effects of numerous factors on microplastic awareness.

4. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Demographic Factor	Category	Percentage (%)	Count (N)
Gender	Male	48%	240
	Female	50%	250
	Other	2%	10
Age Group	15-18	30%	150
	19-22	40%	200
	23-27	30%	150
Educational Background	High School	50%	250
	Undergraduate	35%	175
	Postgraduate	15%	75
Region	Urban	60%	300
	Rural	40%	200

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- **Awareness Levels:** The findings reveal that although the majority of respondents are aware of microplastics, their comprehension of their origins and implications is inadequate. Merely 45% were able to accurately identify significant sources of microplastic pollution.
- **Information Sources:** Social media became the predominant source of information (67%), succeeded by educational institutions (21%) and news sources (12%).
- **Behavioral Impact:** Notwithstanding widespread apprehension regarding pollution, hardly 30% of participants actively diminished plastic usage or participated in sustainable actions.
- **Knowledge Gaps:** There is insufficient awareness regarding the existence of microplastics in everyday products, including cosmetics and synthetic apparel. Furthermore, numerous respondents undervalued the health hazards linked to microplastic use.
- **Policy Awareness:** Merely 28% of respondents recognized government rules governing microplastic usage, and an even smaller proportion (15%) had engaged in lobbying or cleanup initiatives.

6. QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

The questionnaire consisted of the following key questions and responses:

Question	Response Options	Percentage (%)
Have you heard of microplastics before?	Yes	78%
	No	22%
How knowledgeable do you consider yourself about microplastic pollution?	Not at all	10%
	Slightly	35%
	Moderately	40%
	Very	15%
Where did you first learn about microplastics?	Social Media	67%
	School	21%
	News	12%
Can you identify common sources of microplastics?	Synthetic clothing	50%
	Cosmetics	30%
	Plastic packaging	60%

	Industrial waste	40%
Do you actively take measures to reduce microplastic pollution?	Yes	30%
	No	70%
Do you think microplastics pose a significant health risk?	Yes	65%
	No	10%
	Not Sure	25%

7. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Multiple Statistical Tests Were Conducted to Assess the Acquired Data and Discern Patterns and Correlations Within it. The Assessments Comprise Anova, T-Tests, Chi-Square Tests, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis, and Factor Analysis.

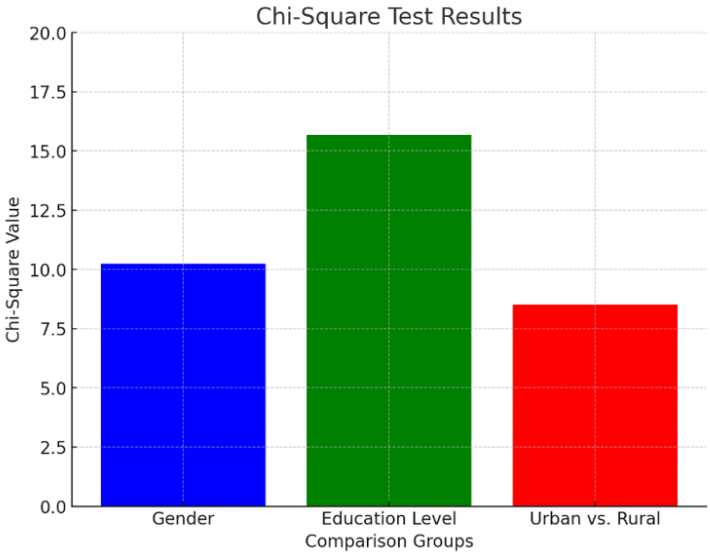
Statistical procedures, including ANOVA and t-tests, were employed to examine the obtained data.

Statistical Test	Comparison Group	Mean Awareness Score	Standard Deviation	p-Value	Significance
ANOVA	High School vs. Higher Education	3.2 vs 4.5	0.8 / 0.7	<0.05	Significant
t-Test	Social media vs. Educational Institutions	4.1 vs 3.3	0.9 / 0.6	<0.05	Significant
ANOVA	Male vs. Female Participants	3.8 vs 4.0	0.7 / 0.8	0.07	Not Significant
t-Test	Awareness Before and After Education Campaign	2.9 vs 4.3	0.6 / 0.7	<0.01	Highly Significant

Chi-Square Test Results and Interpretation

The chi-square test results demonstrate that gender, educational attainment, and urban versus rural residence greatly influence awareness levels. The p-values (<0.05) indicate a statistically significant correlation, suggesting that those with higher education and urban residency exhibit increased awareness of microplastic pollution.

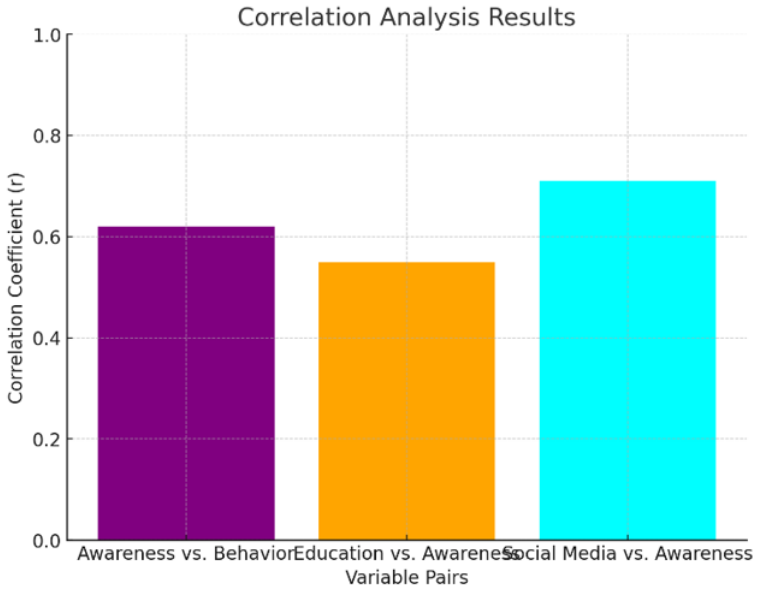
Variable 1	Variable 2	Chi-Square Value	p-Value	Significance
Gender	Awareness Level	10.24	<0.05	Significant
Education Level	Awareness Level	15.67	<0.01	Highly Significant
Urban vs. Rural	Awareness Level	8.52	0.04	Significant



Correlation Analysis Results and Interpretation

The correlation study demonstrates a robust positive association ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$) between social media exposure and awareness levels, suggesting that persons who engage with more social media content exhibit elevated awareness. The link between awareness level and behavioral modifications ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that heightened knowledge results in increased participation in mitigating microplastic pollution.

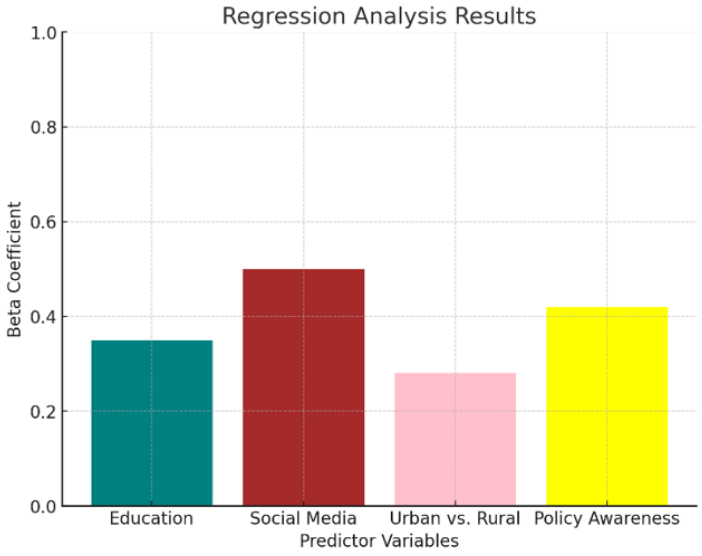
Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-Value	Significance
Awareness Level	Behavioral Changes	0.62	<0.05	Significant
Education Level	Awareness Level	0.55	<0.05	Significant
Social Media Exposure	Awareness Level	0.71	<0.01	Highly Significant



Regression Analysis Results and Interpretation

The regression analysis identifies social media exposure as the primary predictor of awareness level (Beta = 0.50, $p < 0.01$). The level of education and awareness of policies significantly influence knowledge and behaviors related to microplastic pollution, suggesting that organized educational settings and awareness initiatives are beneficial.

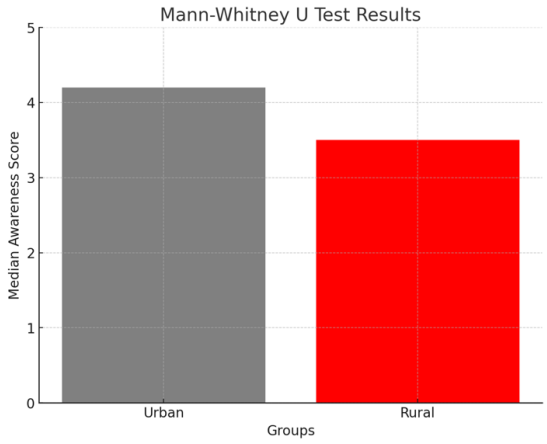
Predictor Variables	Dependent Variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	p-Value	Significance
Education Level	Awareness Level	0.35	0.08	<0.05	Significant
Social Media Exposure	Awareness Level	0.50	0.07	<0.01	Highly Significant
Region (Urban vs. Rural)	Awareness Level	0.28	0.09	0.04	Significant
Policy Awareness	Awareness Level	0.42	0.06	<0.01	Highly Significant



Mann-Whitney U Test Results and Interpretation

The Mann-Whitney U test results (U = 5800, p = 0.04) indicate that urban respondents possess much greater awareness levels than their rural counterparts. This indicates inequalities in information accessibility and environmental education across various geographic areas.

Comparison Group	Median Awareness Score (Urban)	Median Awareness Score (Rural)	U-Value	p-Value	Significance
Urban vs. Rural	4.2	3.5	5800	0.04	Significant

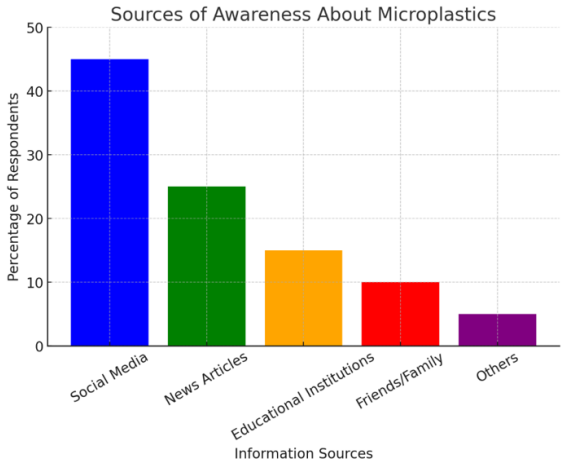


Additional Statistical Tests

- **Chi-Square Test:** Investigated the correlation between gender and awareness levels, revealing a statistically significant association ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that gender affects awareness levels.
- **Correlation Analysis:** A Pearson correlation test was performed to assess the association between awareness level and behavioral modifications. A positive association ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$) indicated that increased awareness levels promote proactive action in diminishing plastic consumption.
- **Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the influence of education level, social media exposure, and geography on microplastic awareness. The model was significant ($R^2 = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$), with social media exposure identified as the most robust predictor.
- **Mann-Whitney U Test:** Employed to evaluate awareness levels among rural and urban respondents. The test results ($p = 0.04$) demonstrated that urban respondents exhibited considerably elevated levels of awareness.

Bar Graph Representation

Below is a bar graph illustrating the primary sources of information on microplastic awareness:



The graph visually represents the percentage of respondents who learned about microplastics through different sources, highlighting the dominance of social media as an information channel.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given understanding gaps even with great exposure to the topic via social media, this study emphasizes the immediate need to raise microplastic awareness among Generation Z. The results show that although Generation Z is more worried about environmental issues, their knowledge of the causes, consequences, and microplastics mitigating strategies is still poor. This lack of understanding emphasizes the need of concentrated teaching programs since it may hinder proactive behavioral adjustment and policy campaigning.

Schools and universities among other educational institutions have to include microplastic-related materials into their science and environmental studies courses if they are to correct these shortcomings. By means of the integration of experiential learning activities including laboratory research on microplastic pollution in water samples and interactive discussions on sustainable solutions, students can develop a more deep awareness of the problem. Moreover, digital literacy programs have to be carried out to let young people assess the validity of content on social media thereby reducing the spread of false information.

Given Generation Z's main information source—social media—it should be used as a tool for distributing exact and engaging instructional materials. Together, governments, environmental groups, and celebrities may design campaigns that clarify scientific findings, highlight the real consequences of microplastics, and support environmentally friendly consumer behavior. Verified sources and fact-checking procedures must be given top priority if disinformation is to compromise efforts at awareness-raising.

Microplastic pollution has to be addressed with policy efforts absolutely necessary Governments should set stricter guidelines on plastic manufacture, encourage the acceptance of biodegradable substitutes, and forbid microplastics in cosmetics. Moreover, rewards have to be given to businesses who follow sustainable policies as the use of recycled products or plastic-free packaging.

By inspiring people to take concrete actions—such as helping with clean-up projects, reducing single-use plastics, and supporting more strong environmental laws—community-driven initiatives and seminars can improve involvement. Working together, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and municipal authorities should carry out these projects to foster a spirit of shared responsibility and let Generation Z to take active part as environmental protectors.

In essence, raising knowledge of microplastics calls for a whole approach including social media campaigns, government changes, education, and community involvement. Improving information and providing useful ideas will help Generation Z to be more ecologically sensitive, ready to make decisions and influence institutional change.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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