

Social Media's Impact on Green E-commerce in Vietnam: A Reciprocity Theory Perspective

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KEYWORDS

Green e-commerce,
sustainable digital
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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the research gap in explaining the socio-psychological mechanisms that translate environmental awareness into actual behavior within digital marketplaces. Drawing on the Reciprocity Theory specifically chosen to decode how users reciprocate positive online social influences with sustainable actions this research investigates social media's impact on green e-commerce in Vietnam. Analyzing data from 315 consumers using PLS-SEM, results indicate that social media significantly drives green purchase intentions. Crucially, sustainable consumption values and environmental responsibility act as key mediators, whereas green product knowledge shows no significant mediating effect. This novel contribution highlights that mere information is insufficient to motivate sustainable digital consumption when credibility is threatened by greenwashing. These findings offer practical implications for businesses aiming to leverage social media in promoting green e-commerce and building sustainable brands.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the strong development from the digital economics of Vietnam has created conditions for e-commerce and social networks to become two key elements shaping new consumer behavior. With more than 70% of the population using the internet and the majority of them having social media accounts, Vietnamese consumers – especially the younger generation – are increasingly inclined to access, exchange and decide to purchase information through digital platforms. In this context, environmental protection and sustainable consumption are gradually becoming a corporate relationship, which can realize the growing interest in green products. In the context

of this research, e-commerce is defined as the buying and selling of goods via digital platforms, while green products refer to environmentally friendly items that minimize negative ecological impacts throughout their lifecycle. Vietnamese consumers especially Gen Z and Millennials are increasingly evaluating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria before making digital purchases.

However, the gap between awareness and behavior remains a major obstacle in converting green purchasing intentions into action. Although many people support environmental values, they still choose popular products over benefits, prices, or lack of reliable information (Joshi & Rahman, 2019). This raises the question: can social media – as a two-way interactive communication

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platform – act as an ethical catalyst to help bridge this gap?

Previous research has noted that social media not only provide information but also determine social norms and create community motivations to distribute green consumption behavior (Nurrahma & Sugiarto, 2026; Rahmadani et al., 2026). However, Research is still lacking in this area solutions to identify their socio-psychological methods behind this transformation. In this context, the Reciprocity Theory is selected as the study's theoretical underpinning, with the intention of determine how users respond to the positive social influences from informational social media through sustainable consumption behavior.

According to Reciprocity Theory (Gouldner, 1960), people tend to reciprocate positive behaviors or values that they receive from others or from their community. When exposed to inspiring environmental content, consumers develop a sense of moral responsibility – thereby forming a desire to “return” the value through specific behaviors such as choosing green products, sharing sustainability messages, or giving to others who also take action (Khandai et al., 2025). This response mechanism is particularly suitable to describe social media's function as a social space that stimulates responsible consumer behavior tips.

From that perspective, this study focuses on analyzing social media activities on green shopping intentions of Vietnamese consumers on e-commerce platforms. The research model produces three mediating variables: green product knowledge, sustainable consumption values, and environmental responsibility capacity - as channels reflecting the social response process leading to green consumption behavior.

Information for the survey was obtained from Ho Chi Minh City. This city was specifically selected because it is Vietnam's largest economic hub and the leading center for digital adoption. It represents a dynamic, diverse consumer base with the highest internet penetration and e-commerce usage in the country, making its population highly representative for investigating sustainable digital consumption trends. By combining social action theory. By combining social action theory with the digital consumer context in Vietnam, the study hopes to provide more empirical evidence, while also providing policy and communication functions for businesses aiming for sustainable development.

2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

2.1. Reciprocity Theory

Reciprocity Theory, an important concept in social psychology, emphasizes that individuals tend to respond to positive behaviors from others with corresponding positive actions. This “give and take” principle not only regulates personal relationships in society but also shapes

behavioral motivation in collective and community contexts (Gouldner, 1960). In the context of digital media, especially social media, this theory helps explain how users interact and respond to social content, such as environmental campaigns, calls for green products, or sharing responsible consumption experiences. When exposed to these messages, individuals not only receive information but also experience an informal form of social commitment – that they should act in a positive way in response to what they have received (Nurrahma & Sugiarto, 2026).

Despite the abundance of research on green consumerism in leading international journals, the existing literature remains predominantly descriptive and often assumes a direct linear path from environmental awareness to purchase. A critical research gap exists in understanding the socio-psychological mechanisms that translate social media exposure into actual behavior in developing e-commerce markets. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of sustainable consumption values and environmental responsibility, but they rarely integrate these with the green product knowledge required to overcome modern digital challenges like consumer skepticism and “greenwashing” (Khandai et al., 2025). This study addresses this gap by utilizing the Reciprocity Theory to interlink these core constructs, distinguishing itself from prior models that rely solely on cognitive or utilitarian frameworks.

When researching environmentally conscious customer behavior, the idea of reciprocity is especially valuable. Consumers who receive information, inspiration, and support from social media communities tend to reciprocate by choosing purchase behaviors that are consistent with the messages they have been exposed to. In other words, green consumer behavior is now a formula for “giving back” to the community and the environment (Zheng et al., 2021). Furthermore, taking action is not only about reciprocating specific content, but also about maintaining social status in the community – a behavior that is deeply rooted in personal environmental responsibility (Duong et al., 2026).

Another important factor that prior research often overlooks is the moderating condition of trust versus knowledge. When consumers acquire sufficient green product knowledge, they can confidently navigate through the noise of green advertising. Conversely, if the content is suspected of being “greenwashed,” the reciprocal response will weaken, being replaced by skepticism and information avoidance (Khandai et al., 2025). In summary, Reciprocity Theory provides a robust theoretical framework to explain why social media – through information sharing, emotional arousal, and social norm building – can strongly influence green consumer intentions.

2.2. Hypothesis development and proposed model

In the digital age, social media is no longer just a platform for exchanging information, but it also plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. In this research model, social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with environmental information and communities. Meanwhile, green purchase intention is defined as the consumer's willingness and probability to buy eco-friendly products via these digital platforms. According to Reciprocity Theory, individuals tend to act to “give back” the positive values they receive from the community. When consumers are exposed to environmental protection content such as articles promoting green consumption behavior or videos sharing sustainable shopping experiences, they feel inspired and socially motivated to respond to the message through corresponding behavior. Rahmadani et al. (2026) found that social media marketing combined with cognitive variables strongly influences consumers' willingness to buy eco-friendly products. Similarly, Nurrahma & Sugiarto (2026) demonstrated that social media shapes green purchasing behavior among younger generations on digital platforms through value transmission.

H1a: Social media activity has a positive impact on green purchase intention on e-commerce platforms.

In the digital environment, the reciprocity mechanism also manifests through knowledge acquisition. Green product knowledge represents consumers' understanding and awareness of the environmentally friendly attributes and ecological impacts of products. When consumers are exposed to valuable information from social media sources, they often respond by absorbing and retaining this knowledge as a form of social engagement. According to Ismail et al. (2026), social media serves as a foundational driver that strengthens consumers' understanding of environmentally friendly products, thereby enhancing their ability to differentiate between “true green” and “greenwashed” products. Wang et al. (2019) also showed that social media content has the potential to significantly improve product knowledge and reduce perceived risks.

H1b: Social media activity has a positive impact on consumer knowledge of green products.

Sustainable consumption values represent the extent to which individuals place social responsibility, environmental ethics, and long-term considerations at the core of their consumer behavior. Applied Reciprocity Theory suggests that when these values are internalized, individuals will “give back” to society by maintaining consumer behaviors consistent with these principles despite potential barriers like higher prices. Haws et al. (2014) verified that pro-environmental values are one of the strongest predictors of sustainable consumer behavior. Additionally, Joshi & Rahman (2019) suggested that individuals with ethical value orientations will maintain sustainable behavior longer than those who respond only to emotional impulse.

H2: Sustainable consumption values have a positive

impact on green purchase intention in the e-commerce environment.

While current knowledge does not perfectly guarantee behavior, in a sustainable consumption context, green product knowledge plays a crucial role as a prerequisite. When customers have sufficient information to evaluate products, they feel more confident and proactive in choosing products that meet sustainability standards. Wang et al. (2019) found that an explicit understanding of a product's environmental advantages enhances green trust as well as the intention to buy. Furthermore, Ismail et al. (2026) emphasized that this knowledge facilitates responsible consumer behavior in e-commerce, especially under conditions where consumers cannot directly experience the physical product.

H3: Green product knowledge has a positive impact on green purchase intention on e-commerce platforms.

Environmental responsibility refers to an individual's intrinsic sense of duty to protect the ecosystem and mitigate environmental harm. Viewing this through the lens of Reciprocity Theory, when consumers feel a strong moral obligation to nature and their community, they are driven to reciprocate by engaging in pro-environmental actions. In the context of online shopping, this motivation acts as a powerful catalyst. According to Duong et al. (2026), consumers with high perceived environmental responsibility are more likely to translate their eco-friendly attitudes into actual purchase intentions. Zheng et al. (2021) further supported that viewing green consumption as a civic duty directly bridges the attitude-intention-behavior gap.

H4: Environmental responsibility motivation has a positive impact on green purchase intention on e-commerce platforms.

Figure 1 depicts the suggested research paradigm based on the aforementioned hypotheses:

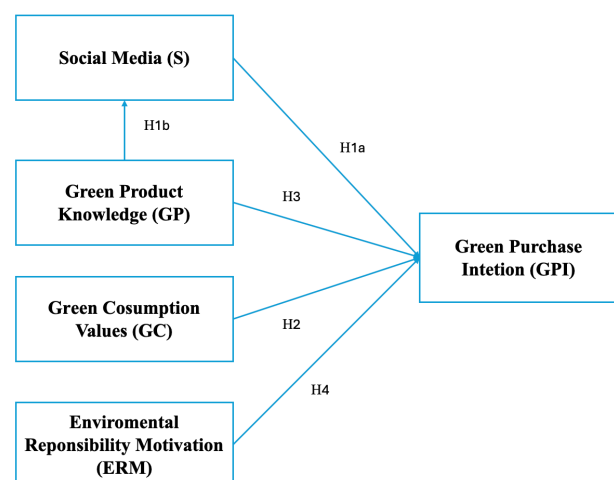


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3. Methods of research

3.1. Data gathering and sampling

Ho Chi Minh City is the city was selected as the research location due to its status as the leading socio-economic center of Vietnam, with a highly diverse population – both geographically and culturally – drawn from different regions across the country. This demographic diversity permits the gathering of information reflecting a wide range of consumer behaviors and supports the representativeness of the sample. With its dynamic urban environment and demographic diversity, the city is often considered a typical location for studies related to consumer behavior and marketing in Vietnam. A purposive sampling method was accustomed to ensure that information gathered from participants were relevant to this research objectives. The questionnaire was distributed directly to the participants, accompanied by a concise description of the goal of the survey. Prior to completing in Participants in the survey received a brief description of the idea of green products and specific examples to ensure common understanding. The target sample consisted of university students and office workers. Although these two groups exhibit distinct characteristics regarding income and lifestyle, they were jointly selected because they collectively represent the core user base of e-commerce platforms in Vietnam (predominantly Gen Z and Millennials). Students represent the emerging, highly socially conscious consumer base, while office workers represent the active consumer segment with independent purchasing power. Together, they comprehensively capture the target demographic necessary for evaluating digital green marketing. To encourage honest responses and minimize bias, there were no right or incorrect responses, participants were told, and their personal opinions were important. From mid-March to late April 2025, 421 questionnaires in all were delivered, yielding 363 results. After checking for missing answers, 315 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. In quantitative research. Any incomplete responses with missing values were handled using the listwise deletion method. While the purposive sampling method and the predominance of young consumers (students and young professionals) in the sample may limit broad generalizability, this demographic was intentionally targeted. In Vietnam, Gen Z and Millennials are the most active cohorts on both social media and e-commerce platforms, making them the most relevant population for investigating sustainable digital consumption behaviors According to Hair et al. (2019), the observed variables in the model indicate that the sample size should be at least ten times the number of participants meaning that a minimum of 270 respondents were required for the

27 observed variables in this study. Additionally, Hair et al. (2019) suggested that a sample size of 150 is sufficient to achieve 80% statistical power at the 0.05 significance level when detecting medium effect sizes. Accordingly, the final sample of 315 was considered both sufficient and statistically reliable for further examination.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic details

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Man	205	65.3%
Women	108	34.7%
Age group		
18–22 years old	194	61.6%
23–25 years old	78	24.8%
26 years and older	43	13.7%
Education level		
Undergraduate	141	44.8%
Postgraduate	124	39.4%
Doctoral	50	15.9%
Monthly household income		
Under 8,000,000 VND/month	70	22.2%
8,000,000 – 15,000,000 VND/month	116	36.8%
15,000,000 – 22,000,000 VND/month	64	20.3 %
Over 22,000,000 VND/month	65	20.6 %
Social media experience		
1–3 years	78	24.8 %
4–7 years old	160	50.8 %
Over 8 years	77	24.4 %
Use social media daily		
1–3 hours/day	196	62.3 %
4–7 hours/day	100	31.7 %
Over 8 hours/day	19	6%

3.2. Measurement scale

To assess the influence of factors such as social media involvement, Motivation for environmental responsibility, awareness of green products, and sustainable consumption principles in green purchasing intention on online e-commerce platforms, this study constructed a set of scales based on the Reciprocity Theory. The constructs were adapted from well-established international research to guarantee legitimacy and dependability. The survey tool was structured into two main parts: the first part gathered demographic data, such as gender, age, career, and degree of education; the second portion concentrated on the core research constructs namely, green product expertise, perceived social media impact, and

ideals of environmentally conscious consumption, environmental responsibility motivation, and green purchase intention on online e-commerce platforms. To ensure cultural and behavioral relevance in the context of Vietnamese consumers, all items in the scale were reviewed and refined after consultation with marketing and consumer behavior experts. Specifically, social media influence was assessed using seven questions modified from Rahmadani et al. (2026). Green consumer values were assessed using four items based on the work of Haws et al. (2014), reflecting personal environmental responsibility in consumer behavior. Six items were used to gauge knowledge of green products derived from Gupta and Ogden (2009), focusing on consumers' knowledge and comprehension of the attributes of environmentally sustainable products. Environmental responsibility motivation included five items adapted from Zhang et al. (2021), capturing individuals' sense of responsibility in making conscious consumption choices. Finally, green purchase intention on online e-commerce platforms was measured using five items inspired by Biswas and Roy (2015), assessing consumers' willingness and tendency to make future purchases of eco-friendly goods. To ensure semantic equivalence and cultural appropriateness, the original English scales were translated into Vietnamese and then back-translated into English by bilingual academic experts. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with

30 respondents to evaluate the clarity and logical flow of the questionnaire. Minor modifications in wording were made based on their feedback. A Likert scale with five points, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 signifying "strongly agree," was employed in order to score each item. Table 2 displays the complete list of scale elements.

3.3. Analyzing and processing data

When processing data for the first time, the purpose of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was to preliminarily validate the scales. EFA is used to identify latent structures among observed variables, which is particularly relevant when measurement items are adapted from multiple previous academic sources. This technique allows in order to evaluate convergent validity and aid in the elimination of poorly performing items, thereby enhancing the reliability and precision of subsequent analyses. The application of EFA is necessary not only to validate the measurement instruments but also to confirm their suitability and relevance with relation to Vietnamese customers. Following EFA, the study tested the theoretical framework using PLS-SEM stands for partial least squares structural equation modeling. In contrast to CB-SEM, PLS-SEM does not need rigorous multivariate normality assumptions and is well suited to intricate models with several observable and latent

Table 2. Description of variables and measurement scales

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's α	rho_A	CR	AVE	VIF
Social Media (S)	S1	0.756	0.801	0.802	0.871	0.626	1.436
	S2	0.823					1.813
	S3	0.818					1.945
	S7	0.768					1.589
Green Product Knowledge (GP)	GP1	0.812	0.719	0.758	0.825	0.544	1.670
	GP2	0.600					1.242
	GP3	0.844					1.789
	GP4	0.668					1.259
Green Consumption Value (GC)	GC1	0.635	0.717	0.725	0.826	0.546	1.202
	GC2	0.818					1.624
	GC3	0.753					1.382
	GC5	0.734					1.397
Environmental Responsibility Motivation (ERM)	DE1	0.812	0.792	0.803	0.878	0.705	1.670
	DE2	0.860					1.763
	DE3	0.849					1.600
Green Purchase Intention (GPI)	GPI1	0.754	0.825	0.827	0.880	0.589	1.638
	GPI2	0.798					1.819
	GPI3	0.709					1.483
	GPI4	0.782					1.889
	GPI5	0.788					1.814

variables. This approach is especially beneficial while doing exploratory research and when theoretical models are still under development or lack extensive empirical validation (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM was used for this investigation because of its capacity to manage complex model structures, including multiple constructs and related pathways. Furthermore, it permits the evaluation of measurement and structural models at the same time, offering a thorough understanding of how constructs such as social media influence, environmental responsibility, and green product knowledge influence consumers' intention to purchase environmentally friendly products. Given these strengths, PLS-SEM is considered the most appropriate analytical technique to achieve the goals of the study and address the theoretical structure put out in this study.

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Bias and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

We first evaluated Common Method Bias (CMB) using a single-factor test. Common method bias did not exist, since the study revealed that the whole variance accounted for by a single component was below the 50% significance threshold significantly affect the data set. This result supported the continuation of subsequent statistical analyses. The scale's latent structure was subsequently investigated using exploratory factor analysis, or EFA. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was employed in the analysis, which maximized the variance among factors. A five-factor solution was validated by the EFA results, consistent with the conceptual model. However, some items were eliminated to improve build clarity because of weak loadings or cross-loadings measurement accuracy. Specifically, item S6 (from the A factor loading of less than 0.40 led to the elimination of the Social Media construct. Additionally, five other items were eliminated due to poor convergence or cross-loading issues: Two items from Social Media (S4 and S5), two from Environmental Responsibility Motivation (DE4 and DE5), and one from Green Consumption Values (GC6). After model refinement, five main factors remained, together explaining 58.869% of the total variance, indicating a solid underlying factor structure and ready for further analysis using the measurement model.

4.2. Evaluation of measurement model

PLS-SEM was used to analyze the measurement model in order to determine the validity and reliability of the latent constructs. Two aspects of reliability were considered: the reliability both the internal consistency

and the signs of the scales. All retained items had factor loadings greater than 0.50, ranging from 0.600 to 0.860. According to Factor loadings greater than 0.60 are deemed appropriate in exploratory research, according to Hair et al. 2019, suggesting that the items accurately reflect their corresponding constructs. Composite Reliability (CR), ρ_A , and Cronbach's Alpha were used to evaluate internal consistency. Every indication surpassed the suggested cutoff point of 0.70, confirming that the scales were internally consistent (Hair et al., 2019). Notably, ρ_A was used because of its higher accuracy in estimating reliability compared to Cronbach's Alpha (Hair et al. 2019). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to confirm the constructs' convergent validity. The majority of the constructions were higher than the AVE's minimal value of 0.50, as recommended by Henseler et al., 2015. One exception was the Green Consumption Value construct, which initially fell below the threshold. Therefore, item GC4 (loading = 0.558) was removed to improve convergent validity. To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio was used as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015) rather than the conventional Fornell-Larcker criteria. Every HTMT score was less than 0.85, indicating that the constructs were distinct and measured appropriately (see Table 3 for details). Prior to testing the structural model, potential multicollinearity issues among the independent variables were addressed use the VIF, or variance inflation factor. VIF values less than three signify no substantial multicollinearity, according Hair et al. (2019) concerns. All VIF values in this study met this criterion, ensuring the robustness of the subsequent structural analysis. The detailed Table 4 presents the findings from these evaluations.

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment (HTMT ratio)

	DE	GC	GPI	GP	S
DE					
GC	0.299				
GPI	0.438	0.729			
GP	0.215	0.407	0.345		
S	0.267	0.305	0.368	0.349	

4.3. Structural model approach

4.3.1. Structural model analysis

To assess the explanatory power and then examine the connections between the latent variables in the structural model, a 5,000-iteration bootstrap resampling process was employed. The analysis showed that R^2 or the coefficient of determination for Green Purchase Intention (GPI) was 0.389, while the R^2 for Green

Table 4. Assessment of Measurement Models

Build	Load	Cronbach's α	rho_a	CR	AVE	VIF
Social Media (S)	S1	0.756	0.801	0.802	0.871	1.436
	S2	0.823				1.813
	S3	0.818				1.945
	S7	0.768				1.589
Green Product Knowledge (GP)	GP1	0.812	0.719	0.758	0.825	1.670
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	DE2	0.860				1.763
	DE3	0.849				1.600
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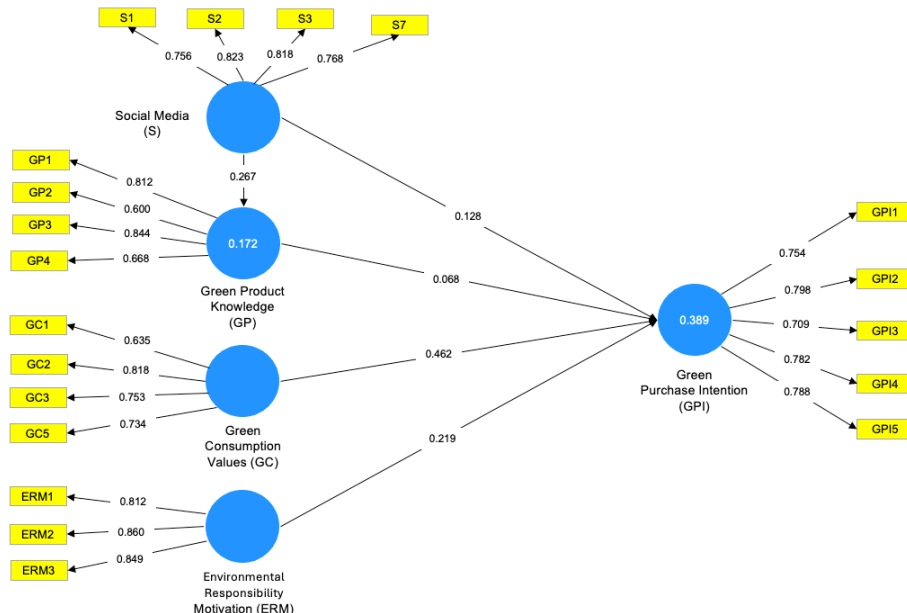


Figure 2. Structural model analysis results

Product Knowledge (GP) was 0.172. These numbers show that the model's explanatory power ranges from modest to strong for the endogenous constructs, with GPI being more strongly influenced by the predictors than GP. According to conventional standards in quantitative research, R^2 values are typically interpreted

according to the following criteria: values below 0.10 are weak, values around 0.13 are moderate, and values over 0.26 are substantial. Based on these criteria, the present model demonstrates satisfactory predictive power, especially for environmentally conscious consumer purchasing behavior the focus of this study.

Additionally, the overall model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The SRMR value for the model was 0.065, which is well below the conservative threshold of 0.08 recommended by Hair et al. (2019), indicating a satisfactory model fit. The model's predictive relevance (Q^2) was evaluated by means of cross-validation techniques. The Q^2 value for GPI was 0.365 and for GP was 0.060 both larger than zero, indicating the model's adequate predictive accuracy in explaining consumer behavior in the studied context. These results strengthen the validity of the model and offer more evidence in favor of the hypothesized relationships.

Table 5. R^2 and Q^2 values of endogenous constructs

Endogenous variables	R^2 (R squared)	Q^2 (Q squared)
Green Purchase Intention (GPI)	0.389	0.365
Green Product Knowledge (GP)	0.172	0.060

4.3.2. Hypothesis testing

Four of the five hypotheses were supported, according to the hypothesis testing findings (Table 6) with statistically significant effects. Specifically, Social Media Influence ($t = 2.509$; $p < 0.05$), Green Consumer Values ($t = 10.459$; $p < 0.001$), and Environmental Responsibility Motivation ($t = 5.109$; $p < 0.001$) were all found to have positive and significant effects on Green Purchase Intention (GPI). These results demonstrate how crucial these three elements are in forming consumers' environmentally conscious purchasing behavior.

Furthermore, social media was also demonstrated to significantly improve Green Product Knowledge (GP) ($t = 5.597$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that digital platforms are effective communication channels to

enhance consumer awareness of ecologically friendly goods.

On the other hand, the theory that Green Product Knowledge directly influences Green Purchase Intention was not supported, as the t -value (1.488; $p > 0.10$) did not reach the threshold for statistical significance. This result suggests that in the current research context, product knowledge alone may not be sufficient to influence behavioral intention possibly due to consumer skepticism or an inability to convert knowledge into actionable behavior.

The effect sizes (f^2) were also examined to determine the substantive impact of each predictor. According to Hair et al. (2019), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. As shown in Table 6, Green Consumption Value exhibits a medium-to-large effect on GPI ($f^2 = 0.258$), while the other supported paths show small but meaningful effect sizes.

4.3.3. Mediation Analysis

To determine if social media and green purchase intention are mediated by green product knowledge, a mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The analysis showed that social media's direct impact on consumers' intentions to make green purchases remained statistically significant ($t = 2.509$; $p = 0.010$), confirming the reliability of this relationship.

However, the indirect effect through the mediating variable green product knowledge was not statistically significant ($t = 1.342$; $p = 0.181$). This suggests that in the current model, green product knowledge does not significantly act as a mediator between social media and environmentally conscious consumer behavior.

This finding implies that while social media can enhance consumer awareness of green products, such

Table 6. Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Path	Original sample (O)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P value	Effect Size (f^2)	Result
H1a	Social Media (S) → GPI	0.128	2.509	0.010	0.032	Supported
H1b	Social Media (S) → GP	0.267	5.597	0.000	0.076	Supported
H2	Green consumption value (GC) → GPI	0.462	10.459	0.000	0.258	Supported
H3	Green Product Knowledge (GP) → GPI	0.068	1.488	0.140	0.011	Not supported
H4	Environmental Responsibility Motivation (ERM) → GPI	0.219	5.109	0.000	0.064	Supported

Table 7. The mediation analysis's findings

Path	Original sample (O)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P value	Result
Social Media (S) → Green Purchase Intention (GPI)	0.128	2.509	0.010	Supported
Social Media (S) → Green Product Knowledge (GP) → GPI	0.019	1.342	0.181	Not Supported

awareness does not necessarily translate into purchase behavior unless supported by additional factors such as trust, personal motivation, or real-life experience. Table 7 displays the mediation analysis's specific findings.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigates social media's function in influencing environmentally conscious consumption behavior among young consumers in Vietnam, especially in light of quickly growing e-commerce platforms. The findings show that social media has a statistically significant and favorable effect on the propensity to make green purchases on online e-commerce platforms in Vietnam, highlighting its function as a powerful digital tool to promote sustainable consumption. This aligns with earlier studies that highlights that through mechanisms such as social interaction, peer review, and viral information sharing, social media can profoundly shape consumers' decision-making processes (Khandai et al., 2025). Notably, users are often influenced by comments, recommendations, and shared experiences from peers or online communities that share similar values. Seminal works such as Nurrahma & Sugiarto (2026) in the field of digital platforms and Rahmadani et al. (2026) in the context of eco-friendly products have also demonstrated that social media can enhance both awareness and socially responsible consumption behavior.

However, a unique finding of this study is that green product knowledge does not act as a mediator between social media influence and green purchase intention on e-commerce platforms. Although product information is widely disseminated through social platforms, it does not appear to be sufficient to drive behavioral changes. This finding is in contrast to previous studies such as Duong et al. (2026) and Ismail et al. (2026), which emphasized the important role of knowledge in promoting green behavior. To analyze this academically, it is crucial to consider the role of perceived authenticity and trust in the digital space. Driven by social media algorithms, consumers are frequently exposed to an overwhelming number of environmental claims, leading to cognitive overload. In this context, raw product knowledge alone cannot stimulate behavior unless it is validated by absolute trust. A plausible explanation lies in the pervasive issue of greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). When companies falsely advertise their products as sustainable, it fosters profound skepticism. Furthermore, in the context of rising eco-anxiety where young consumers feel increasingly stressed about climate change and environmental degradation, they actively seek credible reassurance rather than just product specifications. Therefore, social proof manifested through peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and community

consensus becomes a stronger psychological catalyst than objective knowledge. As Wang et al. (2019) warn, when green advertising lacks transparency, it undermines trust and paralyzes sustainable behavior, regardless of the consumer's level of awareness.

In contrast, personal value-based factors, specifically green consumer values and environmental responsibility motivation, were found to have a strong and consistent impact on green purchase intentions. As noted by Haws et al. (2014), people with strong environmental values typically favor eco-friendly products. Similarly, Joshi & Rahman (2019) highlighted that psychological motivation is a core determinant of sustainable usage. The current findings reinforce that an intrinsic sense of environmental responsibility is the key driver for adopting a sustainable digital lifestyle. In conclusion, to effectively bridge the gap between awareness and action, it is imperative to combine transparent communication, strict regulation of green marketing, and the cultivation of authentic trust at the community level.

6. Research implications

6.1. Theoretical meaning

This study provides important theoretical contributions to the expanding corpus of knowledge on sustainable marketing, especially in the digital context. While prior research has mostly addressed psychological factors or behavior-attitude disparity in green consumption (Joshi & Rahman, 2019), factors such as risk perception, environmental concerns, and guilt in green purchase decisions, this study adopts a novel and distinctive perspective. Specifically, the study applies the Reciprocity Theory as a central theoretical lens to explore environmentally responsible customer behavior in relation to new online e-commerce platforms. Here's a pioneering attempt to integrate socio-behavioral theory with green marketing research in the digital environment. The study does more than just show how social media influences consumers' green purchase intentions on online e-commerce platforms, but also highlights its informational function in spreading awareness of newly launched sustainable products. Today's consumers use social media platforms not just to search and compare information, but in addition to evaluate and share their experiences, thereby fostering a community of environmentally conscious consumers. These interactions play an important role in spreading sustainable values and promoting collective awareness. In addition, the findings show that personal green consumer values strongly influence behavior. Consumers with a high environmental orientation tend to favor environmentally friendly products and reject environmentally harmful alternatives as a form of social responsibility addressing worldwide issues

like climate change, pollution, and resource depletion. Their motivation is driven not only by personal beliefs but also by a desire to make a broader social impact. A notable finding is that there is no mediating role for the connection between the influence of social media and the intention to make green purchases and green product knowledge on online e-commerce platforms. In contrast to evidence from developed markets (Ismail et al., 2026; Duong et al., 2026), where cognition is the main driver of behavior, this study shows that knowledge alone may not translate into action without the support of trust, emotion, or lived experience. This reflects the reality in many developing economies, where consumer behavior is more influenced by social cues, brand reputation, and community reputation than purely cognitive factors. According to the authors, to date, there have been few studies that simultaneously integrate variables such as social media, green consumer values, product knowledge, and environmental responsibility into a unified theoretical model in relation to online shopping. Thus, in Vietnam and other developing nations, this study contributes to closing the theoretical gap and establishing a new line of inquiry for sustainable marketing.

6.2. Practical implications

Apart from the theoretical contributions, this research offers specific, actionable recommendations for three key stakeholders operating within the sustainable digital consumption ecosystem: e-commerce platforms, green businesses, and policymakers.

First, for e-commerce platforms: Social media algorithms and platform interfaces must be optimized to facilitate trust rather than just displaying information. E-commerce platforms should introduce verified "green filters" and standardized "eco-labels" to help consumers easily identify genuinely sustainable products without cognitive fatigue. Furthermore, integrating user-generated social proof such as verified green buyer badges or highlighting transparent peer reviews can effectively mitigate consumer skepticism caused by greenwashing.

Second, for green businesses: Social media should be considered a strategic platform for building a sustainable brand through perceived authenticity. Effectively communicating green values through short videos or inspirational stories can strengthen brand recognition. Real-life examples from brands such as Patagonia, IKEA, and The Body Shop demonstrate the power of visual and thematic consistency linked to real-world practices. Importantly, to bridge the trust gap, businesses must partner with credible environmental KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) and micro-influencers. These influencers can translate complex green knowledge into relatable, authentic storytelling, thereby alleviating eco-anxiety and

leveraging social proof to drive purchases. Investing in online community management to foster a loyal green consumer base is also highly recommended.

Third, for policymakers: Maintaining transparency and honesty in digital communication is essential to avoid market failure due to consumer skepticism. Policymakers need to establish and enforce strict regulations against digital greenwashing. Developing standardized, government-backed digital eco-labels specifically tailored for e-commerce platforms will protect consumers from deceptive marketing, hold businesses accountable, and provide a trusted macro-environment for sustainable economic growth. Finally, businesses and policymakers alike should utilize social media analytics to continuously track consumer sentiment and tailor sustainability initiatives to the evolving expectations of the digital market.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

Despite the fact that this research has generated important findings and made meaningful contributions to the understanding of environmentally friendly purchasing practices in the framework of e-commerce, there are still some limitations. These limitations provide valuable opportunities for future research to improve green marketing's theoretical advancement and real-world applicability.

First, the study focused only on purchase intentions rather than measuring actual purchase behavior. This raises the classic problem of the gap between attitude and conduct, which is a well-known phenomenon in the literature. Future research is encouraged to integrate both intentions and actual behavior to gain a deeper understanding of how environmental awareness translates into real-world consumer actions in digital marketplaces.

Second, the sample in this study consisted primarily of college students a demographic that, while receptive to emerging consumer trends, may have limited purchasing power. This potentially reduces the findings' applicability to a larger population. Future research should expand the participant base to include working professionals, higher-income earners, and older consumers, allowing for a more comprehensive representation of green consumer behavior across socioeconomic strata.

Third, the current model incorporates only one mediating variable green product knowledge which did not yield statistically significant results. This suggests the need to further explore mediating factors such as environmental attitudes, perceived social responsibility, or subjective norms, which have shown significant mediating effects in other contexts.

Fourth, the model lacks moderator variables that could clarify under what conditions the observed relationships occur. Factors such as trust in green

brands, perceived product benefits, or prior green consumption experience may significantly influence the strength of the relationship between exposure to social media and environmentally friendly purchasing practices on online e-commerce platforms. Including these moderators could improve both the explanatory power and practical relevance of future models.

Finally, this study takes a general approach to eco-friendly products without distinguishing between specific product categories. In fact, consumer behavior can vary significantly across different sectors, such as sustainable fashion, organic cosmetics, energy-efficient electronics, or eco-friendly home goods. Future research should conduct category-specific analyses to explore the unique motivations, barriers, and psychological factors associated with each market segment. Additionally, exploring the intersection of AI-driven green marketing and algorithmic transparency presents a promising avenue to understand how social commerce sustainability shapes ESG consumer behavior.

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