

Generation Z's perceptions of a good life beyond consumerism: Insights from the United States and Finland

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Abstract

This paper examines Generation Z consumers' perceptions of a good life beyond consumerism and how their perceptions and practices have evolved during crises and the cultural context in which they live. We present a unique theoretical and empirical cross-cultural investigation which focuses on the ecological crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, and the changes they have caused to Gen Zs' daily lives in the United States (California) and Finland. Two large qualitative data sets were collected through focus group interviews and open- and closed-ended surveys before and during COVID-19 and analyzed via the PERMA framework. Findings revealed that Gen Zs' pathways that lead to a good life include: healthy behaviors and balance; positive and meaningful relationships; happiness and positivity; meaningful things; productivity and goals; and daily routines. Findings also indicated that since COVID-19, Gen Zs are increasingly shifting toward virtuous behaviors and eudaimonic-oriented life, in which moderation, meaningfulness, and self-realization play key roles. Gen Zs are characterized as a global consumer cohort and a driver of change for a sustainable future, thus understanding how these future professionals, leaders, and mainstream consumers perceive a good life provides theoretical and practical insights into how to provide ecologically sustainable well-being for nature and future generations.

KEYWORDS

consumer well-being, eudaimonic well-being, flourishing, good life, hedonic well-being, sustainability

1 | INTRODUCTION

We have entered the Anthropocene Epoch, in which human activity is so massive that it leaves a lasting imprint on the entire planet and its systems (Amel et al., 2017; Dasgupta, 2021). We are experiencing the ecological crisis—the combination of accelerating climate change and biodiversity crisis—which challenges our future on Earth (Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2020; UNEP, 2022). Profound questions regarding the nature of a good life are critical since human activities, particularly

overconsumption, are among the root causes of the ongoing ecological crisis (Amel et al., 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2020; UNEP, 2022). Simultaneously, the COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly one of the most disruptive events humankind has faced in modern history, which has largely affected our everyday lives, practices, and consumption behaviors (Gössling et al., 2020; Yap et al., 2021).

The question of a good life, that is, what makes life worth living, is one of the classic questions in philosophy (Jain et al., 2023). What

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constitutes a good life is also a topical issue in transformative consumer research (TCR) and positive psychology. Several scholars have argued whether and how materialism and well-being interrelate (Alexander, 2011; Bulut et al., 2017; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Hoffmann & Lee, 2016; Jain et al., 2023; Kilbourne et al., 1997; Oral & Thurner, 2019). These questions are further fueled by the ecological crisis that has raised new concerns about individual and collective well-being (Mick et al., 2012; Mick & Schwartz, 2012) and sustainability, that is, moral responsibility toward nature and future generations (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; Fien et al., 2008; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023), which urges us to envision new conceptions of a good life.

In recent years, human flourishing has attracted significant attention in numerous fields (Willen et al., 2022). Flourishing refers to the experience of life going well (Huppert & So, 2013) or a state in which all aspects of one's life are good (VanderWeele, 2017). The concept combines hedonic (happiness) and eudaimonic (functioning well) aspects of well-being and encompasses a range of positive psychological constructs offering a more holistic approach to well-being as a pathway to the "good life" (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2012; VanderWeele, 2017).

Studies have shown that humans can flourish and achieve a good life while consciously consuming less and reducing materialistic desires irrelevant to basic human needs (Gambrel & Cafaro, 2010; García-Ruiz & Rodríguez-Lluesma, 2014; Gorge et al., 2015; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Jain et al., 2023; Kasser, 2006; Oral & Thurner, 2019). Individuals have begun to moderate their consumption levels and pursue a more balanced and sustainable life by seeking non-materialistic sources of happiness and deeper meanings (Alexander, 2011; Grénman, 2019; Jain et al., 2023; Oral & Thurner, 2019). Whether achieving a good life with significantly less materialistic consumption is possible has also been questioned. In many Western societies, individuals' self-definition and society's collective definition have been largely based on consumerism, suggesting that happiness and well-being result from the acquisition of wealth and material possessions transmitting the message that "the goods life" is the pathway to "the good life" (Kasser, 2006; Petrescu-Mag et al., 2019).

Although associating consumer well-being, sustainability, and a good life has been addressed in a few studies (Bulut et al., 2017; Fien et al., 2008; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Minton et al., 2018; Oral & Thurner, 2019), few investigations have delved deeper into what a good life means in consumers' everyday lives, including daily perceptions, practices, and habits that serve as the basis for a good life. Moreover, little is known about how the ecological crisis and sudden COVID-19 pandemic transform consumers' perceptions of a good life. As the ecological crisis forces consumers to reduce consumption and seek sustainable lifestyles (Amel et al., 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019), studying different pathways that lead to a good life beyond consumerism is necessary (Alexander, 2011; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023). It is particularly important to consider younger generations whose

future depends on our current actions and from which scientific evidence is still largely missing (Bulut et al., 2017; Fien et al., 2008; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). Taken together, these arguments highlight an urgent need for research into what makes for a good life for future generations and how to provide ecologically sustainable and intergenerational well-being even during crises.

Born between the late 1990s and the late 2000s, Generation Z (Gen Z) is characterized as digital, global, and mobile (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Gen Z is estimated to be the largest generational cohort, accounting for 32% of the global population with increasing purchasing power (Fu & Ren, 2023). However, the ecological crisis and COVID-19 are considered as era-defining and generation-altering for this global cohort, having impacted their environmental and social consciousness, mental and physical well-being, education and employment opportunities, and ultimately their future. As this generational cohort is highly educated and has a sound understanding of the anthropogenic impact on the environment, Gen Z possess notably different beliefs, values, and worldviews from previous generations (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). By 2030, Gen Z will become the mainstream consumer segment and central working force and is expected to be a driver of change for a sustainable future (Fien et al., 2008; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021).

Based on this background, this paper examines Gen Z consumers' perceptions of a good life in the United States (California) and Finland. Both are strongly committed to promoting happiness, well-being, and sustainable living; California, the strongest global wellness market in the United States, is characterized as one of the healthiest and greenest states in the country, while Finland represents a Nordic welfare and high-trust society with strong nature connection (Helliwell, Layard, Sachs, De Neve, et al., 2023). We are particularly interested in how Gen Zs perceive a good everyday life beyond consumerism and how their perceptions and practices have evolved during crises in the two cultural contexts. To this end, we ask (1) What makes a good everyday life for Gen Zs in California and Finland? (2) How were Gen Zs' perceptions and practices of a good everyday life constructed before and during COVID-19? and (3) How has Gen Zs' sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis evolved amidst COVID-19?

This study contributes to transformative consumer research and our currently limited understanding of the associations between consumer well-being, sustainability, and a good life. We draw from Seligman (2012), the founder of positive psychology, as guidance in exploring Gen Zs' perceptions of a good everyday life by applying the PERMA framework with five domains collectively giving rise to human flourishing. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this paper is the first to address Gen Z consumers' perceptions of a good life during crises.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents literature review and the framework used in the analysis. Section 3 describes the methods and analysis used in this study. Section 4 reports the findings including respondents' direct quotes. Section 5 presents the general discussion and, finally, Section 6 addresses the

implications for theory, managers, and consumers, as well as limitations and directions for future research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Consumer well-being, sustainability, and generation Z

Well-being has become one of the decade's most essential sought-after goals and is omnipresent in almost all discourses relating to human life (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023). Consumer well-being (CWB) is a state of flourishing involving health, happiness, and prosperity that aligns with consumption-related individual, collective, societal, and environmental needs (Mick et al., 2012; Pancer & Handelman, 2012). However, environmental needs and limits have not been adequately acknowledged and addressed concerning consumer well-being until recently, although the pressure to do has existed for decades (Amel et al., 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2019).

The human impact of life on Earth has increased sharply since the 1970s, driven by the demands of a growing population with rising income levels (Díaz et al., 2019). Western societies particularly, which maximize the flow of material contributions from nature to keep up with a consumerist lifestyle, are built on conceptions and beliefs separating humans from nature and ignore planetary limits (Amel et al., 2017; Díaz et al., 2019). This trend has negatively affected consumer well-being and sustainability (Casimir & Dutilh, 2003).

The United Nations Brundtland Commission introduced the concept of sustainable development in 1987 to respond to the conflict between globalized economic growth and accelerated ecological degradation. According to the Commission's definition, sustainable development should meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Brundtland, 1987). Former consumption and production patterns need to be transformed to achieve this demand, ultimately shifting values and lifestyles (Bulut et al., 2017; Fien et al., 2008; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). Despite numerous attempts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the progress made thus far has disappointed many (Casimir & Dutilh, 2003; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021).

Recently, there has been an ever-growing recognition of sustainability and moral responsibility for nature and future generations (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; Fien et al., 2008; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023). The urgency of the sustainability transition, defined as a necessary shift toward a sustainable society capable of operating within planetary limits, has been highlighted in several major reports (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020; UNEP, 2022). Díaz et al. (2019) have listed key leverage points to achieve the sustainability transition, most of which are inextricably linked to consumerism: enabling visions of a good life that do not entail ever-increasing consumption of natural resources; lowering total consumption and waste; unleashing existing, widely held values

to effect new social norms for sustainability, especially regarding materialistic consumption; and equally and equitably promoting sustainable lifestyles and nature conservation.

The overall concern for nature and planetary limits is transforming values and lifestyles from consumerism to the current quest for a good life (Alexander, 2011; Gambrel & Cafaro, 2010; Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; Gorge et al., 2015; Grénman, 2019; Jain et al., 2023; Kasser, 2006; Oral & Thurner, 2019). Much hope is pinned on younger generations, especially Gen Zs, as more sustainable and conscious consumers; this global generation is expected to make real efforts to achieve the SDGs and create a sustainable future (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). Previous studies have revealed that Gen Zs are less materialistic and hedonic-oriented than previous generations (Bulut et al., 2017) and are highly environmentally and socially conscious (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023). They are more likely to reduce and prevent unnecessary consumption (Bulut et al., 2017; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023), have intrinsic motivation to act in an environmentally friendly way (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023), and possess strong ethical and moral values toward environmental protection and the environmental impacts of consumption (Adnan et al., 2017; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023).

Deloitte Global's (2021) recent survey revealed that climate change and protecting the environment rank as the #1 concern among Gen Zs. Yet, Gen Zs are hopeful about the environment: 68% noted that the environmental changes they saw during the pandemic make them more optimistic that climate change is reversible. Concerning well-being, 70% of global Gen Zs reported that the pandemic inspired them to take positive actions to improve their lives, while 58% believed the importance people place on their health and well-being would improve once the pandemic ended.

2.2 | Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being

Conceptions of happiness and the “good life” have been central concerns for philosophers and great thinkers—from Aristotle's time to the present (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Originally, the concept of well-being evolved around two Western philosophical perspectives: hedonism and eudaimonism. Hedonism posits that pursuing pleasure is the greatest good, and happiness is the totality of one's hedonic moments (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Conversely, eudaimonism holds that one should pursue a life of virtue and excellence by focusing on psychological well-being connected to meaningful and valuable actions in opposition to vulgar pleasure seeking (Waterman, 2008). According to Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia (or living well), true happiness is found by leading a virtuous life and doing what is worth doing, suggesting that functioning well and realizing human potential is the ultimate human goal (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2008).

Interest in the hedonia-eudaimonia distinction has proliferated in recent years, especially in positive psychology (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014). Toward the hedonic end, researchers (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman et al., 1999) argue that well-being

consists of the pleasantness of one's moments. Hedonia defines well-being as happiness (or subjective well-being; SWB), focusing on satisfaction with one's life, the quantity of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect (Diener, 2009; Diener et al., 1999). Accordingly, hedonia is most often defined by life satisfaction, happiness, pleasure, enjoyment, and comfort, thus emphasizing positive emotions (Diener, 2009; Huta & Ryan, 2010).

Although well-being is mostly conceptualized as SWB following the hedonic approach, researchers have advocated examining dimensions of well-being beyond it: eudaimonic well-being (EWB) emphasizing psychological functioning (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2008). Eudaimonia, originating from humanistic psychology, captures aspects of optimal living and argues that well-being involves applying and developing oneself to the fullest (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Waterman, 2008). Eudaimonia is connected to meaningfulness and self-realization—commonly defined as a sense of meaning and purpose, personal growth, self-development, psychological functioning, autonomy, competence, engagement, relatedness, and vitality (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Within philosophy, hedonism and eudaimonism are competing ethical perspectives addressing questions regarding the nature of the “good life”; within positive psychology, hedonic and eudaimonic traditions complement each other. Several researchers have argued that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being indicators tend to positively correlate and influence one another, implying they are not mutually exclusive but rather overlapping: individuals high in hedonic and eudaimonic motives tend to experience the most well-being, known as human flourishing (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta & Waterman, 2014).

2.3 | The PERMA framework

In positive psychology, human flourishing is framed as an individual psychological matter and conceptualized as an abstract and universal construct (Willen et al., 2022). Although no mutually agreed upon understanding of the definition nor the specific components of flourishing exist, studies widely agree that multidimensional frameworks are needed to adequately capture the construct's complexities (Butler & Kern, 2016; Forgeard et al., 2011; Kern et al., 2015; Seligman, 2012). Six leading approaches to flourishing exist, each involving five or more dimensions (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2012; VanderWeele, 2017).

Drawing from Seligman (2012), the founder of positive psychology, flourishing consists of five equally important domains: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. These domains are collectively known as the PERMA framework that together give rise to human flourishing (Table 1). Seligman (2012, 2018) argues that each domain individually contributes to well-being, is pursued for its own sake, and is defined and measured independently of each other.

One of the unique aspects of the PERMA framework is the inherent connection to both hedonia and eudaimonia and the focus on application of the PERMA domains within one's life (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Seligman, 2012). The framework can provide a better understanding of one's emotional states, as well as the more long-lasting effects such as relationships, meaningfulness, and achievements across multiple psychosocial life domains (Butler & Kern, 2016; Seligman, 2018). Notably, different individuals derive well-being from each of these domains to varying degrees, which can also evolve,

TABLE 1 The PERMA framework.

Domains	Definitions
Hedonic well-being	
Positive emotions	Positive emotions refer to hedonic feelings of happiness (e.g., feeling joyful, cheerful, and content). Numerous studies support the value of positive emotions across a range of outcomes increasing long-term well-being, life satisfaction, functioning, productivity, and vitality (Kern et al., 2015; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Seligman, 2012).
Eudaimonic well-being	
Engagement	Engagement refers to a deep psychological connection to a particular activity (e.g., feeling absorbed, interested, and engaged). A high level of engagement has been defined as a state of “flow,” referring to an optimal state of concentration on an intrinsically motivating task. Flow states may lead to long-term well-being by promoting positive resources, such as cultivating interests and enhancing skills (Kern et al., 2015; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; Seligman, 2012).
Relationships	Relationships include feeling connected, socially integrated, cared about, esteemed, and supported (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relationships are considered the most crucial element of well-being and have been linked to many positive outcomes: less depression, healthier behaviors, and more vitality (Butler & Kern, 2016; Forgeard et al., 2011; Khaw & Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2012).
Meaning	Meaning refers to believing one's life is valuable and feeling connected to others or something greater than oneself. Personal values guide a sense of meaning. This sense of meaningfulness has been connected to higher life satisfaction, positive relationships, and vitality (Baumeister et al., 2013; Khaw & Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2012).
Accomplishment	Accomplishment involves progressing toward goals, feeling capable of doing daily activities, and having a sense of achievement and self-motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Accomplishment encompasses external and internal goals, yet internal goals, such as growth and connection, lead to greater well-being than external goals, such as money and fame (Khaw & Kern, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2012).

suggesting that a good life for one is not necessarily the same for another—there are different pathways to a good life (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Seligman, 2012.)

Seligman (2012) suggested that while each domain can be pursued individually, the interrelations among the domains are essential in the PERMA framework. Previous studies indicate that the PERMA domains overlap and positively inter-correlate as they are all positive constructs that, together, represent flourishing (Butler & Kern, 2016; Kern et al., 2015; Khaw & Kern, 2014). Due to its simple, yet comprehensive and universal nature, the PERMA framework is extensively used in positive psychology.

Butler and Kern (2016) developed, and later validated, the PERMA-Profiler, a brief measure of well-being across multiple psychosocial domains. Khaw and Kern (2014) extended the PERMA-Profiler and supplemented the original domains with respondents' qualitative responses in defining “well-being” and a “meaningful life” in their cross-cultural comparison of well-being. Kern et al. (2015) used the PERMA framework to measure student well-being among a large sample of adolescent students with a subset of additional elements. More recently, studies have applied the PERMA framework addressing well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carreno et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2020).

The PERMA framework has also been applied in multiple consumer contexts, including sport consumption, tourism, and leisure. Doyle et al. (2016) explored the framework in the spectator sport context to examine the individual-level benefits of sport consumption using a qualitative approach, identifying four domains activated through consumer experience related to spectating sports. Filo and Coghlan (2016) investigated the PERMA domains through charity sport event experiences among participants using focus groups, revealing that all five domains emerged to varying degrees. Laing and Frost (2017) used the PERMA framework to examine the narratives of female travelers' experiences and found it to be a valuable tool for gaining an in-depth understanding of tourists' perceptions of well-being. Farmer and Cotter (2021) applied the PERMA framework to cooking and concluded that the framework may function as a theoretical model to explore psychosocial outcomes associated with cooking.

Additionally, the PERMA framework has been proposed as a model to assess domains valued by youth, in particular (Kern et al., 2015). Khatri and Duggal (2022) discovered in their review article that often theories that treat well-being from a generic standpoint, such as PERMA, have been contextualized for student populations and higher education segments. The PERMA framework has been utilized in examining positive universities to promote student well-being (Oades et al., 2011), positive education to systematically understand and promote student well-being (Kern et al., 2015), relationships between students' mindset, well-being, and performance (Ortiz Alvarado et al., 2019), and understanding how music performance teachers support the autonomy of their students and how this support relates to students' well-being (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2020).

Seligman (2018) suggested that beyond its contribution to the understanding of well-being, the PERMA framework is open to the inclusion of new elements into the flourishing equation. Many studies

have complemented the original PERMA framework with additional elements, such as vitality, autonomy, optimism, and security that are derived from other multidimensional flourishing models (Butler & Kern, 2016; Huppert & So, 2013; Kern et al., 2015; Khaw & Kern, 2014). For the purposes of the current study, we selected two items: vitality and autonomy which we considered to be relevant to PERMA and to identifying what constitutes a good everyday life. While vitality refers to physical and mental well-being, which are crucial components of overall well-being (Butler & Kern, 2016; Huppert & So, 2013; Kern et al., 2015; Khaw & Kern, 2014; VanderWeele, 2017) particularly during times like COVID-19, autonomy refers to freedom of choice, regarded as important for overall well-being especially in Western societies (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Huppert & So, 2013), and among students and higher education segments (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2020; Khatri & Duggal, 2022). Accordingly, we used this extended PERMA(VA) framework to empirically examine perceptions of a good everyday life among Gen Z consumers.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Data and data collection

3.1.1 | Phase I: Focus groups and open-ended surveys

We adopted a qualitative approach to better understand how Gen Z consumers as a generational cohort think, feel, comprehend, and experience the social world. We draw loosely from social constructionism, which focuses on human interpretations and meanings, comprehension of their experiences, and the relationships between these and human actions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The paradigm emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding social reality and socially constructed meanings, as individuals create meanings through their interactions with each other and with the environment in which they live (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Social constructionism has been associated with a variety of qualitative research methods, such as focus groups and narratives, and is regarded as suitable for studies that aim to explore how subjective meanings and experiences are advanced, elaborated, and negotiated in a social context (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tadajewski, 2016; Wilkinson, 1998).

From a social constructionist viewpoint, the focus group method presumes that meaning-making is produced collectively during social interactions among individuals (Wilkinson, 1998). Focus groups provide insights into attitudes, beliefs, and values that underlie behavior as well as the context and perspective that enable meanings and experiences to be understood more holistically (Carey & Asbury, 2016). Additionally, they enable establishing more targeted “why” and “how” questions behind “what” to obtain access to participants' inner mental worlds (Tadajewski, 2016).

To collect a wealth of detailed information among a purposely selected generational cohort (Carey & Asbury, 2016; Wilkinson, 1998),

we conducted a series of focus group interviews and open-ended surveys at a major university in Southern California and two universities in Finland between October 2019 and February 2020. The higher education setting ensured a homogeneous environment in both countries and access to respondents in similar life stages, particularly regarding their age, economic status, daily practices, but also beliefs, values, and world-views (Belk et al., 2013).

Participants were recruited from introductory-level courses and given extra credit points for voluntary participation. Altogether, 18 focus group sessions were conducted with 6–10 participants in each session ($n = 135$). The sample represents Gen Z consumers aged 18–23. In California, 10 sessions were conducted in October 2019, while eight sessions were conducted in Finland between October 2019 and February 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 78 American respondents and 57 Finnish respondents, two-thirds of which were female ($n = 94$; male, $n = 41$).

In the sessions, we focused on exploring the sources and practices of a good everyday life. The sessions were conducted by the authors of this paper by adapting Tuckman's (1965) model of group development with five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and ending (Catterall & Maclaran, 2006). Prior to discussions, respondents were asked to give short written narratives based on their own subjective meanings and experiences on the subject at hand. These open-ended surveys were valuable icebreakers in terms of delving into the theme and subsequently generating points of discussion.

Two interviewers guided the discussions and acted as moderators, which also strengthened the group interaction and diminished the group effect by drawing out minority opinions when needed (Catterall & Maclaran, 2006). A semi-structured interview frame with general guideline questions was used in all sessions (Carey &

Asbury, 2016). However, the discussions varied from one another to some extent, as respondents were encouraged to engage in free-flowing discussions to produce insights that would be less accessible without the group interaction (Wilkinson, 1998). Discussions were further advanced with more targeted “why” and “how” questions (Tadajewski, 2016).

The sessions lasted approximately 90 min and were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. In California, the sessions and open-ended surveys were conducted in English, while in Finland, Finnish was used to better enable the formation of socially and culturally constructed meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). All participants were guaranteed anonymity. Refreshments were served during the discussions. Data collection followed Institutional Research Board (IRB) protocols; the European subjects also followed the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

3.1.2 | Phase II: Open-ended and structured closed-ended surveys

During the COVID-19 outbreak, we wanted to examine whether and how Gen Z consumers' perceptions and practices of a good everyday life changed because of the pandemic. We distributed surveys with open-ended and structured closed-ended surveys online via Qualtrics. In Phase II, we explored (1) the sources and practices of a good everyday life; (2) changes in perceptions and practices of a good everyday life during COVID-19; and (3) sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19 (Table 2).

The second data set was collected during September–October 2020 at the same universities in California and Finland as in Phase

TABLE 2 Interview, open- and closed-ended survey themes, questions, methods, and analysis.

Theme/method/analysis	Phase I: Before the pandemic (October 2019–February 2020)	Phase II: During the pandemic (September–October 2020)
Sources and practices of a good everyday life	How do you define a good everyday life? (Please answer with a few sentences.) How do you seek a good everyday life? (Please answer with a few sentences.)	How do you define a good everyday life? (Please answer with a few sentences.) How do you seek a good everyday life? (Please answer with a few sentences.)
Changes in perceptions and practices during COVID-19		Have your perceptions changed during the pandemic; if so, how? (Please answer with a few sentences.)
Sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19		Has the pandemic altered your perceptions and daily practices of sustainability; if so, how? (Please answer with a few sentences.) How concerned are you about climate change, the biodiversity crisis, and current or future pandemics?
Method	Focus groups and open-ended surveys ($n = 135$)	Open- and closed-ended surveys distributed via Qualtrics ($n = 153$)
Analysis	Qualitative and quantitative content analysis	Qualitative and quantitative content analysis; 3 closed-ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = not concerned at all to 5 = extremely concerned

I. Participants enrolled in online introductory-level courses received an email from their instructors inviting them to participate in the Qualtrics survey. Again, participation was voluntary, and students who completed the survey received extra credit points. In California, the survey was conducted in English, while in Finland it was conducted in Finnish, as in Phase I. Altogether, we received 153 responses (76 in California and 77 in Finland). Like Phase I, two-thirds of the participants were female ($n = 106$; male,

$n = 47$). Notably, as all participants were guaranteed anonymity, the participants were recruited from a different group of students than in Phase I. Again, IRB protocols and GDPR guidelines were followed.

3.2 | Data analysis

The data were analyzed via qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication by interpreting the content or contextual meaning, while quantitative content analysis is conducted by counting and measuring words, concepts, and themes within the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To examine Gen Zs' perceptions of a good everyday life before and during COVID-19, we employed a deductive approach, which is based on existing theory and prior research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener, 2009; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008) and the flourishing theory (Seligman, 2012). First, we identified key codes as initial coding categories; and second, we determined operational definitions for each category using the theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To examine Gen Zs' changes in perceptions and practices of a good everyday life as well as sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19, we took an inductive approach moving from specific observations to broader generalizations. The inductive phase is

justified by the desire to bring out perceptions and practices described by the respondents themselves (first-hand experiences), as well as the description of changes that enrich the analysis made in the previous phase. The authors analyzed the data individually based on the agreed-upon coding process to avoid research bias. Thereafter, the codes, categories, and themes were compared and combined.

We followed four steps in the data analysis (Figure 1). In Step 1, the initial codes were identified in the data (Phases I and II) based on the characteristics of hedonic (SWB) and eudaimonic (EWB) well-being following a deductive approach (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Diener, 2009; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008); these codes were then grouped into categories using simple descriptive phrases from the original responses. In Step 2, axial coding was performed by grouping similar categories from Step 1 into themes according to the PERMA(VA) framework, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, vitality, and autonomy (Seligman, 2012; Phases I and II) and by quantifying the number of categories based on respondents' mentions to identify pathways that lead to a good everyday life. Table 3 presents an example of Steps 1 and 2 based on respondents' definitions of a good everyday life.

In Step 3, the two data sets were analyzed jointly to discover respondents' perceptions and practices of a good everyday life that emerged from the data at different times (Phases I and II) and identify changes during COVID-19 based on respondents' open-ended answers (Phase II). In Step 4, sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19 were identified based on respondents' open- and closed-ended answers (Phase II), which were then discussed on a wider societal level. Respondents' open-ended answers and quotes in Steps 3 and 4 directed the development of the emerging themes regarding the changes in perceptions and practices as well as sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19 following an inductive approach.

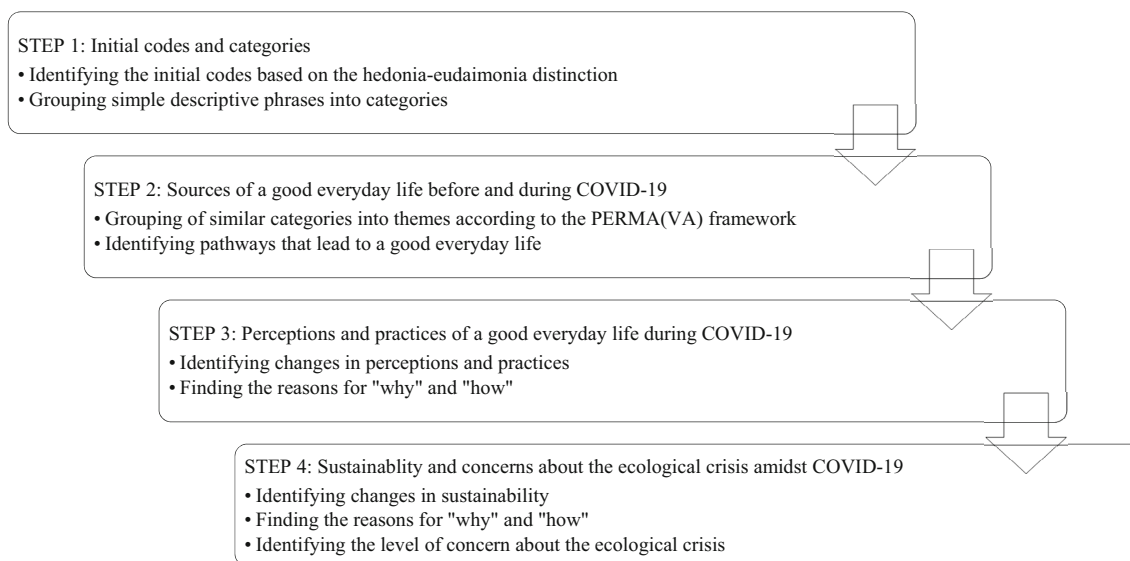


FIGURE 1 Four steps of analysis.

TABLE 3 Example of data analysis based on Steps 1 and 2.

Being happy and healthy surrounded by family, friends, and loved ones. I would also say that having a greater purpose, such as a family or career would contribute to a good everyday life.						
Quote						
Code (SWB; EWB)	Being happy (SWB)	Being healthy (EWB)	Surrounded by family, friends, and loved ones (EWB)	Having a greater purpose (EWB)	Family (EWB)	Career (EWB)
Category	Being/feeling happy	Being healthy	Having family/friends	Having a purpose in life	Having family/friends	Enjoying work
Theme (PERMAVA)	Positive emotions	Vitality	Relationships	Meaning	Relationships	Accomplishment

The quality of the research was ensured by following universally applicable criteria for qualitative research: confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability (Shenton, 2004). First, to ensure confirmability, the findings come from the respondents' experiences, not the researchers'. Second, the study processes were reported in detail, enabling future researchers to replicate the investigation, thereby guaranteeing dependability. Third, credibility was ensured by adopting well-established research methods and asking questions adapted from previous research and current concerns in people's lives. Fourth, transferability was ensured by providing sufficient contextual information about the data collection and data analysis, enabling future researchers to decide whether the context is similar to other contexts and whether the findings can be applied to another setting.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Pathways to a good everyday life before and during COVID-19

Respondents were first asked to briefly define what a “good everyday life” means to them and to address daily practices employed to achieve it in order to identify pathways that lead to a good everyday life. The discussions and open-ended surveys revealed that a good everyday life consists of various attitudes, feelings, behaviors, motivations, and functioning. Additionally, respondents' narratives entailed numerous different aspects of a good everyday life with slightly different emphases.

Some stressed the importance of vitality, balance, productivity, social relationships, and security:

Life with balance. I ideally would like aspects of fitness, productiveness, work, relaxation, and social time. It is important for me to be able to accomplish a lot in one day but still have time left over for social time. (U.S. respondent)

Healthy routines, including regular exercise, a balanced diet, good relationships, continuous learning and taking care of your mental health. In addition, a good everyday life includes taking care of one's own livelihood, which creates a sense of security. (Finnish respondent)

Others emphasized the importance of healthy living, happiness, social relationships, and a sense of purpose:

Being happy and healthy surrounded by family, friends, and loved ones. I would also say that having a greater purpose, such as a family or career would contribute to a good everyday life. (U.S. respondent)

A healthy everyday life, surrounded by friends and loved ones, where you enjoy everyday things. (Finnish respondent)

Some highlighted the importance of productivity, a sense of purpose and meaning, social relationships, and routines:

To be productive and enjoyable, in which something that you do yields a sufficient sense of purpose and satisfaction to justify the inevitable struggles and hard times that will accompany the good ones. (U.S. respondent)

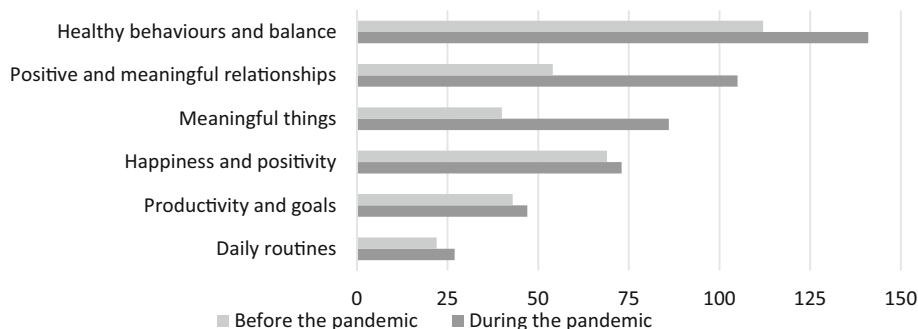
Meaningful activities and good relationships. In everyday life, it is important to experience a sense of control, for example in the form of routines, but also to challenge yourself. (Finnish respondent)

Table 4 summarizes the main findings obtained from the focus groups and open-ended surveys before and during COVID-19 interpreted by the PERMA(VA) framework.

Americans and Finns defined a good everyday life rather similarly before and during the pandemic. From the multiple categories presented in Table 4, six pathways that lead to a good everyday life were identified resulting from Steps 1 and 2 of the analysis and by quantifying the number of categories based on respondents' mentions. These pathways were labeled as follows: (1) healthy behaviors and balance; (2) positive and meaningful relationships; (3) meaningful things; (4) happiness and positivity; (5) productivity and goals; and (6) daily routines. Figure 2 illustrates the pathways leading to a good everyday life before and during the pandemic and the number of respondents' mentions. During the pandemic, the importance of relationships and meaning in life increased the most.

TABLE 4 Themes and categories of a good everyday life according to PERMA(VA).

Themes	Categories (combination of phases I and II)
Hedonic well-being	
Positive emotions	Being stress-free, optimistic; having no major worries, a positive mindset, positive things in life, a happy mentality; being/feeling happy, unrushed, content/fulfilled/satisfied; doing what makes you happy; living a happy life; enjoying life/little moments
Eudaimonic well-being	
Engagement	Doing what you enjoy, what you want, what is important to you; engaging in activities, pleasant things; performing stimulating/creative tasks
Relationships	Having family/friends, positive/meaningful relationships, social connections, security, stability, safe environment, a place to live, enough money for food, clothes, and necessities, access to healthy food and clean water
Meaning	Having/doing meaningful things; having a purpose in life, a reason to wake up; appreciating life; feeling grateful; looking forward to things; living in the moment, every day to the fullest
Accomplishment	Having goals, challenges, success; enjoying work; being productive; taking care of obligations, daily routines, learning, self-improvement; feeling motivated
Vitality	Being healthy; engaging in exercise, healthy routines, hobbies, leisure; having a healthy diet, balance in life, "me" time; getting adequate rest/sleep, relaxation; spending time outdoors
Autonomy	Freedom of choice; a sense of volition

FIGURE 2 Pathways to a good everyday life before and during COVID-19.

4.2 | Changes in perceptions and practices amidst COVID-19

Americans and Finns described that the pandemic changed their perceptions of a good everyday life and practices related to it. While some felt the sources of a good everyday life basically remain unchanged regardless of external circumstances, others indicated the pandemic changed their perceptions of life:

No, I think the foundation of a good life is the same regardless of external circumstances. (U.S. respondent)

It has made me more thankful for the way I have lived in the past and for the way I will be able to live in the future. (Finnish respondent)

Five common themes regarding changes in perceptions and practices of a good everyday life emerged from respondents' narratives from both countries: enjoying simplicity; slowing down and living in the moment; cherishing relationships; valuing daily routines; and being grateful, which were mostly addressed in relation to each other. The common denominator is the strong emphasis on finding meaning in

life and one's relationships, which also aligns with the main pathways that lead to a good everyday life during the pandemic.

Enjoying simplicity, such as spending time with friends and family, listening to music, enjoying a morning coffee, or just relaxing, was widely addressed:

I enjoy the little things, like simply spending time with roommates and listening to music much more than I did before. (U.S. respondent)

Respondents described how the pandemic taught them that life is not just about seeking extravagant experiences or feeling anxious and rushed about everything, but finding joy in simple things. Everyday life became more meaningful, and its importance was seen in a new light:

I've learned that one might never know what will happen in the world and our lives, so you should always appreciate the small things in your life. (Finnish respondent)

The pandemic forced me to realise why I always feel anxious and rushed because of everything. I'm now

working toward enjoying the little things and not worrying about working at someone else's pace. (U.S. respondent)

Everyday life has become much simpler. There is less rush to get to different places nowadays which has freed up time for meaningful things. (Finnish respondent)

Another major outcome of the pandemic was *the need to slow down and learn to live in the moment*, meaning find inner harmony. For example, learning about Eastern philosophy, meditating, and focusing on compassion toward oneself and others were frequently mentioned:

I have spent a lot of time doing internal work, learning about Eastern philosophy and practicing meditation more often. (U.S. respondent)

I have begun to flourish during the pandemic, which is mainly due to slowing down in life and practicing mindfulness. (Finnish respondent)

In the past, I defined a good everyday life by how efficient I was. Nowadays, I think inner well-being is more important and I am more forgiving of myself. (Finnish respondent)

The pandemic has highlighted the need to break from the normal fast pace of living and focus more on oneself—physically and mentally:

The pandemic has made me slow down in life – to live in the moment and not just in the future. (U.S. respondent)

The pandemic showed me that a good everyday life is also about stopping and taking time for yourself. The pandemic showed me the insanity of the constant rush and stress. (Finnish respondent)

The pandemic further increased the importance of *social relationships*. Respondents described how the pandemic prevented them from socializing and spending time with friends, attending university and lectures, exercising, going out, and travelling—*activities* previously taken for granted and were now restricted:

The pandemic has brought to the surface the importance of people's social needs as part of a balanced daily life and how their absence can negatively affect people. (Finnish respondent)

The pandemic has made me appreciate the basics more. Avoiding social contact has made you appreciate

family and friends more, and you have realised that going abroad or going to festivals are not the things that make life meaningful. (Finnish respondent)

Many also stated the pandemic gave them time to re-evaluate their relationships and that they had gotten closer with those who mattered the most to them:

It allowed me to re-evaluate my relationships and my communication styles to better suit my mental and emotional needs. I value my time spent with my friends and family more. (U.S. respondent)

After the pandemic, I realised how much I miss human interaction. I realised how much I depended on my family once I could not go to my job and see my friends. (U.S. respondent)

Social distancing has shown the value of face-to-face connections and having autonomy and a sense of freedom. Respondents wrote that during the pandemic, things could change rapidly and radically. Many said they missed the freedoms they once had and began appreciating their former freedoms even more:

A lot has been changed; even my classes are all online. I have not been out with friends since the pandemic started. (U.S. respondent)

Before, it was kind of self-evident that you would see your friends at the university, in lectures, and during leisure. But now, with the pandemic, everything has changed. (Finnish respondent)

The importance of attending university and lectures was closely related not only to social life but *daily routines*. The pandemic disrupted these routines, resulting in a sense of guilt for being unable to accomplish as much:

It is really a day-by-day thing—routine seem[s] to have gone out of the window. (U.S. respondent)

I feel guilty when I let a day go by and sit inside. On the other hand, now that I know what it feels like to have nothing but time, I feel lazy and less motivated since I've been able to do nothing all day. (U.S. respondent)

Many said the “desynchronization” of daily routines, wherein people continued doing the same things but not simultaneously nor in the same places as others, caused stress, anxiety, and lack of motivation and required increased planning and self-discipline:

For me, now a good day is when I go outside, or see someone new, which does not happen very often

because I'm usually either busy with schoolwork, or tired from doing schoolwork all day. (U.S. respondent)

Although Zoom has offered us a platform to interact with others, I have started to feel so tired of these constant "Zoom-dates." (Finnish respondent)

Particularly as the distance studying in the spring was a rather dull and lonely activity, I have now become more focused on making everyday life work, balanced, and meaningful. (Finnish respondent)

Finally, *being grateful* toward life and learning not to take things for granted also appear to be important lessons from the pandemic. For example, many addressed life's value:

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the seemingly ordinary in everyday life. The things you never appreciated enough before. A good everyday life is made up of things that seem ordinary, but are nevertheless invaluable. (Finnish respondent)

The pandemic has made me appreciate even more the things that really matter, like family and health. The pandemic has given me the opportunity to stop and think about what is important. (Finnish respondent)

Notably, respondents expressed that the pandemic made them realize that eating at a restaurant, attending a concert, or going on holiday are luxuries or privileges and not means to achieve a good life:

I am much more grateful for what I have because I understand how fragile life and society are and how quickly "luxuries" can be taken away. (U.S. respondent)

In the past, going to events and spending evenings out were part of a good everyday life. Nowadays, I do not consider them as part of a good everyday life. (Finnish respondent)

4.3 | Sustainability and concerns about the ecological crisis amidst COVID-19

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether COVID-19 had changed their perceptions and practices of sustainability. Most respondents from both countries expressed that the pandemic had not altered their perceptions nor daily practices as they already lived sustainably:

It has not really altered my consumption habits. I already try to limit my use of disposable items. (U.S. respondent)

No, I feel I live quite sustainably anyway. (Finnish respondent)

Respondents stated that before the pandemic they recycled, avoided plastics and fast fashion, reduced electricity and water consumption, and favored vegetarian- and other plant-based diets. Three common themes emerged from respondents' narratives from both countries, which were often addressed in relation to each other: increasing environmental and social consciousness; favoring domestic and locally produced products and small brands; and using second-hand products.

Some said that since the pandemic they have become even more environmentally and socially conscious:

It has not really changed my consumption but opened my eyes to being more sustainable. (U.S. respondents)

I do feel like I am more conscious as a consumer because I want to support brands and businesses that prioritize diversity and sustainability. (U.S. respondent)

I have been paying more attention to buying unnecessary things and avoiding fast fashion. (Finnish respondent)

Respondents also indicated that since the pandemic, they have begun favoring domestic and locally produced products and smaller brands, especially in relation to food and clothing:

I have started buying from small business that support sustainability and eco-friendly. I have also been trying to reuse old clothing or "revamping" it to give it a new purpose or look. (U.S. respondent)

I'm paying more attention to buying clothes domestically, and I'm trying to increase my purchases of small and medium-sized domestic brands. I buy more recycled, branded, and high quality. (Finnish respondent)

I've noticed that in shops, I'm increasingly looking at the country of origin of the product. I try to favour domestic products the most. (Finnish respondent)

Using secondhand products was also mentioned by respondents:

I am a vegetarian and the pandemic did not exactly change that for me. In terms of sustainability, I have started shopping more sustainably by thrifting and buying second hand clothing in general. (U.S. respondent)

I have bought more secondhand goods than before, and when I buy new goods or services I have been able to choose a better quality and more sustainable option,

as I have more money left over when I am at home. I also consider all my purchasing decisions from a sustainability perspective, and now that I have more time in my everyday life, my purchases are more thoughtful. (Finnish respondent)

Finally, respondents we asked to express their concerns about the ecological crisis as well as current and future pandemics by scoring their level of concern with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not concerned at all to 5 = extremely concerned (Figure 3).

Americans (65%) were more concerned about the pandemics than the Finns (35%). Climate change appeared to cause greater concern for Americans (85%) than for Finns (70%), while approximately 65% of all respondents indicated extreme or moderate concern about the biodiversity crisis.

5 | DISCUSSION

The ecological crisis and unexpected COVID-19 pandemic have become global unifiers for entire generations. This is particularly true considering Gen Z—the most sustainable and conscious generation thus far. As Gen Z is a digital, global, and mobile consumer cohort, perceptions of a good life will likely transcend national borders and different cultural contexts. However, scientific evidence regarding Gen Z's perceptions of a good life is still largely missing, as is the association of consumer well-being, sustainability, and a good life on a wider societal level.

Our unique findings revealed that American and Finnish Gen Zs' perceptions of a good everyday life were similar. Drawing from Seligman's (2012) PERMA framework, we identified six pathways that lead to a good everyday life: (1) engaging in healthy behaviors and finding balance; (2) having positive and meaningful relationships; (3) finding meaning in life; (4) feeling happy and positive; (5) feeling accomplished and being productive; and (6) having daily routines. These findings indicate that Gen Zs' good everyday life is largely based on something other than materialistic and hedonic-oriented needs and desires—that a good everyday life is based on living well, emphasizing eudaimonic well-being, thus aligning with previous research (Chaturvedi

et al., 2020; Fien et al., 2008; Grénman, Räikkönen, et al., 2023; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). Although the core sources of a good everyday life remained relatively unchanged regardless of COVID-19, reflecting Gen Zs' deeply rooted beliefs, values, and worldviews, our findings indicated that importance of relationships and finding meaning in life increased the most during the pandemic counter to the findings of previous studies. Our findings represent a generational perspective; however, different individuals might derive well-being from each of the PERMA domains to varying degrees, which can also evolve, suggesting that a good everyday life for one is not necessarily the same for another (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Seligman, 2012).

Our unique findings revealed that COVID-19 has changed Gen Zs' perceptions and practices of a good everyday life in both countries: enjoying simplicity; slowing down and living in the moment; cherishing relationships; valuing daily routines; and being grateful for what one has; these themes were commonly addressed and mostly in relation to each other. Gen Zs' means to achieve a good everyday life during the pandemic was largely based on two main denominators: finding meaning in life and one's relationships. By contrast, hedonic-oriented means, such as eating at a restaurant, attending a concert, or going on holiday were mainly considered luxuries or privileges. These surprising findings indicate that the pandemic has forced, yet also enabled Gen Zs to reflect on their lifestyles and construct a more balanced and sustainable life, meaning shifting toward virtuous behaviors and eudaimonic-oriented life, in which moderation, meaningfulness, and self-realization play key roles (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2008).

The ecological crisis is causing major concerns for Gen Zs: over two-thirds of American and Finnish Gen Zs experienced extreme or moderate concern about climate change and the biodiversity crisis, aligning with Deloitte Global's (2021) recent survey results. Gen Zs' strong sustainability ethos is also echoed in our findings. Before COVID-19, American and Finnish Gen Zs lived sustainably: they recycled, avoided plastics and fast fashion, reduced electricity and water consumption, and favored vegetarian- and other plant-based diets. However, the pandemic seems to have further increased Gen Zs' sustainability. We identified three common themes similar in both countries, which were often addressed in relation to each other:

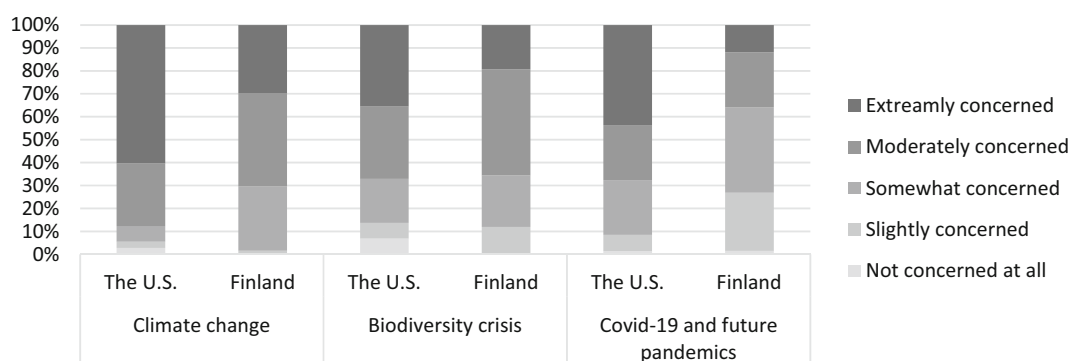


FIGURE 3 Concerns about the ecological crisis and pandemics amidst COVID-19.

increasing environmental and social consciousness; favoring domestic and locally produced products and small brands; and using second-hand products. These findings reflect Gen Zs' intrinsic motivation to act environmentally friendly and their strong ethical and moral values toward environmental protection and the environmental impacts of consumption, which also supports previous research (Adnan et al., 2017; Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023).

The severity of the ecological crisis and COVID-19 pandemic challenges humanity to take urgent actions in transforming values and lifestyles—shifting from consumerism and hedonic-oriented happiness to sustainability and eudaimonic-oriented living well. This leads to a critical question of whether consumers have the wisdom and capacity to live virtuously, that is, to show moderation, demonstrate fortitude, promote a sense of justice, exhibit an ability to form and maintain friendships, and practice good citizenship to benefit nature and future generations (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; Fien et al., 2008; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023; Mick & Schwartz, 2012).

According to Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs (2023), the current evidence shows that developing virtuous behaviors needs a supportive social and institutional environment for society's overall well-being. The scholars also conclude that virtuous citizens and supportive institutions are needed to have a society with a high level of well-being. Our findings revealed that Gen Zs possess virtuous behaviors and can drive change for a sustainable future while facilitating the sustainability transition (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020; UNEP, 2022).

6 | CONCLUSIONS

6.1 | Implications for theory

Numerous scholars have addressed an urgency for the sustainability transition; a consumerist lifestyle and increasing consumption of natural resources cause this urgency (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz et al., 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020; UNEP, 2022). The overall concern for nature and planetary limits is transforming values and lifestyles from consumerism to the current quest for a good life (Alexander, 2011; Gambrel & Cafaro, 2010; Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; Gorge et al., 2015; Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Jain et al., 2023; Kasser, 2006; Oral & Thurner, 2019). However, how can one achieve a good life without a consumerist lifestyle? What does a good life mean in consumers' everyday lives, including daily perceptions, practices, and habits? And how can Gen Z consumers fuel the sustainability transition for a sustainable future? Our study addressed these gaps in the literature by examining the associations between consumer well-being, sustainability, and a good life focusing on Gen Z consumers in California and Finland.

The unique findings of our study provide theoretical and practical insights regarding how Gen Zs—the future professionals, leaders, and mainstream consumers—construct sustainable lifestyles to reduce or

prevent a consumerist lifestyle and consumption of natural resources. Notably, Gen Z is the generation that will hand down available natural resources to future generations for a sustainable future.

Our findings demonstrated that consumer well-being relates to the fundamental question of the “good life” pertaining to virtuous behaviors and eudaimonic-oriented living well. Specifically, our findings expand on the current literature by showing that living through several global crises can place greater attention on virtuous behaviors and eudaimonic-oriented life, allowing one to cope and build resilience for a sustainable future. In fitting with the TCR literature (Mick et al., 2012; Mick & Schwartz, 2012), the SDGs are already vital components of consumer well-being; however, more emphasis must be placed on Díaz et al.'s (2019) leverage points to achieve the needed sustainability transition to benefit nature and future generations.

Beyond contributing to consumer well-being and sustainability, our study provided unique findings regarding the relationships among Gen Z consumers, virtuous behaviors, and a good everyday life. Our findings illustrated that Gen Zs possess virtuous behaviors, that is, moderation, fortitude, a sense of justice, an ability to form and maintain friendships, and good citizenship, counter to the findings of previous studies. The present findings highlight that Gen Z consumers can make real efforts to achieve the SDGs and create a sustainable future, which supports previous literature (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Fien et al., Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023; 2008; Yamane & Kaneko, 2021). Further, these findings are meaningful in understanding how Gen Zs can mainstream transforming values and lifestyles to achieve sustainable conditions for humans and the planet (Grénman, Uusitalo, & Rääkkönen, 2023; Kortetmäki et al., 2021).

The PERMA framework has been called a unique roadmap for oneself and the micro-moments of one's life. This framework has been extensively used in positive psychology, multiple consumer contexts, and studies employing student populations and higher education segments. We extended using the PERMA framework to thus far under-researched consumer context, proving that Gen Zs' good everyday life is largely based on the value of living well, emphasizing eudaimonic well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2008). This finding indicates that values-driven personal reflection is critical to achieving a good life, as individuals' investments in the practices they value benefit their well-being and help them achieve a fulfilling life. Moreover, we enriched our current understanding of a good life during crises, which can be extended to other challenging consumer contexts.

6.2 | Implications for managers and consumers

In addition to expanding on the current TCR literature, these unique findings provide implications for business managers, policymakers, and consumers who desire to foster sustainability and consumer well-being. Gen Z, an environmentally and socially conscious global consumer cohort, can be expected to heavily determine the ecological impacts of current and future consumption, thus leading the way toward a more sustainable future (Adnan et al., 2017; Bulut

et al., 2017; Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Grénman, Rääkkönen, et al., 2023). Accordingly, this global consumer cohort translates not only into increasing consumer demand but into a more sustainability-conscious demand, which is apparent when profiling their perceptions through the PERMA framework. By addressing this generational cohort in business or public policy communications, managers could refer to Gen Zs' sensitivity to environmental and social consciousness and their proneness to take action, such as by favoring small businesses, local brands, or secondhand products as our findings showed. The production and marketing strategies and policies must be designed to provide products, services, and communities that support Gen Z consumers in pursuing their perceptions of a good life. We conclude that consumers' and nature's well-being should be central at the macro level in global diplomacy, international and national policies, and the rules and regulations of businesses in the years to come.

6.3 | Limitations and directions for future research

Our study should be considered in light of its limitations. First, while outlining unique theoretical and empirical insights regarding Gen Z consumers' perceptions of a good everyday life during crises, our study points to new studies with alternative methodological avenues. One caveat in this study was using different participants in pre- and post-Covid samples. Future researchers are advised to seek confirmation for these findings by conducting quantitative surveys to reveal how the domains of the PERMA framework are valued among consumer populations with more versatile demographic backgrounds. Second, this study shows that Gen Z consumers have found pathways that lead to a good life amidst the global crises. Focusing more in-depth on the sustainability transition and how consumerist lifestyles are transformed toward sustainable lifestyles would be greatly beneficial. Third, to better understand how the ecological crisis and the increasing eco-anxiety this crisis has caused can lead to positive impacts on consumer well-being and a more sustainable future, researchers may wish to explore how consumers maintain and build resilience during a crisis on a population level to identify practices that yield to consumer flourishing. Finally, future studies are encouraged to extend research from human well-being to planetary well-being, where scientific evidence is still largely missing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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