



Religious Values, Environmental Concern, and Sustainable Consumption among Generation Z in Vietnam

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Abstract

This study investigates the structural relationships between religious values, environmental concern, and sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z consumers in Vietnam, examining the mediating role of ecological awareness within an integrated behavioral framework. A quantitative survey design captured responses from 542 Generation Z individuals across major Vietnamese urban centers. Structural Equation Modeling via Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) facilitated the assessment of the measurement model and structural paths, evaluating direct and indirect effects among the latent constructs. Empirical findings reveal that intrinsic religious values exert a highly significant positive effect on environmental concern ($\beta = 0.482, p < 0.001$) and a direct positive effect on sustainable consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.215, p < 0.01$). Environmental concern strongly predicts sustainable consumption actions ($\beta = 0.536, p < 0.001$) and acts as a potent partial mediator, channeling the influence of spiritual ethics into tangible ecological purchasing decisions. Spiritual frameworks deeply embedded in Vietnamese society, notably Buddhist and Confucian tenets of moderation and interconnectedness, serve as vital psychological precursors to environmental stewardship. Policymakers and green marketers must integrate socio-religious narratives into sustainability campaigns to effectively mobilize young consumer cohorts toward circular consumption patterns.

Keywords: *Ecological Stewardship; Green Purchasing; Pro-Environmental Behavior; Structural Equation Modeling; Southeast Asian Youth; Spiritual Ethics.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Global environmental degradation accelerates at an unprecedented pace, characterized by catastrophic biodiversity loss, climate instability, and localized resource depletion. Developing economies in Southeast Asia stand at the epicenter of these ecological challenges, balancing the dual demands of rapid economic expansion and environmental preservation. Vietnam exemplifies this macroeconomic tension, where decades of industrial growth have substantially elevated living standards while placing immense stress on national ecosystems. Urban areas confront chronic air pollution, escalating municipal solid waste crises, and widespread water contamination. Addressing these interconnected crises requires a fundamental shift from production-centric paradigms toward demand-side sustainability, rendering the examination of consumer behavior a matter of critical academic and policy relevance.

Consumer cohorts dictate market dynamics, with Generation Z emerging as the primary driver of consumption trends over the coming decades. Born between 1997 and 2012, this demographic cohort constitutes approximately one-quarter of the Vietnamese population. Generation Z possesses distinct psychological and behavioral characteristics, shaped by digital hyper-connectivity, exposure to globalized socioeconomic discourse, and firsthand observation of localized climate impacts. While Western empirical literature frequently characterizes young consumers as inherently eco-conscious, this assertion requires careful empirical scrutiny within emerging Asian markets. The operationalization of environmental awareness into actual purchasing decisions is non-linear, often hindered by economic constraints, structural market deficits, and competing socio-cultural values.

Socio-cultural frameworks, particularly religious and spiritual values, fundamentally shape human-nature relationships and consumption ethics. In Vietnam, the cultural landscape is defined by a syncretic blend of Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous folk beliefs, collectively instilling virtues of harmony, cosmic interconnectedness, and mindfulness regarding material consumption. Despite extensive historical secularization and modern commercialization, these latent spiritual principles continue to govern interpersonal ethics and community responsibilities. Theoretical models of sustainable behavior, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Value-Belief-Norm theory, demonstrate that deep-seated value orientations precede specific attitudes and subsequent behavioral intentions. Consequently, investigating how traditional religious values manifest within the contemporary, consumerist lifestyles of Generation Z provides essential insights into localized pathways toward ecological sustainability.



Extensive literature explores the determinants of green purchasing, focusing primarily on economic incentives, eco-labeling awareness, and individualistic altruism within developed Western paradigms. However, existing studies have not sufficiently addressed the intersection of spiritual metrics and sustainable consumption within transitional, rapidly modernizing Asian economies. Most green marketing research in Southeast Asia treats environmental concern as an isolated cognitive state, omitting the foundational cultural and religious values that generate such awareness. Furthermore, the existing literature exhibits conflicting findings regarding the pro-environmental inclinations of Generation Z, with some studies highlighting an attitude-behavior gap where high ecological concern fails to translate into green purchases due to premium pricing and limited accessibility. This research gap is pronounced in Vietnam, where empirical investigations using advanced structural modeling to map the trajectory from religious ethics to sustainable action remain scarce.

This study investigates the structural relationships between religious values, environmental concern, and sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z in Vietnam. It evaluates whether environmental concern mediates the relationship between traditional spiritual values and sustainable marketplace actions. By integrating socio-religious dimensions into an empirical behavioral model, this paper contributes to sustainability literature in two distinct ways. First, it contextualizes Western-centric behavioral theories by demonstrating how traditional Eastern spiritual principles function as modern drivers of environmental responsibility. Second, it provides actionable, empirical evidence for policymakers and green marketers seeking to design culturally resonant strategies that encourage sustainable lifestyles among young Vietnamese citizens.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 synthesizes the theoretical framework, reviews relevant literature, and establishes the research hypotheses. Section 3 delineates the quantitative methodology, including sampling protocols, measurement scales, and the analytical framework. Section 4 presents the empirical results derived from the SEM-PLS estimation. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to prior literature and explores theoretical and practical implications. Section 6 concludes the study, addressing limitations and outlining directions for future research.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between human values and pro-environmental action is deeply anchored in environmental psychology, notably within the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory. This framework asserts that an individual's deeply held values influence their worldview regarding human-nature interactions, which activates personal norms regarding ecological responsibilities. In non-Western societies, these foundational values are frequently derived from religious and philosophical traditions that define the moral boundaries of resource utilization. While early Western ecological critique occasionally posited that Judeo-Christian anthropocentric dogmas encouraged environmental domination, alternative scholarly perspectives highlight the eco-centric dimensions of Eastern philosophies. Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism, which deeply permeate Vietnamese cultural metaphysics, emphasize the codependency of all living entities and advocate for ascetic moderation, directly opposing hyper-consumerism.

Recent empirical literature validates the positive influence of religious orientations on environmental stewardship across various global regions. Intrinsic religiosity, where faith serves as an internalized, guiding life force, consistently correlates with enhanced altruism and biospheric value orientations. Scholars note that individuals who actively internalize spiritual doctrines tend to view nature through a lens of divine stewardship or cosmic balance, fostering heightened emotional connectivity to environmental protection. In Asian market contexts, consumers influenced by Buddhist principles demonstrate a higher propensity for green product adoption, driven by the belief that reckless resource depletion disrupts spiritual harmony and accumulates negative karmic consequences. These cultural frameworks encourage long-term thinking, shifting individual focus from immediate materialistic gratification toward collective, cross-generational well-being.

Environmental concern reflects an individual's cognitive awareness and affective evaluation of ecological threats, serving as a critical psychological precursor to pro-environmental action. Within consumer behavior models, general value orientations rarely influence specific purchasing choices directly; instead, they operate through intermediate cognitive appraisals. Environmental concern represents this intermediate phase, translating broad moral frameworks into heightened awareness of specific environmental challenges, such as plastic pollution or carbon emissions. Empirical studies confirm that consumers exhibiting elevated levels of environmental anxiety are more receptive to sustainable market innovations, actively seeking out organic, energy-efficient, or recyclable alternatives.

The transition from environmental concern to actual sustainable consumption behavior is often complicated by socio-demographic variables and market readiness. Generation Z presents a complex behavioral profile in contemporary consumer research. Although hyper-aware of global climate risks, their



consumption habits are also influenced by digital peer dynamics, fast-fashion trends, and economic constraints. In transitional economies like Vietnam, young consumers face a rapidly expanding retail sector that promotes material acquisition as a symbol of social status. Consequently, understanding how internalized religious values interact with environmental concern to overcome these commercial pressures is essential for developing effective sustainability interventions.

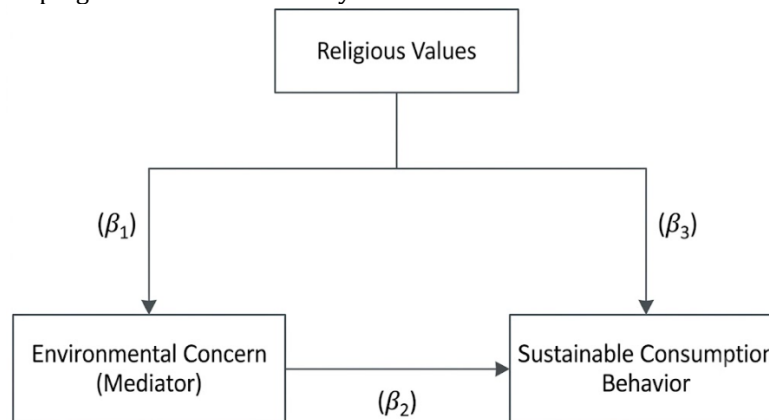


Figure 1. Conceptual framework detailing structural pathways and hypothesized interactions

Based on the theoretical linkages identified in the literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) mapping the structural relationships between religious values, environmental concern, and sustainable consumption behavior. The model posited that traditional spiritual values provide the normative foundation required to heighten ecological concern, which subsequently steers actual market behaviors. To empirically validate these pathways within the context of Vietnamese Generation Z, three primary hypotheses are developed:

1. H1: Religious values exert a significant positive effect on the environmental concern of Generation Z consumers in Vietnam.
2. H2: Environmental concern exerts a significant positive effect on the sustainable consumption behavior of Generation Z consumers in Vietnam.
3. H3: Religious values exert a significant positive direct effect on the sustainable consumption behavior of Generation Z consumers in Vietnam.
4. H4: Environmental concern significantly mediates the relationship between religious values and sustainable consumption behavior.

C. METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design to test the hypothesized relationships between religious values, environmental concern, and sustainable consumption behavior. Given the complex, multi-layered nature of human psychological constructs and behavioral intentions, Structural Equation Modeling via Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was selected as the primary analytical tool. SEM-PLS is well-suited for exploratory-predictive research designs, particularly when analyzing complex structural paths without requiring strict multivariate normality assumptions. The study followed a systematic workflow encompassing instrument development, target sampling, indicator verification, and structural path assessment to ensure methodological rigor.

Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

Data collection occurred between January and March 2026 utilizing a highly structured, self-administered digital questionnaire. The target population comprised Vietnamese nationals belonging to Generation Z, operationally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. To achieve a geographically diverse sample, the digital survey link was disseminated across academic institutions, youth community networks, and digital interest groups based in three major macro-regions of Vietnam: Hanoi (North), Da Nang (Central), and Ho Chi Minh City (South).

A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed, applying strict screening questions to ensure respondents met the specified birth year criteria and resided within the target urban zones. To mitigate common method bias, the survey introductory text assured absolute anonymity, emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect answers, and separated the independent and dependent scale items across different digital modules.



A total of 610 responses were collected. Following an intensive data cleaning phase to remove incomplete submissions, straight-lining responses, and extreme outliers, 542 valid responses were retained for structural analysis, representing an effective response rate of 88.85%. This sample size exceeds the minimum threshold specified by the ten-times rule in PLS path modeling and provides sufficient statistical power ($\omega = 0.95$) to detect small effect sizes at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Table 1 details the demographic distribution of the final dataset.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of Generation Z respondents (N = 542).

Demographic Variable	Classification Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	238	43.91
	Female	304	56.09
Age Cohort	14–18 years (Late Gen Z)	112	20.66
	19–24 years (Mid Gen Z)	245	45.20
	25–29 years (Early Gen Z)	185	34.13
Region	Northern Region (Hanoi)	201	37.08
	Central Region (Da Nang)	98	18.08
	Southern Region (HCMC)	243	44.83
Monthly Allowance/Income	Under 5,000,000 VND	164	30.26
	5,000,000–15,000,000 VND	262	48.34
	Over 15,000,000 VND	116	21.40

Measurement Instruments

All latent constructs were operationalized using validated, multi-item psychometric scales adapted from established empirical literature, modified slightly to fit the contemporary Vietnamese socio-cultural context. The items were translated from English into Vietnamese using a rigorous forward-and-backward translation protocol conducted by independent bilingual linguistics experts to maintain semantic integrity. Every item was evaluated using a standard 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Religious Values (RV) were measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Worthington et al. (2003), focusing on the internalization of spiritual doctrines, moral consciousness, and the role of faith in daily decision-making frameworks. Environmental Concern (EC) was captured using 5 items adapted from the New Ecological Paradigm scale developed by Dunlap et al. (2000), assessing individual awareness of environmental fragility, pollution risks, and ecosystem disruption. Sustainable Consumption Behavior (SCB) was operationalized through a 6-item scale adapted from Roberts (1996) and Straughan and Roberts (1999), measuring energy-saving habits, waste reduction efforts, and the avoidance of ecologically harmful consumer goods.

Data Analysis Strategy

The structural model estimation followed a two-stage analytical paradigm using SmartPLS 4.0 software. Stage one evaluated the measurement (outer) model to verify the reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity of the latent constructs. Stage two assessed the structural (inner) model, computing path coefficients (β), coefficients of determination (R^2), predictive relevance metrics (Q^2), and effect sizes (f^2). To determine the statistical significance of the path estimates and mediation pathways, a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure was executed with 5,000 subsamples at a 95% confidence interval.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed by verifying indicator reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was evaluated via standardized factor loadings; all outer loadings exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that the designated indicators shared substantial variance with their respective latent constructs. Internal consistency and construct reliability were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). Every construct achieved value parameters well above the critical threshold of 0.70.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The calculated AVE values for all constructs exceeded the 0.50 benchmark, confirming that each latent construct accounted for more than half of the variance in its constituent indicators. Table 2 compiles the specific standardized loadings, means, standard deviations, and reliability metrics for the measurement model.

**Table 2.** Measurement model properties and convergent validity parameters (N = 542)

Construct and Measurement Items	Outer Loading	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Religious Values (RV)				0.884	0.915	0.683
RV1: My spiritual values guide daily decisions.	0.812	3.65	0.92			
RV2: I integrate faith into my ethical choices.	0.841	3.58	0.88			
RV3: Religious tenets encourage consumption moderation.	0.835	3.72	0.91			
RV4: Spiritual teachings foster respect for nature.	0.829	3.84	0.85			
RV5: My belief framework shapes my social duties.	0.814	3.69	0.94			
Environmental Concern (EC)				0.891	0.920	0.697
EC1: The balance of nature is very delicate.	0.824	4.15	0.76			
EC2: Humans are severely abusing the environment.	0.836	4.28	0.72			
EC3: Industrial growth threatens local ecosystems.	0.851	4.31	0.69			
EC4: Environmental degradation requires urgency.	0.844	4.22	0.75			
EC5: Ecosystem modification causes disasters.	0.819	4.19	0.78			
Sustainable Consumption (SCB)				0.912	0.932	0.695
SCB1: I actively avoid single-use plastics.	0.809	3.42	0.98			
SCB2: I choose products with eco-friendly packaging.	0.833	3.35	1.01			
SCB3: I reduce energy consumption when possible.	0.846	3.68	0.89			
SCB4: I buy from brands with green practices.	0.852	3.29	1.04			
SCB5: I repurpose and recycle household waste.	0.821	3.54	0.95			
SCB6: I limit unnecessary consumption choices.	0.839	3.48	0.92			

Discriminant validity was established using two criteria: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is supported when the square root of the *AVE* for each construct exceeds its correlation coefficients with all other constructs. As shown in Table 3, the diagonal values representing the square roots of the *AVE* parameters are consistently greater than the off-diagonal correlation values.

Table 3. Inter-construct correlations and Fornell-Larcker discriminant validity matrix

Latent Construct	Environmental Concern (EC)	Religious Values (RV)	Sustainable Consumption (SCB)
Environmental Concern (EC)	0.835		
Religious Values (RV)	0.482	0.826	
Sustainable Consumption (SCB)	0.640	0.473	0.834

To further confirm discriminant validity, the HTMT ratios were evaluated. All HTMT values fell well below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (HTMT for RV and EC = 0.542; HTMT for SCB and RV = 0.525; HTMT for SCB and EC = 0.708), providing strong evidence that the latent constructs represent distinct empirical concepts. Collinearity diagnostics were performed prior to structural assessment; all inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged between 1.302 and 1.458, well below the critical threshold of 3.0, ruling out multicollinearity issues within the structural model.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 replicates to calculate path coefficients, *p*-values, and confidence intervals. The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs: the coefficient of determination for environmental concern was $R^2 = 0.232$, while sustainable consumption behavior achieved $R^2 = 0.448$, demonstrating strong explanatory capacity within consumer behavior paradigms. Predictive relevance was confirmed via blindfolding protocols, yielding cross-validated redundancy metrics (Q^2) of 0.158 for EC and 0.306 for SCB, values significantly greater than zero.

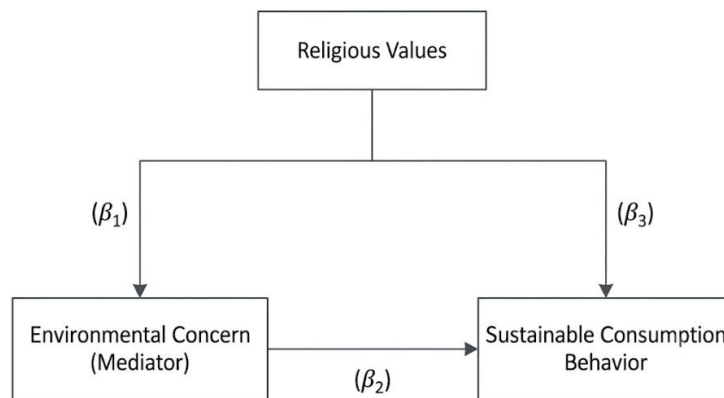


Figure 2. Empirical validation of the structural path model ($p < 0.001, p < 0.01$)

The standardized path coefficients confirm that all hypothesized direct relationships are statistically significant (Figure 2). Religious values exert a strong direct positive effect on environmental concern ($\beta = 0.482, t = 12.541, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Environmental concern demonstrates a highly significant positive effect on sustainable consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.536, t = 15.104, p < 0.001$), validating H2. Furthermore, religious values maintain a significant direct positive path to sustainable consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.215, t = 5.087, p < 0.01$), supporting H3.

Table 4. Structural path coefficients and significance testing

Hypothesis	Structural Pathway	Standardized β	Std. Error	t-value	P-value	Decision
H1	Religious Values → Environmental Concern	0.482	0.038	12.541	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Environmental Concern → Sustainable Consumption	0.536	0.035	15.104	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Religious Values → Sustainable Consumption	0.215	0.042	5.087	0.002	Supported

To evaluate mediation effects (H4), the indirect effect of religious values on sustainable consumption behavior through environmental concern was examined. The standardized indirect effect is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.258, t = 9.421, p < 0.001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.207, 0.314]$). Because the direct path remains significant, environmental concern acts as a partial mediator, capturing 54.54% of the total effect of religious values on sustainable consumption behavior. This confirms H4 and underscores the important role of environmental concern in translating spiritual ethics into sustainable action.

Discussion

The empirical findings confirm that internalized religious values significantly influence both environmental concern and sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z in Vietnam. These results validate the applicability of the Value-Belief-Norm theory within emerging Asian consumer markets, demonstrating that spiritual orientations can serve as foundational cognitive drivers of ecological responsibility. The strong relationship observed between religious values and environmental concern ($\beta = 0.482$) suggests that traditional philosophies, such as the Buddhist concept of *Interdependent Co-arising* (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) and Confucian socio-ecological harmony, remain relevant even among highly secularized, digitally connected urban youth. Rather than fading amid modernization, these latent belief systems continue to shape how individuals conceptualize environmental risks and understand the human relationship with nature.

The strong direct path from environmental concern to sustainable consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.536$) aligns with contemporary environmental psychology literature. This path underlines that heightened ecological anxiety is an essential prerequisite for green lifestyle choices. In Vietnam, where urban pollution and climate vulnerabilities are highly visible, Generation Z's awareness of these issues



directly influences their marketplace decisions, leading them to actively seek out eco-friendly packaging, reduce resource consumption, and avoid single-use plastics.

Importantly, the structural model identifies a significant direct path from religious values to sustainable consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.215$), independent of environmental concern. This indicates that religious frameworks do not merely heighten ecological awareness; they also directly encourage restraint and mindful consumption. This direct link reflects spiritual mandates that promote moderation and warn against excessive materialism, discouraging wasteful consumption habits regardless of an individual's explicit environmental focus.

The confirmation of partial mediation ($\beta = 0.258, p < 0.001$) provides valuable insight into the psychological mechanisms behind green consumer behavior. Environmental concern serves as a key cognitive link that translates abstract spiritual values into concrete sustainable practices. While internalized religious beliefs offer an ethical foundation, they are most effective at driving sustainable market behaviors when paired with a clear, conscious understanding of current ecological threats. This mediation dynamic highlights the synergy between traditional values and modern scientific awareness, suggesting that combining cultural ethics with ecological literacy can produce powerful drivers for sustainable lifestyle changes.

These findings have practical implications for sustainability advocates, green marketers, and environmental policymakers in emerging Southeast Asian markets. Traditional, compliance-based environmental campaigns frequently rely on clinical, scientific data regarding carbon metrics or biodiversity losses, narratives that can feel abstract or disconnected from everyday life. This study indicates that interventions could gain significant resonance by connecting ecological protection with culturally embedded spiritual values. Marketing strategies for eco-friendly products could emphasize themes of harmony, mindfulness, and generational responsibility, aligning modern sustainability with deep-seated cultural ethics. For policymakers, integrating ethical stewardship concepts into educational curricula offers a culturally grounded approach to fostering sustainable habits in younger generations.

Despite its rigorous structural modeling approach, this study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the cross-sectional data collection design captures consumer attitudes and reported behaviors at a single point in time, limiting the ability to infer definitive, long-term causal trajectories. Future research could utilize longitudinal designs to assess the stability of these behavioral patterns as Generation Z transitions further into the workforce. Second, the reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce social desirability bias, where respondents overstate their actual green purchasing habits or level of religious commitment. Incorporating objective behavioral indicators, such as corporate point-of-sale data or real-time digital consumption logs, could help validate these findings. Finally, while this study focused on urban centers in Vietnam, future comparative research could examine these dynamics across other emerging economies in Southeast Asia to explore how differing institutional and theological frameworks influence sustainable consumption.

E. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the structural relationships between religious values, environmental concern, and sustainable consumption behavior among Generation Z consumers in Vietnam using a SEM-PLS framework. The empirical results confirm that internalized spiritual values significantly strengthen environmental concern and directly encourage sustainable marketplace choices. Furthermore, environmental concern serves as an important psychological mediator, translating broad traditional ethics into concrete green behaviors, such as reducing plastic waste and choosing eco-friendly brands. These findings indicate that traditional Eastern philosophies, which emphasize moderation and cosmic harmony, remain powerful drivers of eco-conscious behaviors even among modern, digitally native urban youth. To encourage sustainable consumption patterns effectively, policymakers and green marketers should move beyond purely economic or technical messaging and leverage these deep-seated cultural values to promote long-term environmental stewardship. Future research should build on these insights by conducting cross-cultural comparative analyses across Southeast Asia and utilizing longitudinal tracking to evaluate how these ethical consumption patterns evolve over time.

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