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Green Consumption Behavior and Norms of Adults: A Case from the Mekong River Delta, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at analysing green consumption behaviour of young consumers from Mekong River Delta, Vietnam by applying the extended theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Data was collected from 342 students in Mekong Delta (MKD) via online platforms. The regression results indicated that four factors affecting students' green consumer behaviour were Attitude to green consumption, Subjective norms, Environmental awareness, and Perceived behavioural control. Attitude to green consumption was the most impactful factor, whereas Availability of green products did not significantly affect green consumption behaviour. Based on the findings, some managerial implications would be proposed to raise consumers' awareness of using more environmental-friendly products.

Keywords: Green consumption, Extended theory of planned behavior (TPB), pro-environmental behaviors, sustainable marketing.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Bank's Business Environment Report 2020, Vietnam was ranked 70th out of 190 economies regarding ease of doing business. However, pollution is severely affecting its economic growth. Specially, the daily plastic waste in Vietnam averages nearly 18 thousand tons, making it the fourth-biggest plastic waste producer (Ministry of Construction, 2020). Besides, air pollution and water pollution have cost Vietnam approximately 8.68% of the total GDP.

In recent decades, despite great efforts made by enterprises to make the manufacturing process more eco-friendly and efficient, it is the environmental impact caused by the manufacture that is reduced, not that caused by customers' choices, uses, and discarding. As a result, consumer behavior is playing an increasingly crucial role in tackling environmental issues.

Nowadays, thanks to the increase in annual income as well as the improvement of customers' consciousness, green consumption has been considered a trend of the 21st century, when the environment has taken center stage in many countries, including Vietnam. The limited use of plastic bags and other plastic products and the emergence of alternative eco-friendly or recyclable materials have also been warmly welcomed.

To effectively scale up and develop green consumption, many research studies have been conducted to significantly raise public awareness and encourage green consumption. White (2001) pointed out that the student market is an important segment to marketers, whose responsibilities include approaching and researching this group of consumers, as they have to make their own decisions in all aspects of life, very often making their first purchase without their parents' opinions. To curb the alarming rate of pollution in Vietnam in general and in Can Tho City (CTC), the economic hub of the Mekong River Delta (MRD) region in Vietnam, in particular, this research is of great importance and urgency. It aims to analyze the contributing factors to students' green consumption in MDR, as well as suggest solutions that help promote green consumption.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MODEL

Theoretical basis

Green products

According to Goh and Nabsiah (2015), green products are those that fulfill the ecological requirements, such as replacing artificial ingredients with organic ones which are more recyclable, eco-friendlier, and harmless to human beings in comparison with their counterparts on the market [1].

However, Ottman et al. (2006) evaluated that no product has completely no negative impact on the environment. In other words, people have yet to create an absolutely eco-friendly product, but instead, the items available nowadays are just relatively eco-friendly, due to various environmental influences they have in different stages, from the manufacture, utilization to disposal [2].

Green consumption

Peattie (2010) referred to green consumption as the consumer behavior of the products that could be preserved, beneficial to the environment, as well as satisfactory to green practitioners. Not only does green consumption involve customers' decision not to buy products that harm the environment, but it also encourages them to purchase eco-friendly and recycled items instead [3].

Green consumer behavior

Kim and Choi (2005) stated that green consumer behavior is different from ordinary consumer behavior. Ordinary consumer behavior is the consideration of both benefits and costs. In marked contrast, green consumer behavior usually prioritizes social benefits [4]. Besides, some authors explained that both objective and subjective factors lay the foundation for green consumer behavior. These factors include attitudes and knowledge of environmental issues, awareness of the product's environmental impacts, demographic factors, standards of moral values, personal living conditions, characteristics of the product [4].

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The introduction of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) aimed at reducing the shortcomings of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) when predicting the subconscious behavior of consumers, who have no control over it. The TPB model was proposed by Ajzen, who stated that the intention leading to behavior is influenced by attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control [5].

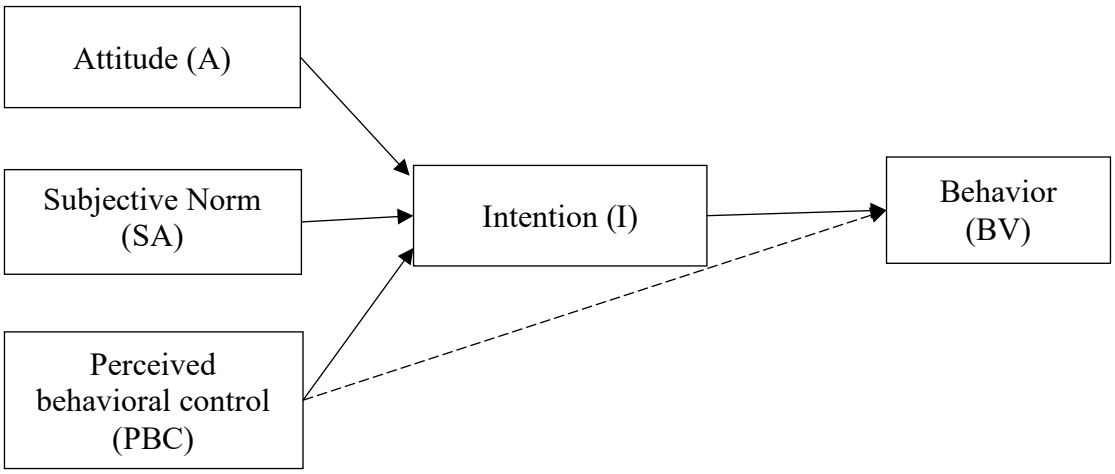


Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

The TPB (Ajzen, 1991) is a suitable framework for examining and predicting the purchasing intention and behavior by intention (one's readiness to perform a behavior) and perceived behavioral control (PBC; perceptions of control over behavioral performance); intention is influenced by attitudes (one's overall evaluations of performing a behavior), subjective norm (perceived social pressure from others to perform a behavior), and PBC (Ajzen, 1991), all with respective underlying beliefs [5]. By changing underlying beliefs, the TPB constructs (attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC) can be modified; intention and behavior will be subsequently altered [6].

Research model

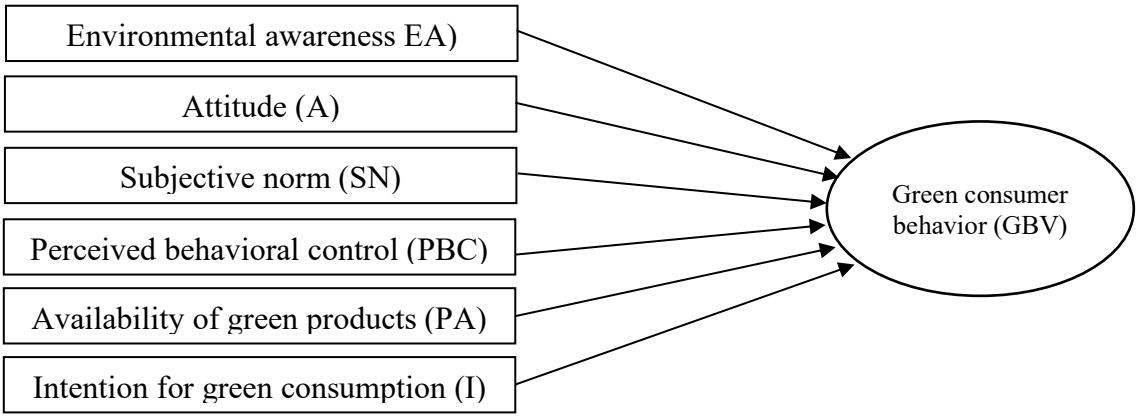


Figure 2 Proposed research model based on extended TPB

Certain studies scrutinizing green consumer behavior have further developed the TPB by Ajzen (1991) [4, 7, 8]. Therefore, in this part, the author also embraces the theoretical basis of TPB [6]. The review of related literature has given rise to the proposed research model, which consists of 6 factors, namely environmental awareness, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, availability of green products, and intention for green consumption.

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Research methodology

Data collection

The primary data of this study was collected by using a detailed online questionnaire, which was then emailed to or sent via social networking sites and completed by 342 student respondents of different majors at MRD. The sampling method for this study is the non-probability sampling method or convenience sampling in particular.

Data analysis

The study employs descriptive statistics and frequency analysis to investigate students' green consumer behavior in MRD. To evaluate the extent to which the respondents agreed with items, the authors used descriptive statistics for items of the scales for contributing factors to green consumer behavior. Then, so as to eliminate inappropriate items, the author proceeded to evaluate the aforementioned scales using the Cronbach's Alpha, then utilizing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), researched the factors that affect green consumer behavior, as well as resorted to multivariate regression analysis to estimate the extent to which these factors affect students' green consumer behavior.

Instrument

All the variables used in this research were measured by the 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1- totally disagree to 5- totally agree. Items were adapted from Rustam et al. (2020), Tripathi and Singh (2016), Sikandar (2021), Wu and Chen (2014), and Emekci (2019) [10,11,12,13,14], which is illustrated in Table 1.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

Cronbach's Alpha Testing

By applying exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to find out the determinants affecting green consumption behavior, the scale reliability test needs to be taken. The scales will be tested using Cronbach's Alpha because Cronbach's Alpha test will help eliminate observed variables or unsatisfactory scales for further analysis. According to Hair et al. (2012), when the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the item is greater than 0.6 and the corrected item - total correlation is greater than 0.3, the observed items in the scale are reliable and suitable for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) [9].

There were 342 respondents who provided answers to 24 criteria of 6 factors to students' green consumer behavior. By checking Cronbach's Alpha, the authors could identify 2 items whose corrected item - total correlation is below 0.3 and thus, were eliminated. Specifically, EA5 - Humans have to live harmoniously with Nature for their long survival, and SN1 - My decision to buy something is influenced by my family were taken out because they had a corrected item - total correlation < 0.3. After the elimination of EA5 and SN1, the remaining 22 criteria were eligible for the EFA (see Table 1).

Table 1: Scale reliability testing

Items	Explanation	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item Deleted
Awareness		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,681**	
EA1	I'm very worried about the environment, both now and in the future	0,561	0,579
EA2	Humans are abusing the environment	0,509	0,607
EA3	When humans intervene in natural processes there are adverse consequences.	0,421	0,640
EA4	Ecological balance is very fragile	0,463	0,618
EA5	Humans have to live harmoniously with Nature for their long survival	**0,266**	**0,702**
Attitude towards green consumption (A)		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,855**	
A1	I support green consumption	0,763	0,762
A2	I love green consumption	0,749	0,776
A3	Green consumption is a good idea to tackle pollution	0,670	0,851
Subjective norm		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,716**	
SN1	My decision to buy something is influenced by my family**.**	**0,263**	**0,758**
SN2	Most of my family members and relatives think that I should buy green products	0,532	0,644
SN3	Mass media (newspapers, radio, TV, the Internet, etc.) are providing a lot of information about green products.	0,539	0,641
SN4	The Government is encouraging everyone to buy green products	0,554	0,639
SN5	Many people around me are using green products	0,522	0,649
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,753**	
PBC1	I have enough time to research and consider buying green products.	0,545	0,697
PBC2	I can buy green products if I need	0,502	0,720
PBC3	I think it's easy to buy green products	0,588	0,674
PBC4	I have enough resources (money, time, knowledge) necessary to begin green consumption	0,561	0,689
Availability of Green Product (PA)		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,679**	
PA1	It's inconvenient to replace ordinary products with.	0,406	0,649
PA2	Green products are not available at normal stores	0,542	0,560
PA3	I honestly don't know where to buy green products	0,444	0,624
PA4	I find it challenging to recognize green products	0,456	0,617
Purchasing Intention		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,882**	
I1	I/ my family will buy green products because they cause less pollution	0,769	0,843
I2	I am/ my family is willing to buy green products for myself and our family	0,797	0,810
I3	I'll try hard to buy green products	0,763	0,844
Green Consumption Behavior (GBV)		**Cronbach's Alpha = 0,734**	
GBV1	I will keep buying green products in the future	0,581	_
GBV2	I will recommend that my friends and family buy green products	0,581	_

(Source: Result from EFA analyzed by SPSS 20, 2020)

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Exploratory Factor Analysis

EFA of independent variables

According to the first exploratory factor analysis, PBC1 - I have enough time to research and consider buying green products was rejected due to factor loading PBC1 = 0.480 < 0.5, which is statistically insignificant. When the second exploratory factor analysis was conducted, PA2 – ***Green products are not available at normal stores*** was rejected as its factor loading violated the convergence principle (two different values on the same row) and the difference of factor loading was smaller than 0.3 (0.520 - 0.517 < 0.3). The study continued with the third exploratory factor analysis with results for the remaining 20 criteria, which were divided into 5 groups of factors affecting green consumer behavior.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test Result

KMO.		0,812
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi - square	1223,997
	Df	190
	Sig.	0,000

(Source: Results of survey data processed by SPSS 20, 2020)

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy indicated the proportion of variance in variables that might be caused by underlying factors. High values (close to 1.0) generally indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. If the value is less than 0.50, the results of the factor analysis probably will not be very appropriate. Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with research data.

The Bartlett test considers the following hypotheses:
- H0: The variables are not correlated with each other
- H1: The variables are correlated with each other.

According to Hoang Trong and Chu Nguyen Mong Ngoc (2005), in Bartlett's test to check the correlation in the population, the variables are correlated with Significance P.value value <0.05. Analysis results show that, Barlett test = 1223,997 and P.value = 0.000 <0.05. Therefore, we can reject hypothesis H0 and accept hypothesis H1, which means that the observed variables are linearly correlated with the dependent factors.

As seen from Table 3, the results from the EFA abide by all conditions, which are (1) test of the appropriateness of the model (0,5 < KMO = 0.812 < 1,0); (2) KMO and Bartlett's Test investigating the correlation of observable variables (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05), which confirms that the variables are closely correlated; (3) AVE = 63.066% of the data variation.

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis (Rotated component matrix)

Items	Component				
	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5
Group 1 – Attitude towards green consumption (AG - Regroup)					
AG_1 – I support green consumption (from A_1)	0.824				
AG_2 – I/ my family will buy green products because they cause less pollution (from I_1)	0.803				
AG_3 – I love green consumption (from A_2)	0.750				
AG_4– Green consumption is a good idea to tackle pollution (from A_3)	0.743				
AG_5 – I am/ my family is willing to buy green products for myself and family (I_2)	0.711				
AG_6 – We'll try hard to buy green products (I_3)	0.707				
Group 2 – Subjective norm (SN)					
SN_5 – Many people around me are using green products		0.797			
SN_3 – Mass media (newspapers, radio, TV, the Internet, etc.) are providing a lot of information about green products		0.733			
SN_2 – Most of my family members and relatives think that I should buy green products		0.678			
SN_4 – The Government is encouraging everyone to buy green products		0.652			
Group 3 – Environmental awareness (EA)					
EA_4 – Ecological balance is very fragile			0.796		
EA_3 – When humans intervene in natural processes there are adverse consequences.			0.788		
EA_1 – I'm very worried about the environment, both now and in the future			0.601		
EA_2 – Humans are abusing the environment			0.529		
Group 4 – Perceived behavioral control (PBC)					
PBC_3 – I think it's easy to buy green products				0.833	
PBC_4 – I have enough resources (money, time, knowledge) necessary to begin green consumption				0.678	
PBC_2 – I can buy green products if I need				0.634	
Group 5 – Availability of green products (PA)					
PA_3 – I honestly don't know where to buy green products					0.742
PA_4 – I find it challenging to recognize green products					0.679
PA_1 – It's inconvenient to replace ordinary products with green products					0.660
KMO coefficient					0.812
Eigen value					1.178
Average Variance Extracted					63.066
Sig.					0.000

(Source: Result from EFA analyzed by SPSS 20, 2020)

EFA results showed that there are 5 groups (after re-group) that affect green consumer behavior, namely (1) Attitude towards green consumption, (2) Subjective norm, (3)

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Environmental awareness, (4) Perceived behavioral control, and (5) Availability of green products. As such, the research model was modified as follows.

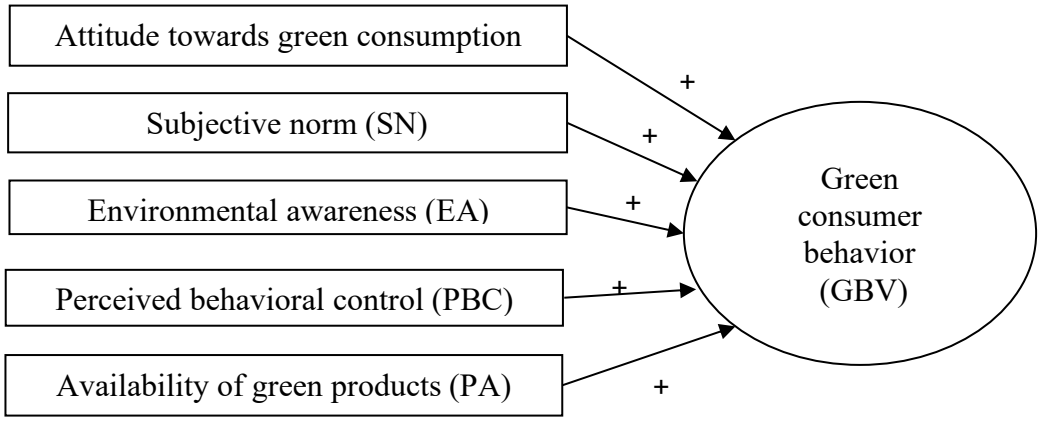


Figure 3 Modified research model of Extended TPB by authors

Based on the modified research model and the literature review, the hypotheses are as follows.
- **Hypothesis H1**: The attitude towards green consumption has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.
- **Hypothesis H2**: The subjective norm has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.
- **Hypothesis H3**: Environmental awareness has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.
- **Hypothesis H4**: The attitude towards green consumption has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.
- **Hypothesis H5**: The availability of green products has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.

EFA of dependent variable - green consumer behavior

Similar to the independent variables, the dependent one, which is the intention to use eco-friendly drinking straws, was evaluated with regard to three criteria and the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The results are shown in Table 4 featuring (1) the measure of sampling adequacy ($0.5 < KMO = 0.5 < 0.1$), (2) Bartlett's test on the correlation of observing variables (Sig.= $0.000 < 0.05$), (3) Total variance explained = 79.050% (>50%), which met the requirements. Besides, all factor loading coefficients were larger than 0.5. In brief, three criteria have been combined into an umbrella factor that met all requirements and had been justified by the EFA.

Table 4: Exploratory factor analysis results of the green consumer behavior

Criteria	**Factor loading**
GBV_1 – I will buy more green products in the future	0.889
I_1 – I will recommend that my friends and family buy green products	0.889
KMO coefficient	0.500
Eigenvalue	1.581
Total variance explained	79.050
Sig.	0.000

(Source: Result from EFA analyzed by SPSS 20, 2020)

Regression results

Linear regression analysis was applied to determine the causal relations among independent variables, including attitude to green consumption, subjective norm, environmental awareness, perceived behavioral control, availability of green products, and the dependent variable of green consumer behavior. The results are as follows.

Table 5: Linear regression analysis results of independent variables

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance	Multi-collinearity	
	B	Standard deviation	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0,090	0,427	_	0,210	0.834	_	_
Attitude towards green consumption (AG)	0,468	0,093	**0,400**	5,057	0.000*	0,558	1,791
Subjective norm (SN)	0,219	0,054	**0,249**	4,068	0.000*	0,929	1,077
Environmental awareness (EA)	0,208	0,079	**0,183**	2,650	0.009*	0,732	1,366
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	0,175	0,078	**0,164**	2,253	0.026	0,654	1,529
Availability of green products (PA)	-0,089	0,062	**-0,085**	-1,429	0.155	0,976	1,024
R^2	0.526						
Adjusted R^2	0.509						
Sig. F	0.000						
Durbin – Watson Coefficient	2.038						

(Source: Result from data analyzed by SPSS 20, 2020)

The regression results show that the adjusted R^2 of this model was 0.509, signifying that independent variables added to this model could be used to explain about 50.9% of the variation of dependent variables; the remaining 49.1% could be elaborated by factors that were not in the model. Besides, the Durbin – Watson coefficient (d) = 2.038 (approximately 2) indicated that there was no autocorrelation; no VIF values of analyzing variables were greater than 10, which meant there was no record of multi-collinearity; the Sig value of the F-test was 0.000 < 0,05. Therefore, the linear regression analysis model was appropriate for the study.

As shown in Table 5, among the 5 factors affecting the green consumer behavior, SC (the availability of green products) got the significance of 0.155 > 0.05, thus it was not statistically significant in this model. With all variables standardized, the regression equation showing the relations between dependent variables of green consumption with its independent ones: attitude to green consumption, subjective norm, environmental awareness, perceived behavioral control is as follows.

$$\mathbf{Y_{Green\ consumption\ behavior} = 0.4\ AG + 0.249\ SN + 0.183\ EA + 0.164\ PBC}$$

The regression results show that the beta coefficients of 4 independent variables were all greater than 0, which means they had a positive impact on the GBV – the green consumer

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behavior, with the validity of 95%. Based on the standardized beta coefficient, Attitude to green consumption (AG) got the greatest beta coefficient. In other words, compared to other variables, this one made the most noticeable influence on green consumer behavior, followed by subjective norm (SB), environmental awareness (EA), and perceived behavioral control (PBC), respectively. The regression results demonstrated that 4 elements namely attitude to green consumption, subjective norm, environmental awareness, perceived behavioral control had a positive influence on the green consumer behavior with the validity of 95%.

DISCUSSIONS

Among the variables featured in the model, attitude towards green consumption is the most impactful factor toward the green consumer behavior with the adjusted beta coefficient of 0.4 and the significance of 5%. That is to say, if the variable of a student's attitude to green consumption increased by 1 unit, that of the green consumer behavior would gain 0.4 unit under the condition that other factors stay unchanged. Indeed, attitude plays an important role in determining human behaviors. Particularly, the attitude to a specific object (green consumption) may show that a person has a positive view of the product, which catalyzes the buying behavior. Hence, this factor demonstrates the buyer's trust and expectations for the product or the opposite.

Subjective norm is the second most impactful factor in the model with a beta coefficient of 0.249 and a significance of 5%. That means if the variable of subjective norm went up by 1 unit, that of the green consumer behavior would gain 0.249 unit under the condition that other factors stay unchanged. Subjective norm are external factors that influence consumer behavior. In this model, they included influences from family, friends, people around, the government, etc. Among them, as shown in the EFA results, most of the factors that affected the social norms were the environment, the surrounding community, and information provided by the mass media. This reflects the cultural-historical features as a member of a community will be likely to be affected by other peers. Therefore, the claim that the objective norms may encourage the buying behavior is acceptable.

According to the regression equation results, the coefficient for the factor of environmental awareness was 0.183 with the significance level of 5%, which confirms that if environmental awareness increased by 1 unit, the green consumer behavior would also go up by 0.183 unit under the condition that other factors stay fixed. The survey revealed that a majority of respondents had fostered keen environmental awareness, which was synonymous with their considerable knowledge of the natural environment. Due to the current situation of contamination and degradation, many nations and international bodies have set environmental issues on top of their agenda. This scrupulous attention and acute awareness of the global environment have affected the personal understanding of these matters, leading to the usage of eco-friendly products. Thanks to the awareness of environmental conservation, consumers are increasingly more concerned about whether the products they choose may leave a negative imprint on the environment. Accordingly, the higher the consumer environmental awareness is, the more common the green consumer behavior becomes.

Perceived behavioral control is the least impactful factor to the green consumer behavior compared to the others. The beta coefficient of this factor was 0.164 with the significance level of 5%. It means if the variable of this factor went up by 1 unit, that of the green consumer

behavior would gain 0.164 unit under the condition that other factors stay unchanged. The perceived behavioral control reflects a person's judgment on whether a behavior is easy or difficult and if he or she has the resources to show it. When consumers know they have sufficient resources (in terms of finance, time, etc.), they will be likely to display the green consumer behavior, unlike when they felt short of resources or the behavior is too challenging.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing results

Hypotheses	Elaboration	Sign	Results
H1	The attitude to green consumption has a positive impact on the green consumer behavior	+	Supported
H2	The subjective norm has a positive impact on green consumer behavior	+	Supported
H3	Environmental awareness has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.	+	Supported
H4	The perceived behavioral control has a positive impact on green consumer behavior.	+	Supported
H5	The availability of green products has a positive impact on green consumer behavior	NA	Irrelevant

(Source: Summarized from research results, 2020)

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the attitude towards green consumption

The findings reveal that the factor of attitude to green consumption created a positive effect, even the most impactful one, on students' green consumer behaviors. Therefore, it is necessary to improve their attitude to green consumption through practical activities such as organizing green market sessions, seminars on safe vegetables, as well as environmental fairs, and making green products featured in exhibitions, trade fairs, and green startup and environmental resilience-oriented events, etc. to capture more students' attention into the sustainable co-development of the economy and environment. When students have a good attitude and interest, they will support green consumption and participate. Hence, this is one of the effective factors to motivate students to embrace green consumption in their daily life.

Raising the environmental awareness

The factor of environmental awareness had a positive impact on the students' green consumer behavior, so it is necessary to assimilate more information about the current issues with the environment and the benefits of green consumption for more resilient environmental development. Thereby, more people will acquire deeper insights and their awareness will also be considerably improved. An easy but effective way is to spread the information on forums or channels which are popular among the youth, for instance, social networking sites, websites, e-newspaper with a vivid interface and easy-to-use navigation.

Organizing programs on green consumption

The factor of subjective norm was among those positively influencing students' green consumer behavior. Therefore, there should be media campaigns or policies to motivate people to use green products. As a result, this is likely to create a trend that attracts new customers in green consumption. To boost green consumption among students and office workers, new regulations

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and messages can be introduced in the workplace or schools. For example, it may be a regulation on minimizing plastic usage. The practice would be popularized to other people such as friends, colleagues, and even family, which contributes to a greater awareness of protecting the environment and using eco-friendly products.

Develop the green products

Besides, the factor of perceived behavioral control also imprints a positive effect on the students' green consumer behavior. Students should be facilitated to feel that they have sufficient resources to display green consumer behavior. The facilitation should be applied to such resources as time, finance, and knowledge. For example, product information should be transparently displayed on the packaging, the product price should be acceptable for a wide range of consumers, especially students, more online shopping platforms, and new payment methods should be introduced for convenience. Other solutions include applying a clean and healthy manufacturing process, producing reusable or recyclable products, together with minimizing disposable ones.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims at analyzing factors affecting the students' green consumer behavior. Their green consumer behavior mostly manifests through practices such as buying recyclable or reusable products, using organic or energy-saving ones. Besides, students still have a habit of using plastic bags as reusable products on a daily basis. This will tremendously impact the environment as they decompose too slowly. However, it is seemingly impossible to avoid plastic bags because they are low-cost and common.

As revealed in the findings, there are four factors affecting students' green consumer behavior: (1) Attitude to green consumption, (2) Subjective norm, (3) Environmental awareness, (4) Perceived behavioral control. Among them, the most impactful factor is the attitude towards green consumption. Followed by subjective norm, environmental awareness, and perceived behavioral control respectively.

This study also suggests some solutions to improve the understanding and promote green consumption as a habit of consumers such as: assimilating information about green consumption, improving public environmental awareness, equipping them with better insights into green products in the market, innovating products so that they meet the demands for convenience and acceptable prices.

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