

Green Consumption Trends and Challenges for Retail Businesses in Ho Chi Minh City

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KEYWORDS

Challenges,
green consumption,
retail enterprises,
trends.

ABSTRACT

The increasing threats to the global environment have positioned green consumption as a crucial element in achieving sustainable development. This study investigates the rise of green consumption trends in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), focusing on the factors that drive consumers to select environmentally friendly products and services. It also identifies the challenges retail enterprises face in adapting to this trend, including limitations on capital investment, outdated production technologies, and incomplete legal frameworks. The study subsequently proposes solutions to help Vietnamese retailers overcome these obstacles, enhance consumer awareness of green consumption, and promote sustainable development nationwide.

1. Introduction

In the context of pressing global challenges such as climate change, environmental pollution, and the depletion of natural resources, green lifestyles have become an essential trend that consumers increasingly embrace (Aranitou et al., 2024; Adnan et al., 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2025). In Vietnam, awareness of the importance of environmental protection is rising, leading to notable changes in consumer behavior (Nguyen Thi Hanh, 2024; Vu Thi Thu Ha, 2025). Consumers are now more willing than ever to prioritize environmentally friendly products and services, as reflected in their growing demand for organic, eco-friendly, and socially responsible goods (Adnan et al., 2025). This shift requires not only changes in consumer habits but also poses significant challenges for retail enterprises in Vietnam (Vu Thi Thu Ha, 2025). Retailers must adjust their production, supply, and marketing strategies to meet the growing demand

for green consumption (Syafrida et al., 2025; Zhang & Wang, 2025).

While the transition towards sustainable consumption is a national priority, this study specifically focuses on HCMC as a representative case study for several strategic reasons. First, as Vietnam's largest economic locomotive and a primary retail hub, HCMC reflects the most dynamic shifts in consumer preferences and market trends. Second, the city's high concentration of a burgeoning middle class, characterized by higher environmental consciousness and purchasing power, serves as a "litmus test" for green product adoption. Consequently, HCMC's retail sector faces the most acute pressure to transition, making it an ideal environment to examine the practical challenges and operational barriers encountered by enterprises.

Despite the evident potential, scholarly research on the intersection of consumer trends and retailers' specific organizational difficulties in this urban context remains fragmented. This study aims to bridge this gap

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<http://doi.org/10.61602/jdi.2026.89.05>

Submitted: 8-Dec-2025; Revised: 14-Mar-2026; Accepted: 23-Mar-2026; Online first: 11-Apr-2026

ISSN (print): 1859-428X, ISSN (online): 2815-6234

by identifying the key drivers of green consumption in HCMC and analyzing systemic obstacles, ranging from capital constraints to regulatory gaps, that hinder retail businesses. By situating the research in HCMC, the findings offer localized insights and a strategic roadmap for sustainable development in similar emerging metropolitan markets.

2. Theoretical basis and literature review

2.1. Rational choice theory

Rational Choice Theory provides an important foundation for explaining green consumption trends and how businesses respond to them. According to Friedman and Hechter (1988), the theory posits that both individuals and organizations tend to make decisions by comparing costs and benefits in order to maximize the value they receive. Applied to the context of green consumption in Vietnam, customers' preference for environmentally friendly products is not only associated with environmental awareness but also linked to tangible benefits such as safety, quality, and long-term utility (Marín Rives, 2024; Syafrida et al., 2025).

From the perspective of retail enterprises, the theory suggests that the strategies of businesses adopting green products should be based on balancing investment costs and expected benefits of customer expectations and how it impacts the marketing processes of retail enterprises (Syafrida et al., 2025). Procuring products from green suppliers, designing environmentally friendly packaging, or investing in green marketing campaigns often entails higher costs, requiring businesses to consider the actual benefits that the market can offer, including consumers' willingness to pay, demand growth, and potential for long-term competitive advantage. This aligns with Zhang and Wang (2025), who suggested that the scarcity or low prevalence of green products can enhance perceived value but simultaneously creates pressure on businesses to persuade customers and ensure a stable supply.

In addition, Rational Choice Theory suggests that green consumption becomes significant only when sustainable benefits are clearly demonstrated and substantiated, rather than being limited to marketing messages. This means that, to encourage green consumption trends, Vietnamese retail companies must share transparent information about the environmental impact of their products, improve product availability, maintain reasonable pricing, and demonstrate sustainability commitments through tangible actions (Nguyen Thi Hanh, 2024). This approach assists in understanding demand changes and the current challenges Vietnamese businesses face in pursuing green growth (Vu Thi Thu Ha, 2025).

2.2. Green consumption

Research by Aranitou et al. (2024), Marín Rives (2024), Southerton and McEachern (2024) defines green consumption as a manifestation of responsible buying behavior. It entails the procurement and utilization of environmentally sustainable offerings across their full life cycle, encompassing manufacturing, logistics, and decomposition. Green consumption reflects a sense of responsibility for environmental protection through the selection of environmentally friendly products, sustainable consumption practices, and proper waste management (Aranitou et al., 2024). The term "green consumption behavior" refers to individuals or organizations choosing and using products with minimal or no negative environmental impact (Marín Rives, 2024). Engaging in environmentally friendly consumption practices encourages consumers to act in ways that benefit their local communities (Aranitou et al., 2024; Southerton & McEachern, 2024).

2.3. Green consumption trends in Vietnam

Amid the global transition toward sustainable development, green consumption trends in Vietnam have become increasingly evident (Ta Dinh Thi, 2024). Consumers today are not only concerned with product quality and price but also consider the environmental impact when making purchasing decisions (NielsenIQ, 2024; PwC Vietnam, 2024). This shift places urgent demands on retail enterprises, requiring them not only to capture these emerging trends promptly but also to adjust their business strategies to meet evolving market needs (Nguyen Thi Hanh, 2024).

Recent surveys and reports indicate that green consumption trends are becoming increasingly evident both globally and in Vietnam. The growing demand for green products has prompted many businesses in the F&B sector to adjust their strategies, invest in clean production technologies, adopt renewable energy, and prioritize eco-friendly packaging (NielsenIQ, 2024). The government has also issued Decision No. 889/QĐ-TTg, which outlines the national orientation for sustainable production and consumption until 2030, with a strong focus on developing recycled, reused, and renewable products. Domestic surveys reveal that 31% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for green products (NielsenIQ, 2024; The Vietnamese High Quality Products, 2024), while green shopping habits such as using reusable bags, separating waste, and conserving energy are becoming more widespread. In addition, many community-driven initiatives, such as the use of banana leaves, bamboo straws, and biodegradable bags, have been widely embraced (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, 2024). These indicators clearly reflect a shift in consumer awareness and behavior, while also presenting both opportunities and

Table 1. Indicators of green consumption trends (2023)

Content group	Survey results (%)	Implications	Source
Spending Trends	31% of consumers are willing to pay more for green products	Consumers demonstrate a clear commitment to environmentally friendly products	NielsenIQ (2024), PwC Vietnam (2024)
National Policy	Decision No. 889/QĐ-TTg (2021–2030): National Action Program on Sustainable Production and Consumption, promoting recycled, reused, and renewable products	A policy framework that drives sustainable production and consumption	The Vietnamese High Quality Products (2024), PwC Vietnam (2024)
Green Behavior in Vietnam (2023)	49% bring their own bags and use reusable bags	Increasing awareness of reducing plastic waste	NielsenIQ (2024), The Vietnamese High Quality Products (2024), Nguyen Thi Hanh (2024).
	47% only purchase essential items to avoid waste	More responsible consumption	
	45% separate waste and save electricity	Daily habits are shifting for environmental protection	
Expectations for Businesses	38% believe that corporate green initiatives are “extremely important”	Increased pressure on businesses regarding social responsibility	

Table 2. Industries of green consumption trends in Vietnam (2024)

Sector/ Industry	Manifestations of green consumption	Practical applications	Source
F&B (milk tea, coffee, food)	Replacing single-use plastics with eco-friendly materials	Bamboo/steel straws, paper bags, retail chains such as Sói Biển, Bác Tôm, Hano Farm	NielsenIQ (2024), PwC Vietnam (2024)
Aviation	Adoption of green products in service delivery	Vietjet and Bamboo Airways are using environmentally friendly utensils	
Agriculture & Production	Development of green farms and clean agricultural processing	Vinamilk (green farms), Vinamit (green agricultural products for export & domestic market)	
Community Activities	Promoting recycling, exchanging plastics for trees	Various private organizations in urban areas	
Consumer Awareness & Behavior	Consumers prioritize socially and environmentally responsible brands. Surveys show that 90% of Vietnamese consumers support ethical businesses; 43% have a better impression of green brands	Survey results: 90% of Vietnamese consumers support ethical businesses; 43% have a better impression of green brands	The Vietnamese High Quality Products (2024), PwC Vietnam (2024)
Policies & Context	Environmental protection and sustainable consumption strategies as national priorities	Party and State, particularly emphasized in urban areas	Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper (2024)

challenges for businesses to innovate toward green and sustainable development (Ta Đình Thi, 2024; Nguyen Thi Hanh, 2024).

It can be observed that green consumption trends in Vietnam are continuing to develop and have become an important driver in reshaping the consumer market. These changes stem from both supply and demand. On the business side, green initiatives are increasingly diverse, ranging from replacing plastic packaging with eco-friendly materials, to applying renewable energy in production, to developing clean product lines to meet the growing needs of consumers (The Vietnamese High Quality Products, 2024). Industries in the food and beverage, aviation, agriculture, and retail sectors have seen substantial gains, demonstrating that “greening” is no longer a temporary trend but is becoming a new standard in business operations.

With regard to policy, the government recognized that environmental protection and sustainable development are major long-term strategic issues, particularly in major urban areas experiencing growing pressure of pollution. These priorities have been operationalized through various action programs and initiatives that encourage consumers to adopt greener behaviors, thereby contributing to a healthier living environment and improving quality of life (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, 2024).

Regarding consumers, surveys indicate a significant increase in consumer awareness about social responsibility and environmental protection. Nearly 90% of consumers strongly support businesses that demonstrate ethical and socially responsible practices, while 43% report having a more positive impression of environmentally friendly brands (NielsenIQ, 2024;

PwC Vietnam, 2024). These figures confirm that green considerations have become an important criterion in brand choice and purchasing decisions.

2.4. Challenges faced by retail enterprises in Vietnam in the context of green consumption

Nguyen Thi Hanh (2024) argues that the development of a green economy in Vietnam faces numerous challenges stemming from both objective and subjective factors, including an incomplete legal framework, wasteful consumption habits, insufficient investment capital, outdated production technologies, and severe impacts from climate change. These issues require the joint efforts of the government, businesses, and the community to raise awareness and promote sustainable solutions.

Although many enterprises recognize the importance of green production, implementation still encounters significant obstacles related to financing and access to capital (NielsenIQ, 2024). Furthermore, the dissemination and communication of policies and regulations remain limited, with a lack of specific rules and strict enforcement mechanisms, leading to ineffective compliance (Ta Dinh Thi, 2024). In addition, outdated production technologies and ongoing climate change continue to pose serious challenges to sustainable development.

Therefore, overcoming these barriers requires close coordination among stakeholders: the government in improving the legal framework and financial support mechanisms, businesses in adopting green technologies, and the community in changing consumption habits. Only through the concerted efforts of all parties can green consumption trends and the green economy in Vietnam achieve sustainable development.

The Vietnam High-Quality Goods Business Association conducted the “Green Consumption Awareness and Behavior 2024” survey in Hanoi and HCMC with nearly 400 respondents. The results show that Vietnamese consumers are becoming more positive about green consumption and are seeking products that are good for their health, high-quality, and environmentally friendly. However, a significant gap remains between awareness and actual behavior due to barriers such as high prices, limited transparency, insufficient policy support, and restricted product availability (Vietnam High-Quality Goods Business Association, 2024). These findings pose challenges for retail businesses as they seek to expand the green market, optimize cost strategies, build consumer trust, and develop sustainable distribution systems.

While awareness of green consumption in Vietnam is on the rise, existing scholarship remains largely confined to macro-level perspectives or general

Table 3. Summary of survey results on awareness, behavior, and barriers to green consumption in Vietnam (2024)

Group	Content	Results	Implications for businesses
Behavior & Attitudes	Selection criteria	Quality (77%) Safety (74%) Health (69%) Environmentally friendly (63%) Price (44%)	Health and environmental concerns are primary motivators, but price remains a decisive factor
	Information channels	Online platforms 69% Family/friends <40%	Businesses need to invest heavily in online communication and build digital trust
	Purchase channels	Traditional retail 67% Modern trade 66% Online 45%	Multi-channel distribution is important, with emphasis on developing e-commerce
	Motivators	Health benefits (83%) Reducing environmental harm (82%)	Businesses should communicate products as “healthy & sustainable”
Barriers & Challenges	Trends	59% plan to increase green consumption ~20% willing to pay >10% more	Market potential exists; pricing strategy and positioning are critical
	High price	78% of consumers see it as the biggest barrier	Businesses must optimize costs and adopt reasonable pricing strategies
	Lack of guidance	49% of consumers	Increase transparency, green labeling, and traceability
	Lack of policy support	43% of consumers	Businesses rely on government policies; advocacy for supportive mechanisms is needed
	Difficult access to products	43% of consumers	Expanding distribution coverage is essential
	Quality not meeting Expectations	18% of consumers	Strict quality control is necessary; avoid “greenwashing”
	Limited awareness	7% of consumers feel green products are unnecessary	Long-term solution: educate the market and raise awareness.

Source: Vietnam High-Quality Goods Business Association (2024)

theories, leaving three significant research gaps. First, there is a lack of localized context regarding HCMC - a dynamic yet complex retail ecosystem where market segment nuances remain under-explored. Second, a persistent 'attitude-behavior gap' exists due to financial barriers, necessitating in-depth investigations into psychological mechanisms and digital communication strategies to drive conversion. Finally, adaptive solutions for enterprise retail remain vague, particularly regarding supply chain optimization and trust management against 'greenwashing' risks. These gaps underscore the necessity of this study to provide practical strategic frameworks for the retail market in HCMC.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach combined with descriptive statistics to analyze green consumption trends and the operational challenges faced by retail enterprises in HCMC. The qualitative phase involved a preliminary review of existing literature and expert perspectives to refine the research variables and ensure the questionnaire's content validity.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed directly to retail enterprises in HCMC. The sampling frame consisted of 115 retail enterprises, including supermarkets/retail chains, convenience stores, independent stores, and other types of retail businesses, ensuring a diverse representation of the city's retail landscape. The use of a purposive sampling method allowed for the collection of targeted insights from business managers and owners who possess a direct understanding of sustainable strategic shifts.

The questionnaire was designed with two primary sections: (i) general business demographics, such as enterprise type, workforce size, and average monthly revenue (ii) a set of questions assessing the influence of various factors related to green consumption

trends and the difficulties encountered by enterprises in implementing sustainable business activities. All observed variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "Completely disagree" to 5 = "Completely agree"). The collected primary data were subsequently coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, to evaluate the intensity of each factor as perceived by the enterprises. This mixed-methodological framework provides a robust basis for interpreting the current state of green transition in a major emerging metropolitan market.

4. Results

Independent stores accounted for the highest proportion (44.3%), followed by convenience stores (27.8%), supermarkets/retail chains (18.3%), and other business types (9.6%). Most enterprises had workforces of 5–20 employees (46.1%) and 21–100 employees (31.3%), reflecting the prevalence of small- and medium-sized retail businesses in HCMC.

The survey results indicate that the green consumption trend has exerted a particular influence on the business orientations of retail enterprises in HCMC, although the impact varies across different factors. Among the seven factors examined, competitive pressure received the highest rating (Mean = 3.99; SD = 0.87). This indicates that, in an increasingly competitive market, enterprises are compelled to pay greater attention to green products and services to maintain their competitive edge and retain customers.

Next, legal regulations also achieved a relatively high average score (Mean = 3.89; SD = 0.85), indicating that the system of policies, standards, and legal frameworks plays an important role in guiding enterprises toward green business practices. However, as noted by Quỳnh Như (2022) and Tạ Đình Thi (2024), many legal documents in Vietnam still lack specificity and strict enforcement mechanisms, resulting in limited effectiveness in practice.

Table 4. Survey results on green consumption trends of retail enterprises in HCMC

Factor	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Competitive pressure	3.99	0.87	The highest score, indicating that market competition drives enterprises to focus on green consumption
Legal regulations	3.89	0.85	Relatively high, reflecting that policies and regulations influence enterprises.
Market demand	3.64	0.98	Moderately important, showing that customers are beginning to pay attention to green products
Technology and resources	3.62	0.95	Fairly average, many enterprises still have limited capacity for innovation
Financial challenges	3.42	0.95	Costs remain a significant barrier in transitioning to green operations
Managerial difficulties	3.41	0.94	Some enterprises lack experience in sustainable management
Sustainable development strategy	3.40	1.01	The lowest score indicates that enterprises still lack long-term strategic planning

Other factors, such as market demand (Mean = 3.64; SD = 0.98) and technology and resources (Mean = 3.62; SD = 0.95), were rated moderately. This shows that consumers are increasingly concerned about environmentally friendly products, and businesses are making efforts to enhance their internal capacities to adapt. Nevertheless, the impact is not yet prominent, reflecting that the green consumption trend is still in its formative and developing stage in Vietnam.

Conversely, factors such as financial challenges (Mean = 3.42; SD = 0.95), management difficulties (Mean = 3.41; SD = 0.94), and particularly sustainable development strategy (Mean = 3.40; SD = 1.01) were rated lower. This indicates that many retail enterprises still lack long-term vision and concrete strategies to implement green transformation. In addition, financial and managerial constraints hinder their ability to deploy green initiatives effectively. This observation is consistent with Vu Khue (2024), who emphasizes that limited access to capital and support policies remain the biggest barriers to small and medium-sized enterprises in their green transition.

When combining data on business types and sizes, the picture of the retail sector in Vietnam becomes clearer. The majority of surveyed businesses are independent stores (44.3%) and convenience stores (27.8%), indicating that the market is still dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises operating independently rather than large chains or corporations. In terms of workforce size, small and medium-sized businesses account for the majority: 46.1% have 5–20 employees, and 31.3% have 21–100 employees. Regarding average monthly revenue, 69.6% of

businesses reported revenue below VND 200 million, reflecting limited financial capacity and the “small-scale” nature of most enterprises in the sector.

These characteristics partly explain the challenges that Vietnamese businesses face when implementing green consumption initiatives: limited financial and human resources, difficulties in developing long-term strategies, and competitive market pressures. In this context, analyzing the influence of each factor on the green consumption trend, while accounting for the type and size of the business, is particularly important.

This information not only provides a basis for assessing the current situation but also helps in designing practical management solutions. Specifically, small and medium-sized enterprises can be supported through priority financial programs, strategic consulting tailored to their type and scale, enhanced capabilities in applying green technologies, and training programs to improve awareness and skills in managing environmentally friendly operations. These solutions will help promote green consumption in Vietnam’s retail sector, while minimizing risks and enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, laying the foundation for sustainable development in today’s market context.

The research also evaluated five core drivers of green consumer behavior: (1) environmental awareness, (2) trust in green brands, (3) social influence, (4) green product value and quality, and (5) accessibility to points of sale. This research data elucidates the primary motivations shaping sustainable consumption patterns in the current market context, with the results illustrated in Figure 1.

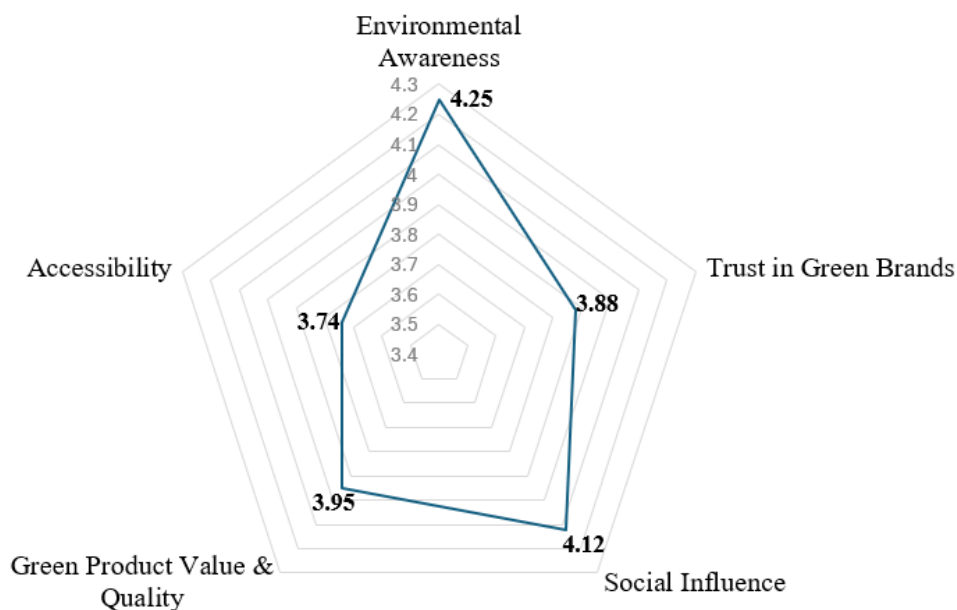


Figure 1. Factors driving consumer preference for eco-friendly products and services

Based on the survey findings illustrated in Figure 1, consumer awareness and motivation toward eco-friendly products are notably high. Specifically, environmental protection awareness emerges as the primary driver with a significant mean score of 4.25, indicating a robust sense of ecological responsibility among consumers in HCMC. This is followed by community and social influence at 4.12, which underscores the efficacy of green living trends in shaping purchasing behavior. Factors such as perceived product value and quality (3.95) and trust in green brands (3.88) also maintain positive scores, reinforcing the critical role of corporate reputation in sustainability commitments. Conversely, accessibility and convenience recorded the lowest score of 3.74, highlighting a tangible barrier in distribution networks. These findings indicate that while consumers demonstrate high levels of awareness and goodwill, retailers must optimize distribution channels and product accessibility to effectively bridge the gap between green consciousness and actual purchasing behavior.

In summary, while there is a strong consumer inclination toward green consumption in HCMC, a significant gap remains between environmental awareness and actual purchasing behavior due to accessibility and internal business constraints. These findings highlight the need for retail enterprises to resolve strategic and operational challenges to capitalize on the green trend and achieve full long-term sustainability.

5. Conclusion, managerial implications and policy recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The green consumption trend is becoming increasingly significant amid environmental and climate challenges. This study examines the trends in green consumption research and digitalization for retail businesses in HCMC and concludes that transitioning to green consumption in HCMC requires a three-pillar strategic framework. First, operational excellence through digitalization and human capital development provides the essential internal foundation. Second, a green differentiation strategy is crucial for building brand equity and market share. Finally, green financial management and the strategic mobilization of government incentives serve as the bedrock for technological innovation and long-term competitiveness. If implemented systematically, these measures will not only protect the environment but also foster sustainable development, retail businesses in HCMC can transcend structural barriers and secure a sustainable competitive advantage in an eco-conscious market.

5.2. Managerial implications

To overcome the challenges posed by Vietnam's current green consumption trend, retail enterprises need practical, proactive, and flexible solutions that enable them to adapt to market demands and enhance competitiveness. Success requires not only internal policies but also government support and community collaboration. The following solutions are proposed to help businesses seize opportunities and address obstacles in an increasingly green consumer market.

First, establishing internal capabilities and optimizing operations are the prerequisite for retail enterprises to adapt to the era of green consumption. To adapt to green consumption trends, retail enterprises must prioritize business process optimization and internal capacity building. This transition begins with the digitalization of administrative processes and the integration of green technologies into operational systems to maximize resource efficiency and minimize waste. Furthermore, human resource development plays a pivotal role; specialized training programs and periodic workshops on sustainable production foster organizational consensus. Once the workforce is deeply imbued with green values, businesses can implement flexible adaptive strategies and maintain long-term sustainable operations.

Next, achieving differentiation through green product portfolios and collaborative ecosystems is the key factor in capturing market share and consolidating brand equity. A differentiation strategy centered on green offerings is a decisive factor in securing a competitive advantage. Retailers should focus on R&D for product portfolios derived from recycled or renewable materials, while simultaneously establishing a concrete green transformation roadmap. Success also hinges on cultivating a collaborative ecosystem with suppliers, NGOs, and government agencies to standardize production protocols. Additionally, marketing campaigns must emphasize environmental value propositions, utilizing eco-labeling to build consumer trust and educate the community on sustainable consumption habits. Investing in the development of a comprehensive omnichannel distribution network, particularly by enhancing the presence of green products on e-commerce platforms with transparent data, serves as a strategic solution to mitigate the accessibility barriers for green consumers in HCMC.

Finally, green financial management and strategic resource mobilization serve as the bedrock for actualizing sustainability initiatives and sustaining long-term competitiveness. Green financial management serves as the bedrock for realizing sustainability initiatives. Enterprises need to proactively leverage government support mechanisms, such as tax exemptions, preferential credit, or subsidies

for clean technologies. Cost optimization through digital transformation and investment in renewable energy not only mitigates environmental impacts but also enhances overall business performance. Furthermore, participation in green ecosystems allows firms to share investment risks and tap into partners' resources, securing the capital needed for technological innovation and expanding green distribution networks.

5.3. Policy recommendations

To foster a conducive environment for green retail transformation in HCMC, the following policy recommendations are proposed for government authorities and relevant regulatory bodies:

First, the government should establish a robust financial incentive framework to alleviate the capital burden on green retailers. Given that financial constraints remain a significant barrier, authorities should implement preferential credit policies, such as low-interest “green loans” and tax exemptions for enterprises investing in renewable energy, waste treatment systems, or digital transformation.

Second, there is an urgent need to standardize the “Green Labeling” system and enhance market transparency. The survey results highlighted that “Trust in Green Brands” is a key driver for consumers. Therefore, regulatory bodies should develop and enforce a national set of criteria for eco-labels that align with international standards.

Third, investment in green infrastructure and digital ecosystems must be prioritized to improve product accessibility. Since “Accessibility and Convenience” recorded the lowest performance score, the government should incentivize the development of green logistics and sustainable supply chains.

Acknowledgement

This research was fully funded by Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance under grant number 232/QĐ-UEF.

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