

The Determinants of Consumers' Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention: Gen Z Perspectives

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Abstract

Growing global concern about sustainable development has fueled interest across all economic sectors. To this vein, both producers and consumers are turning their attention to the sustainable (i.e., environmentally friendly) product category, keeping in mind that shaping sustainable consumption consciousness of consumers and potential consumers are being taken more seriously as sustainable development becomes an imperative. Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior, this study explores the factors that shape the sustainable purchase behavioral intention of educated Generation Z - young consumers in emerging countries, particularly in Vietnam. Empirical data were collected from a survey of 496 students at higher education institutions. By applying structural equation modeling, this study corroborated factors shaping sustainable purchase behavior intention of Generation Z including both supportive behaviors, sociocultural and personal factors. The findings of this study suggest messages and action strategies for governments or organizations to regulate and educate the younger generations towards sustainable consumption behavior.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Generation Z, Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention, Theory of Planned Behavior, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly increasing problems of environmental pollution, resource depletion, global warming and climate change are proven to be the result of human consumption and production activities. For instance, a study by Sam and Dillon (2019) found that a factory produces roughly 20,000 plastic water bottles every day, but only uses them for a short while before releasing them into the environment. Of these, 91% are not recycled, and the worst part is that the waste ends up in the ocean, seriously polluting it. This is just one example of the many inexpensive, disposable goods we have today. The equilibrium between people and the environment has been seriously threatened by mainstream economic development models by going beyond the world's absorptive capacity and the planet's boundaries, endangering ensuring the essential needs of future generations (Chen, 2024; Kelleci & Yıldız, 2021; McLellan, 2013).

Faced with this situation, many global initiatives and efforts have been promoted. The terminology of “sustainable development” was initially introduced into the literature in 1972 at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Hall *et al.*, 2010) and later, Sustainable development was defined in the World Commission on Environment and Development's Brundtland report as “sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WECD., 1987). Accordingly, sustainable consumption, a crucial component of sustainable development, emphasizing conscientious consumption patterns for future generations (Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023). The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proposed 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), of which SDG 12 encompasses “responsible production and consumption” that allows the integration of sustainable consumption models in economic development (United Nations., 2015).

To explain sustainable consumption behavior, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is frequently utilized (Ajzen, 1991). As stated by TPB, personal attitudes toward the behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the intention to perform the behavior and then influence the decision to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2002). TPB was later expanded in combination with other theories of behavioral explanation, such as TPB combined with social cognitive theory (SCT) with the presence of some new factors such as past

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environmental behaviors (i.e., past supportive behaviors toward environmental organizations), personal factors (i.e., perceived knowledge about sustainability issues, perceived marketplace influence, environmental concerns) (Joshi & Rahman, 2017). TPB and its extended versions are commonly used to examine factors affecting attitudes and behavioral intentions towards environmental or green consumption behaviors (Al-Swidi *et al.*, 2021; Saut & Saing, 2021; Zhao *et al.*, 2014). More broadly, TPB has also been used to explore sustainable consumption behaviors with a 3-pillar approach, including economic, environmental and social aspects (Ayar & Gürbüz, 2021; Dragolea *et al.*, 2023; Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023).

Today, the social sustainability aspect has been receiving more attention from conscious consumers, including the youngest generation in the consumer segment - Gen Z. Gen Z is the generation born during the period from 1993 to 2012, they were characterized as an advanced generation in both knowledge and behavior (Ayar & Gürbüz, 2021). According to statistics, generation Z (Gen Z) are potential consumers of goods and services in the future and would soon dominate up to 40% of the market (Claveria, 2019; Chamberlain, 2018). However, generation Z faces many ecological problems, and with their advancement, they are trusted and empowered to change for sustainable development for themselves and future generations (Ayar & Gürbüz, 2021; Dragolea *et al.*, 2023). Centered on the sustainable consumption behavior of generation Z, the goal of this study is to elucidate the determinants that influence Gen Z's sustainable purchase intention in an emerging country, namely Vietnam. Considering the social context, Vietnamese culture is characterized by a mixture of socialist, collectivist and Confucian elements (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the research context in Vietnam and generation Z make a distinction for this study. Furthermore, even though research has focused on sustainable consumption habits and green products, there are still many unanswered questions, particularly for generation Z. Therefore, this study used extend TPB to explore and explain the factors that determine the sustainable purchase behavioral intention of generation Z in Vietnam using a new consumption model with 3 aspects of environmental behaviors (i.e., past supportive behaviors toward environmental organizations), sociocultural factors (i.e., subjective norms), and personal factors (i.e., attitude toward sustainable consumption, perceived knowledge about sustainability issues, perceived social influence, sustainability concern, willingness to pay).

A survey was administered in-person to university students who are a representative sample of Vietnam's educated Generation Z in order to gather data. The proposed research model was tested using structural equation modeling. The results of this study add to the body of knowledge already available on the factors influencing sustainable purchase behavioral intention of Gen Z, potential consumers in the future sustainable market. Second, the study provides assumptions for further research to examine the impact of factors on intrinsic sustainable consumption behavior. The meaningful findings of this study suggest implications for governments and organizations on how to convey messages, develop strategies and actions to regulate and educate young generations towards 21st century goal - sustainable development.

The following sections begin by outlining the research methodology explaining the data collection method, measurement model, and data analysis process. The research results and discussion of the research results are presented in the next section. This study ends with conclusions, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

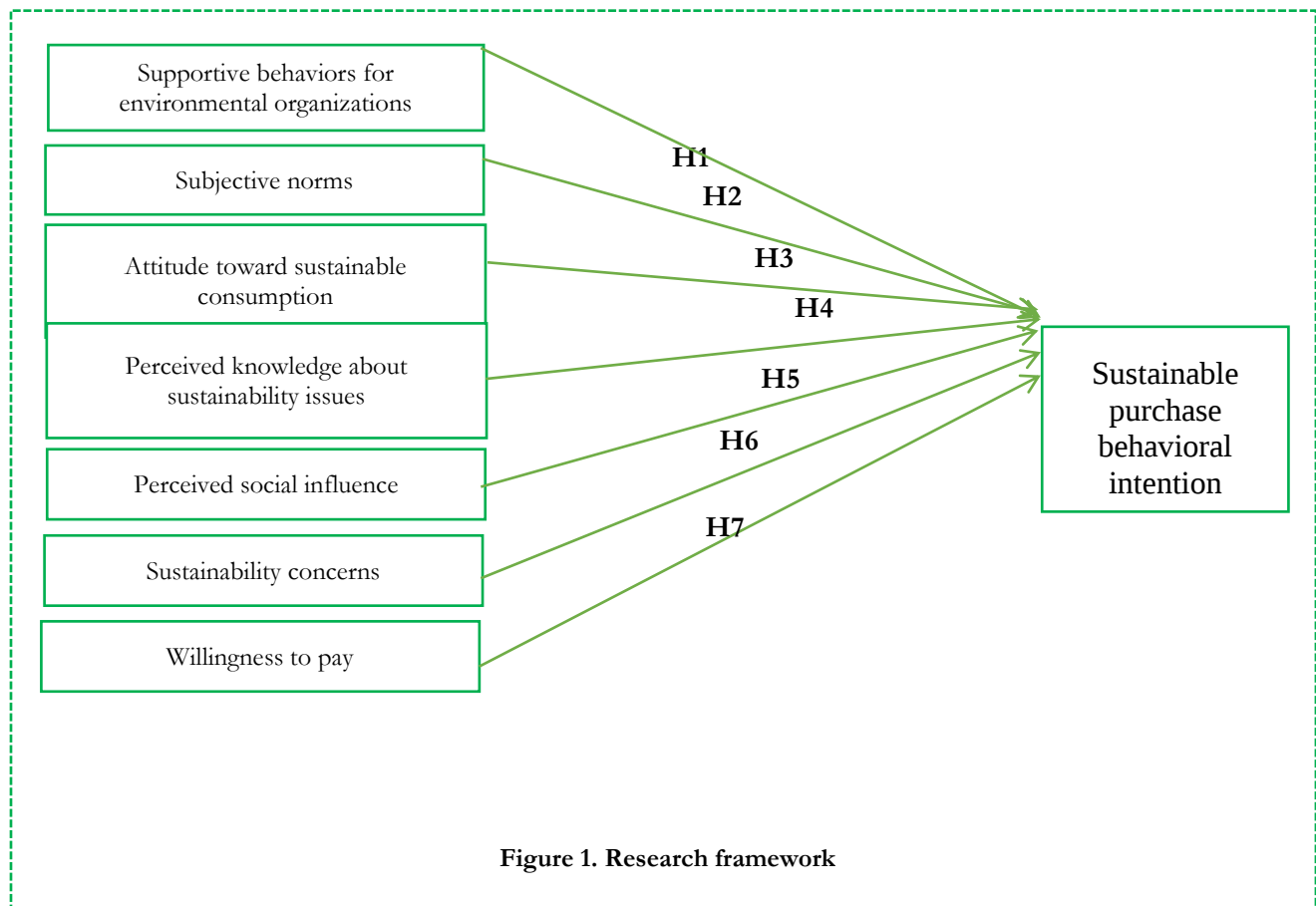
This study examines the determinants of consumers' sustainable purchase behavior of Generation Z in Vietnam. A survey has been administered in-person to university students who serve as representatives of the educated Generation Z in order to gather data. A total of 669 responses were obtained as of May 2024. After refinement, 496 valid responses were retained for the study.

Measurements

The measures of variables used in this work (i.e., past supportive behaviors toward environmental organizations, subjective norms, attitude toward sustainable consumption, perceived knowledge about sustainability issues, perceived social influence, sustainability concern, willingness to pay, sustainable purchase

behavioral intention) were borrowed from previous studies (Dragolea *et al.*, 2023; Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023). We first gave the questionnaire to ten carefully chosen students in order to gauge their comprehension in an effort to boost its validity. To further understand their opinions and make recommendations for improving the survey's main questions, a follow-up communication was made. As a result, some terms were removed, some language was altered to make it clearer, and examples were provided for a number of the measuring elements. A sample of thirty students was then selected to complete the questionnaire in order to verify that its content was valid before it was distributed to a larger group of respondents. A five-point Likert scale, from 1 - *strongly disagree* to 5 - *strongly agree*, was used to capture the answer of respondents.

Overall, this study develops a research framework to examines the determinants of consumers' sustainable purchase behavior (see Figure 1).



Data Analysis Methods

Initially, the underlying structure of a relatively large set of variables was discovered using descriptive statistics and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which helped to determine the underlying dimensions. Next, using SPSS 20 for Window and the AMOS 20 statistical package, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to verify the measurement model's unidimensionality, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Lastly, we used structural equation modeling to evaluate the cause-and-effect relationship between latent variables in the structure model.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Table 1 lists the characteristics of the respondents. The majority of respondents are female (63.51%), male only account for 36.49%. More than 32% of the responses used in this study came from sophomore, followed by freshman (25.60%), junior students (23.59%) and senior students (18.35%).

Table 1. Respondent profile (n = 496)

Features		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	181	36.49
	Female	315	63.51
Grade	Freshman	127	25.60
	Sophomore	162	32.66
	Junior	117	23.59
	Senior	91	18.35

Source: Author's calculation

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

To extract dimensions from measurable data, EFA using principal components and the VARIMAX rotation technique were used. SBE, SUN, ASC, PKS, PSI, SUC, WIP, and SBI were the eight labels assigned to the latent variables (see Table 2). There is a substantial correlation in the data, as shown by the KMO values all being over 0.5 and the significant level for Barlett's tests being below 0.05. All constructs have Cronbach α values more than 0.9, indicating that the factors retrieved in the EFA have satisfied internal consistent reliability (Nunnally, 1978). We can also conclude that scales are reliable because the corrected item-total correlation (CITC) reliability test also showed that the smallest one is 0.659, which is greater than 0.5 (Kerlinger, 1986).

Table 2. Factor analysis results (n = 496)

Latent variables	Completely standardized factor loading	Standard error ^a	Critical ratio ^b
SBE: Supportive Behaviors for Environmental Organizations (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.916; CITC range = 0.721 – 0.817; AVE = 0.679)			
SBE1	0.806	0.051	18.207***
SBE2	0.811	0.053	19.111***
SBE3	0.821	-- ^c	--
SUN: Subjective Norms (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.902; CITC range = 0.698 – 0.768; AVE = 0.677)			
SUN1	0.760	0.052	17.795**
SUN2	0.807	0.049	19.109***
SUN3	0.849	0.049	19.221***
SUN4	0.838	-- ^c	--
ASC: Attitude toward Sustainable Consumption (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.922; CITC range = 0.731 – 0.836; AVE = 0.653)			
ASC1	0.804	0.056	18.234***
ASC2	0.798	0.057	17.666***
ASC3	0.827	0.055	17.791***
ASC4	0.776	-- ^c	--

Latent variables	Completely standardized factor loading	Standard error ^a	Critical ratio ^b
PKS: Perceived Knowledge about Sustainable Issues (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.913; CITC range = 0.772 – 0.868; AVE = 0.747)			
PKS1	0.782	-- ^c	--
PKS2	0.844	0.049	22.336***
PKS3	0.882	0.044	23.129***
PKS4	0.895	0.041	27.462***
PKS5	0.908	0.044	28.087***
PSI: Perceived Social Influence (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.914; CITC range = 0.737 – 0.838; AVE = 0.721)			
PSI1	0.785	-- ^c	--
PSI2	0.861	0.061	21.920***
PSI3	0.842	0.059	21.362***
SUC: Sustainable Concerns (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.909; CITC range = 0.722 – 0.836; AVE = 0.713)			
SUC1	0.803	0.053	20.127***
SUC2	0.786	0.055	19.798***
SUC3	0.770	0.054	19.120***
SUC4	0.755	-- ^c	--
WIP: Willingness to Pay (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.929; CITC range = 0.751 – 0.879; AVE = 0.746)			
WIP1	0.821	0.048	20.376***
WIP2	0.776	0.052	19.139***
WIP3	0.768	0.050	19.097***
WIP4	0.750	-- ^c	--
SBI: Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.907; CITC range = 0.672 – 0.828; AVE = 0.698)			
SBI1	0.782	-- ^c	--
SBI2	0.902	0.067	24.056***
SBI3	0.873	0.052	22.223***
SBI4	0.779	0.050	19.540***

Latent variables	Completely standardized factor loading	Standard error ^a	Critical ratio ^b
Notes: ^aS.E. is an estimate of the standard error of the covariance. ^bC.R. is the critical ratio obtained by dividing the estimate of the covariance by its standard error. ***Correlation is significant at the 1% level ^bC.R. is the critical ratio obtained by dividing the estimate of the covariance by its standard error. ^cIndicates a parameter fixed at 1.0 in the original solution. Fit indices: $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.972$, $p = 0.000$, GFI = 0.851, AGFI = 0.816, CFI = 0.931, NFI = 0.904, IFI = 0.932, RMR = 0.052, RMSEA = 0.069.			

Source: Author's calculation

Instrumental Reliability and Validity

Table 2 presents the results of the CFA model fit test, followed by the validity and reliability test. A several crucial indicators to evaluate the goodness of fit: chi-square / degrees of freedom (CMIN/df) = 2.972 that is acceptability ratio of fit test, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.931 indicates that the research model has a reasonable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999)), normed fit index (NFI) = 0.904 indicates that a good fit model (Hu & Bentler, 1999)), root mean square residual (RMR) = 0.052 indicates an acceptable model (Byrne, 2013)) and root mean square error of approximately (RMSEA) = 0.069 are generally considered appropriate (Hu & Bentler, 1999). These results indicate the appropriateness of the research model.

The latent variables' discriminant and convergent validity are next examined. The factor validity in our study model is indicated by CFA results, which show that all factor loading coefficients more than 0.50 (Kline, 2011) with C.R. considerably (CR > 1.96). The research model exhibits convergent validity since all constructs have the average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square of the correlation between each latent construct and the other constructs is compared to the AVE for each latent construct in order to confirm the discriminant validity of the extracted measures into the corresponding latent variables (Segars & Grover, 1998). Every AVE value on the diagonal is higher than the squared correlation on the off-diagonal displayed, which indicates the discriminant validity (see Table 3).

Table 3. Discriminant validity

Construct	SBE	SUN	ASC	PKS	PSI	SUC	WIP	SBI
SBE	0.782							
SUN	0.602	0.803						
ASC	0.566	0.569	0.767					
PKS	0.591	0.461	0.487	0.827				
PSI	0.457	0.504	0.497	0.499	0.850			
SUC	0.485	0.448	0.508	0.485	0.440	0.858		
WIP	0.376	0.278	0.440	0.535	0.572	0.497	0.782	
SBI	0.462	0.380	0.382	0.341	0.438	0.398	0.441	0.836
Notes: "AVE are on the diagonal; squared correlations are off-diagonal"								

Source: Author's calculation

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Following the agreement levels of the respondents in Table 4, the results reveal that educated Gen Z show a high agreement with sustainable purchase behavioral intention (mean = 4.072), perceived social influence (mean = 3.928), supportive behaviors for environmental organizations (mean = 3.881), and sustainability concerns (mean = 3.767) and they also agreed with the degree of perceived knowledge about sustainability issues, willingness to pay, subjective norms, attitudes toward sustainable consumption but in lower level. The correlation between SBE, SUN, ASC, PKS, PSI, SUC, WIP and SBI were all positively significant at 1% level.

Table 4. Means, Standard deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SBE	3.881	0.726	1							
2. SUN	3.489	0.778	.434**	1						
3. ASC	3.467	0.823	.331**	.465	1					
4. PKS	3.543	0.908	.342**	.235*	.428*	1				
5. PSI	3.928	0.804	.453**	.324	.548**	.432*	1			
6. SUC	3.767	0.709	.398**	.356*	.456**	.475**	.398*	1		
7. WIP	3.509	0.876	.453**	.411**	.637**	.564**	.568**	.437*	1	
8. SBI	4.072	0.768	.453**	.432**	.646**	.449**	.597**	.522**	.403**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Source: Author's calculation

Hypotheses Testing

To test proposals in the research model, we estimated the path coefficients of the structural model (see Table 5). The intention to make sustainable purchases is directly correlated with each of the seven proposed components. All hypotheses have been adopted in light of the findings with positive significantly coefficients. Thus, hypotheses from H1 to H7 are supported. Supportive behaviors for environmental organizations have greatest effect on sustainable purchase behavioral intention of Gen Z ($\beta=0.302$, $p<0.05$), followed by perceived social influence ($\beta=0.297$, $p=0.000$), attitudes toward sustainable consumption ($b=0.267$, $p=0.000$), perceived knowledge about sustainability issues ($\beta=0.249$, $p=0.000$), sustainability concerns ($\beta=0.209$, $p=0.000$), and willingness to pay ($\beta=0.178$, $p=0.000$). Subjective norms have established a meaningful relationship with behavioral intention but in a lower effect ($\beta=0.094$, $p<0.05$).

Table 5. Hypotheses testing results

	Estimate (β)	P	Outcome
H1: Supportive Behaviors for Environmental Organizations ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.302 (β_1)	0.003	Supported
H2: Subjective Norms ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.094 (β_2)	0.011	Supported
H3: Attitudes toward Sustainable Consumption ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.267 (β_3)	0.000	Supported
H4: Perceived Knowledge about Sustainability Issues ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.249 (β_4)	0.000	Supported
H5: Perceived Social Influence ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.297 (β_5)	0.009	Supported
H6: Sustainability Concerns ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.209 (β_6)	0.000	Supported
H7: Willingness to Pay ---> Sustainable Purchase Behavioral Intention	.178 (β_7)	0.000	Supported

Source: Author's calculation

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of the current study is to identify the factors that influence young, educated consumers in Vietnam to make sustainable purchasing decisions. Social cognitive theories have not received significant attention in previous studies on sustainable behavior (Phipps *et al.*, 2013). This paper adds to the body of literature by emphasizing how additional interpersonal and sociocultural factors, in conjunction with educated purchasers' prior sustainable behavior—in this case, support for environmental organizations—predict their future sustainable purchasing behavior. The empirical results of this study show that the following sequence of

characteristics, out of all those taken into consideration, predicts the sustainable purchase behavior of Gen Z: “(1) supportive behaviors for environmental organizations; (2) subjective norms; (3) attitude towards sustainable consumption; (4) perceived social influence; (5) perceived knowledge about sustainability issues; (6) sustainability concern; and (7) willingness to pay”.

Among all the variables taken into consideration, supportive behaviors for environmental institutions had the highest predictive power. This outcome is consistent with previous studies (Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Lee, 2014), which indicate that the most significant predictor of future sustainable consumption patterns is prior sustainable behaviors. The findings imply that people read something about themselves in a socially acceptable conduct, then behave in the future in a way that is consistent with their previous actions. This result validates TPB in accordance with SCT and extends earlier research that solely looked at sustainable behaviors as a dependent variable. Customers, particularly Generation Z, exhibit both emotional and rational behavior. They might become more conscious of their civic responsibilities and make both short- and long-term plans based on the principles and actions of responsible consumers.

Among the predictors, perceived social influence (PSI) comes in second. It adds to the findings of Joshi and Rahman (2017), who highlighted PSI as a crucial sign of young, educated consumers' sustainable consumption habits. According to the current study, there is no denying that young people's behaviors in this age of rapidly developing social media and technology may be impacted by and mirror the actions of other market participants (such as influencers, well-known actors, or singers) or societal trends. It is seen that many respondents who place a high value on perceived social influence have more favorable attitudes regarding sustainable purchasing practices.

The third most important predictor of young customers' intentions to make sustainable purchases is their attitude toward doing so. The current study's findings are consistent with earlier research, which indicates that an ecological mindset and sustainable consumption are positively correlated (Ayar & Gürbüz, 2021; Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Lee, 2014; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023). The fourth most crucial metric is perceived knowledge of sustainability issues. The results corroborate other studies that found a link between sustainable purchase intention and perceived sustainability knowledge of young educated consumers (Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023).

Among the considered variables, Gen Z's intention to make sustainable purchases is lesser affected by sustainability concern. The outcome is in line with previous studies corroborating statistically significant relationship between consumer sustainable consumption behavioral intention and environmental concern (Chen, 2024; Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023). This is the starting point for creating awareness and can lead to a transition into sustainable action.

The study's empirical results demonstrate a significant correlation between the intention to make sustainable purchases and willingness to pay. Therefore, the results seem to confirm the findings of Saut and Saing (2021), who looked at young customers' intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products and found the positive relationship between price sensitivity and the purchase intention. The findings showed that consumers are willing to spend an additional fund for sustainable products compared to conventional ones.

The least impact on young customers' intentions to make sustainable purchases comes from subjective norms. The socialization impact, which refers to the internalization and modification of societal norms on educated consumers' purchase behavioral intention, might be used to justify this result (Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2020). The "group effect" on customers' intentions to make sustainable purchases may also be shown by a larger effect of subjective norms (Joshi & Rahman, 2017).

Overall, these outcomes are consistent with previous studies (Dragolea *et al.*, 2023; Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Saut & Saing, 2021; Yıldız & Kelleci, 2023) but in an extended version. The current study has validated the fundamental postulates of TPB, especially for Gen Z. Our results highlight the importance of variables influencing the behavioral intentions of well-educated customers as a byproduct of socialization, particularly for Gen Z, who dominate the future. By extending TPB and combining with SCT, these results may suggest marketers and governments on how to make attempt to involve young consumers in sustainable manner. For example, regarding

education field, embedding sustainability issues into core curriculum is crucial way to educate and equip knowledge for young generation. Besides, promoting public awareness and sensitivity to environmental and sustainability issues can be achieved by working together with marketers and the government to implement educational and experimental programs/ initiatives (e.g., recycling campaigns, ecological tourism). Additionally, the findings of this study imply that attitudes and extrinsic cognitions govern Gen Z's sustainable behavioral intentions. In line with Gen Z's pragmatic and objective mindset, a potential implication for marketers is to convey rationally appealing messages and evoke the importance of young people by emphasizing their co-creation role.

First, this study only explored the factors that influence sustainable purchase behavior intentions, without being sure about how the actual actions are. Future studies could extend this research by examining behavioral intentions as a transitional step to sustainable purchase behavior. This study takes educated GenZ into consideration, therefore, further studies may take a larger demographic segmentation (such as Gen X, Gen Y) to make a comparison and see the whole picture.

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