

Decoding the Green Consumer: A Deep Dive into the Dynamics of Sustainable Choices

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Abstract

This research illuminates the complex web of factors that shape sustainable consumer behavior, with a focus on the roles of General Prosocial Attitudes (GPA), Green Consumption Values (GCV), Receptivity to Green Communication (RGC), and Social Value (SV) in steering buying behavior. The objective is to unravel the direct and indirect influences of these elements on consumer preferences for eco-friendly products. Employing a survey methodology and structural equation modeling analysis, data were collected from a sample of 200 respondents. The results underscore the significant direct impacts of GPA on GCV, RGC, and SV. Furthermore, GCV and RGC were found to directly steer buying behavior. A key highlight of the study is the identification of the mediating role of GCV and RGC in the nexus between GPA and purchasing behavior. SV emerges as a pivotal player, directly influencing buying behavior and acting as a bridge between GPA and GCV.

Keywords

Sustainable consumer behavior, prosocial attitudes, green consumption values, social value.

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Introduction

The quest for sustainable consumer behavior has become a paramount concern in today's society, driven by the pressing need to address environmental challenges (Kayani et al., 2023). This research delves into the intricate dynamics of consumer behavior within the context of sustainability, aiming to illuminate the pathways through which individuals' attitudes and values influence their buying decisions. Specifically, our study focuses on the roles of general prosocial attitudes, green consumption values, receptivity to green communication, and social value in shaping consumer choices towards eco-friendly products.

Consumer behavior is not simply a matter of personal preference; it is deeply intertwined with broader social and environmental considerations (White et al., 2019). Understanding how individuals' general prosocial attitudes, such as the desire to aid others and prioritize collective welfare, translate into green consumption values is essential. These values reflect the importance individuals place on environmentally friendly practices in their purchasing decisions. Additionally, receptivity to green communication plays a central role, as it determines how consumers respond to messages advocating for environmental causes (Bailey et al., 2016). Finally, social value, or perceived positive impression and social acceptance gained from purchasing green products, influences consumers' choices and behaviors (Sangroya and Nayak, 2017).

Through our research, our objective is to uncover the direct and indirect effects of these factors on purchasing behavior, shedding light on the complex web of influences that guide sustainable consumer choices. By examining these interrelated factors, we seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of sustainable consumption patterns and provide actionable insights for businesses and policy makers.

Although previous research has explored various aspects of sustainable consumer behavior, there remains a significant gap in understanding the intricate relationships among general prosocial attitudes, green consumption values, receptivity to green communication, social value, and their combined impact on

buying behavior. This study addresses this gap by providing a broad analysis of these factors and their interplay in the context of sustainable consumption.

One key novelty of our research lies in the examination of the mediating role of green consumption values and the receptivity to green communication between general prosocial attitudes and buying behavior. By elucidating these indirect pathways, we aim to offer a nuanced understanding of how individuals' broader social values translate into specific eco-friendly purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, our study contributes to the existing literature by investigating the role of social value as both a direct and indirect influence of buying behavior. We explore how consumers' perceptions of social approval and positive social impressions from purchasing green products shape their eco-conscious choices. This adds a new dimension to understanding of sustainable consumer behavior, particularly in the context of social norms and identity.

1. Literature review – hypotheses development

1.1 General Prosocial Attitudes and Green Consumption Values, Receptivity to Green Communication, and Social Value

The research conducted by DoPaco et al. (2018) elucidates the complex interplay between prosocial attitudes, characterized by empathy, social concern and a positive contribution inclination, and green consumption behavior. The study reveals that individuals with pronounced prosocial attitudes are more likely to exhibit favorable GCV, prioritizing environmentally friendly choices, including sustainable products and practices. Research further underscores the positive influence of green values, an individual's commitment to environmental sustainability, and alignment with eco-friendly principles, on actual green buying behavior.

Consumers who endorse strong green values are more inclined towards sustainable purchasing decisions, favoring products and services with minimal environmental impact (Kaufmann et al., 2012). Sheng et al. (2023) suggested that people with prosocial attitudes and robust green values are receptive to green communication, including messages related to environmental benefits, eco-labels, and sustainability claims. The perception of such communication as credible and value-aligned positively sways their purchasing decisions. Complementing this, a systematic review of the literature by Barbu et al. (2022) identifies determinants that influence green purchase behavior, emphasizing the importance of understanding these factors to promote sustainable consumption.

Furthermore, Leal Filho et al. (2022) discuss the role of social value in community-based sustainability projects, highlighting the broader implications of values in shaping behavior, albeit not directly tied to green consumption. On the basis of these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed: *Hypothesis 1. GPA significantly influences GCV, RGC, and SV.*

1.2 Green Consumption Values and Receptivity to Green Communication in Buying Behavior

The influence of GCV and RGC on BB is a complex interplay of factors. Woo and Kim (2019) found that consumers' understanding of ecoinnovation, including GCV and RGC, influences their buying behavior. This understanding is further contextualized by Druică et al. (2022), who found that green consumption is usually understood in the context of GCV and RGC, and that 70% of the variation in buying behavior is explained by a combination of direct and mediated influences.

The role of green marketing communication in shaping consumer behavior is highlighted by Correia et al. (2023), who revealed that consumers are attentive to green marketing communication, and that there is a strong correlation between this attention and green purchasing behavior. This suggests that RGC can significantly influence BB.

The influence of GCV on buying behavior is further supported by Jan et al. (2019), who applied the theory of planned behavior and value–attitude–behavior hierarchy model to examine the influence of green product consumption values on the green product buying attitude and green product purchase behavior. This indicates that GCV can shape consumer attitudes towards green products, which in turn influences their buying behavior.

Li et al. (2021) expanded on this finding that environmental values, including GCV, have an impact on how consumers respond to advertising and public relations stimuli. These responses influence perceptions of trust in green brands, attitudes toward green marketing communications, and support and purchase intentions, further reinforcing the indirect influence of GCV on BB.

Finally, a study by Tewari et al. (2022) found that receptivity to green communication, along with altruism, openness to change, and the three predictors of the theory of planned behavior (TPB), significantly affect consumers' purchase intention towards green clothing (Kumar et al., 2021). This suggests that RGC, in conjunction with other factors, can significantly influence BB. Therefore, we hypothesize the following. *Hypothesis 2. GCV and RGC significantly influence BB.*

1.3 Indirect Influence of General Prosocial Attitudes on Buying Behavior

The influence of GPA on BB through GCV, RGC, and SV is a multifaceted process that involves several interrelated factors.

DoPaco et al. (2018) found that GPA influences green buying behavior through GCV and receptivity to green advertising, laying the groundwork for understanding the indirect influence of GPA on BB. This is further supported by Sharma et al. (2022), who found that GPA have a direct influence on GCV, and that these green values positively influence green buying behavior and receptivity to green advertising.

Jain and Jha (2020) expanded on this by discussing the individual and situational predictors of green buying behavior, highlighting the role of GCV and receptivity to green advertising. This suggests that the indirect influence of GPA on BB is mediated by these factors.

Čapienė et al. (2022) added another dimension to this by finding that internal factors, such as environmental attitudes, values, personal norms, and perceived responsibility, have a positive direct effect on engagement with sustainable consumption. This indicates that these internal factors, which could be influenced by GPA, play a significant role in shaping BB.

Finally, Sanderson and McQuilkin (2017) found that Self-Transcendence is consistently positively related while Self-Enhancement, and within it particularly Power, is often negatively associated with behaviors that are perceived as prosocial. This suggests that the influence of GPA on BB could also be moderated by these personality traits. Therefore, we hypothesize the following. *Hypothesis 3. GPA indirectly influences BB through GCV, RGC, and SV.*

1.4 Indirect Influence of Social Value on Buying Behavior

Amin and Tarun (2021) found that SV has a significant effect on customers' green purchase intention through green trust, suggesting that SV can indirectly influence BB through the mediating role of green trust. This is further supported by Woo and Kim (2019), who applied the multidimensional construct of green perceived value (GPV) to the buying behavior of green food products. They found that GPV, which could be influenced by SV, improves understanding of consumer behavior intentions and explains the formation of the intention to buy green food products.

Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) studied the factors that affect the purchase decisions in India. They found that social values have a direct influence on GCV, indicating that SV can indirectly influence BB through its impact on GCV. Therefore, we hypothesize the following. *Hypothesis 4. SV indirectly influences BB through GCV.*

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Procedure, sampling, and measures

The necessary data for this study was collected through a survey. The survey consisted of questions designed to gather the data to validate the research hypotheses. It also included questions that familiarize participants with the subject of the research and identification queries intended to create a profile of the participants.

The survey designed to validate the research hypotheses was created using the Google Forms online platform. This platform provides a variety of features to construct questions and answer options in a way that is straightforward and comprehensible for participants. The survey was distributed digitally via an access link from January 15 to February 23, 2024. The sampling method selected for this study is non-probability, convenience sampling. At the conclusion of the survey period, a total of 200 valid responses were obtained.

2.2 Data Analysis

In this research, our main analytical tool was partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is a powerful multivariate analysis method that enables the concurrent analysis of multiple relationships among sets of observed variables. It is particularly apt for our study as it can manage intricate models with multiple mediators and can accommodate both formative and reflective constructs (Ringle et

al., 2022). We opted for PLS-SEM for a number of reasons. First, it is a component-based method that allows us to model intricate relationships between observed and latent variables. Second, PLS-SEM is resilient to deviations from normality, which makes it appropriate for our data. Third, it can manage small to medium sample sizes, which is common in social science research. We utilized SmartPLS version 4.0.9.6 for the implementation of PLS-SEM.

3. Results

Table no. 1 presents an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample population. The data are organized into three main categories: Age Group, Gender, and Education Level.

Table no. 1. The structure of the sample

Age Group	Frequency	Gender	Frequency	Education Level	Frequency
20-24	49.5%	Female	59.4%	High School	9.8%
25-29	13.0%	Male	40.6%	Bachelor's Degree	52.0%
30-34	10.4%			Master's Degree	27.5%
35-39	3.9%			Doctorate	10.7%
40+	23.1%				

Source: Authors

3.1 Evaluation of the PLS-SEM model

Table no. 2 highlights the reliability and validity of the constructs we have used, as indicated by their respective indicators. The loadings, which all exceed the 0.7 threshold as suggested by Sarstedt et al. (2021), denote the robustness of the correlation between the indicators and their corresponding constructs. This exceeding the threshold implies a reliable indicator.

The table also provides several measures of reliability and validity for each construct, including Cronbach's Alpha (α), rho_a, rho_c, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Cronbach's Alpha, rho_a, and rho_c are all reliability measures, with values above 0.7 (as suggested by Hair et al., 2024) indicating good reliability. All constructs in the table meet this criterion for α , rho_a, and rho_c, demonstrating their reliability.

AVE, on the other hand, measures the proportion of variance captured by the construct relative to the variance due to measurement error. A construct is considered to have good convergent validity if its AVE is 0.5 or higher, meaning that it accounts for more than half of its indicators' variance (Hair et al., 2022). All constructs in the table meet this criterion, indicating their good convergent validity.

Table no. 2. Indicators, construct description and reliability

Indicator	Construct	Loadings
GPA 1	<i>General prosocial attitudes</i> represent a person's inclination towards promoting the well-being of others. It emphasizes the importance of helping those in need, considering others' needs, and striving for the happiness and well-being of all individuals. (GPA) - ($\alpha = 0.888$; rho_a = 0.901; rho_c = 0.915; AVE = 0.642)	0.724
GPA 2		0.835
GPA 3		0.874
GPA 4		0.820
GPA 5		0.822
GPA 6		0.721
GRE 1	<i>Green consumption values</i> reflect an individual's commitment to environmental responsibility. It underscores the importance of making environmentally conscious decisions, from choosing eco-friendly products to being willing to endure inconvenience for more sustainable actions. (GCV) - ($\alpha = 0.888$; rho_a = 0.892; rho_c = 0.915; AVE = 0.643)	0.819
GRE 2		0.829
GRE 3		0.816
GRE 4		0.723
GRE 5		0.823
GRE_6		0.796
RGC 1	<i>Receptivity to green communication</i> denotes an individual's positive response to environmentally focused marketing. It encompasses the endorsement of brands that support environmental causes, the attention to and being influenced by green advertising messages, and the willingness to purchase products marketed as environmentally friendly. It also reflects a belief in the value and essential nature of green advertising. (RGC) - ($\alpha = 0.955$; rho_a = 0.957; rho_c = 0.962; AVE = 0.737)	0.789
RGC 2		0.890
RGC 3		0.821
RGC 4		0.910
RGC 5		0.914
RGC 6		0.856
RGC 7		0.859
RGC 8		0.821
RGC 9		0.859

BB 1	<i>Buying behavior</i> encapsulates an individual’s conscious efforts to make environmentally responsible purchasing decisions. This includes choosing energy-efficient products, avoiding excessive packaging, prioritizing products that minimize pollution, and switching brands for ecological reasons. It also involves advocating for the environment by influencing others’ purchasing habits and opting for recyclable or reusable products whenever possible.	0.672	
BB 2		0.785	
BB 3		0.804	
BB 4		0.833	
BB 5		0.820	
BB 6		0.840	
BB 7		0.697	
BB 8		0.753	
BB 9		(BB) - ($\alpha = 0.918$; $\rho_a = 0.929$; $\rho_c = 0.933$; AVE = 0.586)	0.813
BB 10		0.859	
SV 1	<i>Social Value</i> refers to the perceived social benefits of environmentally conscious behavior. It suggests that purchasing green products can enhance one’s social image, contribute to feelings of acceptance, and provide social approval.	0.821	
SV 2		0.900	
SV 3		0.915	
SV 4		0.898	
SV 5		(SV) - ($\alpha = 0.931$; $\rho_a = 0.935$; $\rho_c = 0.948$; AVE = 0.785)	0.892
Note: α = Cronbach’s Alpha; AVE—Average variance extracted			

Source: Authors

Table no. 3 provides an evaluation of the discriminant validity of the constructs, utilizing two key criteria: the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

The HTMT values, which are all below the 0.85 threshold as suggested by Hair et al. (2021), serve as a reliable indicator to distinguish between discriminant valid pairs of latent variables and those that are not. This suggests a good discriminant validity for all constructs.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion, on the other hand, requires that the square root of the average variance extracted by a construct surpasses the correlation between the construct and any other construct (Henseler et al., 2015). The diagonal values in the Fornell-Larcker criterion section of the table, which are greater than the off-diagonal values in the corresponding rows and columns, represent the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct. This indicates a good discriminant validity for all constructs.

Table no. 3. Discriminant validity assessment

Constructs	HTMT Ratio					Fornell–Larcker Criterion				
	BB	GCV	GPA	RGC	SV	BB	GCV	GPA	RGC	SV
BB						0.765				
GCV	0.771					0.700	0.802			
GPA	0.445	0.559				0.405	0.503	0.801		
RGC	0.685	0.734	0.542			0.646	0.681	0.509	0.859	
SV	0.482	0.387	0.319	0.486		0.450	0.364	0.302	0.466	0.886

Source: Authors

The evaluation of the structural model necessitated an extensive review of potential collinearity issues and predictive capabilities. Given that all individual variation inflation factor (VIF) values were significantly less than 3, any collinearity concerns were considered to be insignificant.

3.2 Testing of hypotheses

Table no. 4 presents the testing of the four hypotheses based on the results of the PLS-SEM analysis. The hypotheses were formulated to examine the direct and indirect effects of GPA, GCV, RGC, and SV on BB.

Hypothesis 1 posits that GPA significantly influences GCV, RGC, and SV. The beta coefficients are 0.433, 0.509, and 0.302 respectively, and the t statistics are 5.447, 7.655, and 4.161 respectively, all surpassing the threshold of 2. Therefore, H1 is supported, indicating significant direct effects.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that GCV and RGC significantly influence BB. The beta coefficients are 0.474 and 0.253 respectively, and the t statistics are 6.627 and 3.316 respectively, both exceeding the threshold of 2. Therefore, H2 is supported, indicating significant direct effects.

Hypothesis 3 argue that GPA indirectly influences BB through GCV, RGC, and SV. While the direct effect (GPA → BB) is not significant (t-statistic = 0.191), the indirect effects (GPA → GCV, RGC, SV → BB) are significant with t-statistics of 3.999, 2.924, and 2.395 respectively. Thus, H3 is supported, indicating a full mediation effect.

Hypothesis 4 asserts that SV indirectly influences BB through GCV. Both the direct effect (SV → BB) and the indirect effect (SV → GCV → BB) are significant with t-statistics of 2.759 and 3.138 respectively. Therefore, H4 is supported, indicating a partial mediation effect.

Table no. 4. Direct and indirect effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	Beta Coef.	SD	T statistics	Decision	Type of Effect
H1	GPA → GCV, RGC, SV	0.433, 0.509, 0.302.	0.080, 0.066, 0.073.	5.447, 7.655, 4.161.	Supported*	Direct
H2	GCV, RGC → BB	0.474, 0.253.	0.072, 0.076.	6.627, 3.316.	Supported*	Direct
H3	GPA → BB (de) GPA → GCV, RGC, SV → BB (ie)	-0.012, 0.205, 0.129, 0.070.	0.065, 0.051, 0.044, 0.029.	0.191, 3.999, 2.924, 2.395.	Supported*	Indirect (Full mediation)
H4	SV → BB (de) SV → GCV → BB (ie)	0.163, 0.110.	0.059, 0.035.	2.759, 3.138.	Supported*	Indirect (Partial mediation)

Note: * p < 0.05; SD - standard deviation. In the above table, 'de' stands for direct effect and 'ie' stands for indirect effect. The type of mediation is determined on the significance of the direct and indirect effects. If only the indirect effect is significant, it is a case of full mediation. If both direct and indirect effects are significant, it is a case of partial mediation. If only the direct effect is significant, there is no mediation.

Source: Authors with Smart-PLS 4

4. Discussions

The results of our study align with previous research (Paço et al., 2019), which indicates that individuals with a stronger GPA tend to show greater concern for the environment. This is evident in the significant positive influence of GPA on GCV and RGC. Consumers who prioritize the welfare of others and express a desire to aid those in need are more likely to consider the environmental impact of their actions and be receptive to environmentally focused advertising messages (Hypothesis 1). This finding supports the notion that people with a stronger sense of prosocial behavior extend their concern for others to encompass environmental stewardship (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015).

Our study also confirms the importance of GCV and RGC in influencing the actual BB. Consumers who prioritize environmental considerations and are receptive to green advertising are more inclined to engage in eco-friendly purchasing behaviors (Hypothesis 2). This highlights the critical role of personal values and external messaging in driving sustainable consumer choices, echoing the findings of Zhao et al. (2014) and Woo and Kim (2019).

Interestingly, our analysis reveals intricate mediation effects in the relationship between GPA, GCV, RGC, SV, and BB. The indirect effects shed light on the pathways through which these variables influence consumer behavior.

Hypothesis 3, which proposes an indirect influence of GPA on BB through GCV, RGC, and SV, is supported. This suggests that consumers' prosocial attitudes indirectly impact their buying behavior by shaping their green consumption values, receptivity to green communication, and perceived social value associated with eco-friendly choices. This finding emphasizes the multifaceted nature of sustainable consumption decisions, with personal values and social perceptions acting as intermediaries.

Similarly, Hypothesis 4 reveals a partial mediation effect of SV on BB through GCV. Consumers who perceive social approval and positive impressions from purchasing green products are more likely to prioritize environmental considerations when making purchasing decisions. This finding underscores the role of social norms and perceived social desirability in driving sustainable consumption behaviors (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015).

Conclusions

This study explores the complex interplay between prosocial attitudes, environmental concerns, receptivity to green messaging, social perceptions, and actual buying behavior, offering a nuanced perspective on sustainable consumer choices. It expands the concept of prosocial behavior to include environmental concerns, revealing how values manifest in consumption choices. The study also links GPA with GCV and RGC, shedding light on the psychological mechanisms behind sustainable consumption.

For managers and marketers, these findings provide valuable information for designing effective sustainability-focused campaigns. Brands aligning with consumer GPA and emphasizing GCV in messaging resonate more with environmentally conscious consumers. Understanding the mediating role of SV can guide strategies to maximize social approval and positive impressions of eco-friendly purchases. Marketers can target consumers with strong GPA by highlighting the social and environmental impact of products, enhancing brand loyalty. Crafting messaging appealing to prosocial tendencies and emphasizing positive impacts can further resonate with consumers who value social and environmental causes.

Effective green communication strategies are vital to influence consumer perceptions and behaviors. Brands should focus on showcasing environmental benefits, sustainability efforts, and engaging on platforms receptive to green messaging. Emphasizing eco-friendly features and certifications can attract environmentally conscious consumers. Highlighting the social value associated with purchases, such as positive social impact and acceptance of eco-friendly choices, can influence behavior. Leveraging green certifications and endorsements from environmental organizations can enhance brand trust and credibility, guiding consumers towards sustainable choices.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AVE – Average Variance Extracted

BB - Buying Behavior

GCV - Green Consumption Values

GPA - General Prosocial Attitudes

PLS-SEM – Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling

RGC - Receptivity to Green Communication

SV - Social Value

VIF – Variance Inflation Factor

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