

The role of corporate social responsibility in building long-term relationships with green brands



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of corporate social responsibility activities (CSR) and green advertising (GAD) on green consumer-brand relationship quality (GRQ) and green brand loyalty (GBL) in Vietnam. A conceptual model was developed to examine the relationships among CSR, GAD, GRQ, and GBL. Data were collected from 447 green consumers and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings indicate that CSR has a significant positive effect on both GRQ and GBL, whereas GAD does not significantly influence either GRQ or GBL. In addition, GRQ has a significant positive effect on GBL. These findings highlight the important role of CSR in strengthening consumer-brand relationships and green brand loyalty. The results suggest that managers should prioritize authentic CSR activities and focus less on green advertising when seeking to build long-term relationships with green consumers.

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1. Introduction

The world is facing unprecedented challenges, including climate change and environmental degradation, which increasingly affect human well-being. In response, business philosophy has evolved toward balancing economic, environmental, and social objectives, as reflected in the triple bottom line approach and the concept of social responsibility in marketing. Consequently, consumers are becoming more interested in and willing to pay for green brands that emphasize environmental protection and social welfare (Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016). This trend requires stakeholders to focus on pro-environmental consumption and social responsibility to achieve sustainable development (Ma et al., 2023), particularly through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and green marketing activities (Dinh et al., 2023; Rahimah et al., 2024).

CSR activities have been widely recognized as key drivers of both consumer behavior and firm performance. Empirical evidence indicates that CSR enhances purchase intention and actual buying

behavior, while also strengthening corporate reputation, brand equity, and overall performance (Rahimah et al., 2024). Furthermore, CSR has been identified as an important antecedent of brand-related outcomes, including brand attitude, preference, awareness, trust, and loyalty (Islam et al., 2021). However, most existing studies focus on these outcomes separately and are predominantly conducted in developed markets. As a result, limited research has examined the role of CSR in shaping consumer-brand relationship quality, despite its importance as a foundation for long-term relationships, particularly in developing economies.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of green advertising can be explained through signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), which posits that firms use observable signals to communicate unobservable qualities to consumers. Environmental claims in advertising can therefore serve as indicators of a firm's commitment to sustainability. When perceived as credible, these signals reduce information asymmetry and enhance consumer trust, thereby strengthening relationship quality and loyalty (Chen and Chang, 2013; Connelly et al., 2011).

However, little is known about how CSR and green advertising jointly influence consumer-brand relationship quality and brand loyalty, as prior studies have largely examined these factors in isolation. This gap is particularly evident in emerging markets such as Vietnam, where consumer

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perceptions of sustainability may differ from those in developed contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the combined effects of CSR and green advertising on consumer-brand relationship quality and brand loyalty in emerging market settings.

2. Literature review

2.1. Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility refers to the use of organizational resources and activities to achieve economic goals while complying with social norms and legal requirements (Freeman et al., 2010). Consequently, CSR plays a significant role in business strategy (Lindgreen et al., 2009). From consumers' perspective, CSR can be measured by a first-order construct or a second-order construct (Du et al., 2011). Referring to the first-order construct, CSR is defined as the status and performance of an enterprise based on its social responsibility perception, which consists of economic responsibility and non-economic responsibility dimensions.

In this view, CSR is too general, losing the richness of the concept and the accuracy of the content. In terms of the second-order construct, CSR is mentioned by three theoretical approaches, namely the well-known pyramid model of Carroll (2016), stakeholder theory (Pomeroy, 2017), and sustainable development theory (Öberseder et al., 2014).

Among these approaches, CSR based on sustainable development is particularly notable, as it provides more tangible and measurable attributes for consumers (Öberseder et al., 2014). Moreover, the components of CSR in the sustainable development theory comprise all three core values of sustainable development, including environmental, economic, and social dimensions that are in line with this study.

Economic responsibility focuses on operating the organization efficiently to generate sustainable economic growth by setting up efficient distribution channels and a sales force (Chow and Chen, 2012) or improving service quality, consumer interaction, and a competitive pricing policy.

Social responsibility is the enterprises' contribution to raising the living standards, including education, health, community culture, social development, and the development of the country (Carroll, 2016).

The environmental responsibility of enterprises reflects optimizing the usage of natural resources (Lindgreen et al., 2009) to reserve resources for the next generation's development.

From another perspective, Kangun et al. (1991) discussed that the more consumers are interested in pro-environmental activities, the more attention green advertising receives. In addition, in the green advertising context, Kilbourne (1998) argued that consumers are more concerned with an enterprise's identity system or brand image than the green

product. Therefore, GAD is a prominent communication tool widely used to promote green brands and reach environmentally conscious consumers. In another study, Nagar (2015) stated that GAD has few studies exploring the impact of GAD on consumers' behavior and no studies investigating the influence of GAD on GRQ and GBL. These study results raise the need to investigate the impact of GAD on GRQ and GBL.

2.2. Green advertising

Green advertising (GAD) or environmental advertisement conveys information about a specific green brand to encourage customers to buy a green brand. Davis (1994) discussed that GAD has three components encompassing environmental statement, environmental protocol, and specific environmental action plan. GAD is the most popular marketing tool for sustainable development context.

2.3. Green consumer-brand relationship quality

Relationship quality is a complex concept that has been defined in various dimensions and approaches (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2011). In the retail sector and from a consumer perspective, relationship quality is the customer's perception of trust and satisfaction with a specific brand through their experience. Based on the Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011) and Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) studies, this study proposed that green consumer-brand relationship quality comprises three components - green brand satisfaction, green brand trust, and green brand commitment that represent the green consumer's evaluation during their experiential interaction with a specific green brand. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) mentioned that brand trust was the perception of consumers of the value of a specific brand. In the green brand context, Nguyen et al. (2023) stated that green brand trust is a customer's belief in the reliability of a specific green brand. Satisfaction is the value of a brand that the consumer perceives through their experienced transactions. Dwyer et al. (1987) defined commitment in the buyer-seller relationship as the direct or indirect promise of continuous exchanges between buyer and seller.

In addition, Giovanis (2016) referred to commitment as the long-term intention and close bond with the brand, which eventually leads to sacrifices to support a given brand. Based on these studies, this paper proposes that the green brand trust concept is consumers' credibility in the offers of a specific green brand; the green brand satisfaction concept is mentioned as the level of customers' gratification while choosing, purchasing, and consuming a particular green brand; and the green brand commitment concept is defined as a long-term orientation of consumers that continues to interact or maintain the relationship with the specific green brand.

2.4. Green brand loyalty

Oliver (1999) argued that loyalty is the re-purchasing behavior toward a given brand regardless of the various circumstances. In a closer look, Chaudhuri (1999) discussed that brand loyalty is the consumers' favorite purchasing brand name compared to similar products in the same category. Regarding the green brand, Grant (2008) stated that it offers a significant eco-advantage over the incumbents. In this study, green brand loyalty is about the commitment to frequently repurchase a given green brand regardless of strong competitors' offers.

In conclusion, most modern trend marketing, such as green marketing studies, has been conducted in developed countries, hardly studying in other nations (Lee, 2008). Therefore, to fill this gap, this article explores the impact of CSR and GAD on GRQ and GBL. The research results not only describe insights into consumers in the transition market and imply important practical implications but also have significant contributions to the sustainable development literature.

2.5. Hypothesis development

In the marketing literature review, socially responsible initiatives may bring benefits to a company in the form of raising the reputation and brand value. Prior studies showed CSR affects consumer product responses, especially customers' attitudes and behaviors (Pivato et al., 2008). It contributes to the credibility and reputation of a brand all over the world. Moreover, several studies indicated that CSR influences customer satisfaction, corporate reputation, and brand equity. Notably, customers' perception of CSR has significantly affected satisfaction, trust, and commitment, while trust, satisfaction, and commitment are the components of brand relationship quality. Furthermore, CSR was examined to have a significant impact on loyalty and word of mouth (Servera-Francés and Piqueras-Tomás, 2019). Therefore, in the sustainable development context, CSR might have an impact on GRQ and GBL. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: CSR has positively impacted GRQ.

H2: CSR has positively impacted GBL.

Green advertising is widely acknowledged as a strategic communication tool for conveying firms' environmental commitment and promoting sustainable consumption. By highlighting ecological attributes and sustainability-oriented values, it plays a critical role in shaping consumers' perceptions and differentiating green brands in increasingly competitive markets (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017). In addition, prior research indicates that green advertising significantly influences consumers' purchase behavior (Rahbar and Abdul Wahid, 2011) and enhances green brand equity (Nguyen et al.,

2023). Therefore, this study proposes the hypotheses below:

H3: GAD has positively influenced GRQ.

H4: GAD has positively influenced GBL.

The purpose of GCBRQ is to strengthen long-term relationships with consumers. Nguyen and Nguyen (2011) confirmed that relationship quality is a vital attribute in evaluating and strengthening business relationships. Previous studies indicated that relationship quality is a high-level construct including satisfaction, trust, and commitment, and has positively affected brand loyalty (Pivato et al., 2008). It implies that a brand's effort to increase relationship quality will result in enhancing brand loyalty (Francisco-Maffezzoli et al., 2014). In addition, Kieu and Ho (2018) confirmed there is a relationship between brand relationship quality and brand loyalty in the fashion industry in Vietnam. Furthermore, Martenson (2007) argued that when consumers are satisfied with a specific green brand, they tend to repurchase. Obviously, a consumer experiences an eco-friendly product or green brand and has a positive attitude toward the green brand, which raises the consumer's level of green brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). Thus, GRQ might have an impact on GBL. Hence, another hypothesis in this study is as follows:

H5: GRQ has a positive effect on green brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research procedure

This study was undertaken through two phases. In the first stage, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a group of 15 green consumers who bought green products and another group of 05 experts to explore and adjust the scales based on the available measurements. The first stage results were used to complete the survey questionnaire. In the second stage, the completed survey questionnaires were distributed to green consumers who buy goods at green shop stores and green product sections in supermarkets. Based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2012) for a good sample size in analyzing data by structural equation model, this study collected a valid 447 green consumer questionnaires.

The collected data were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 software.

3.2. Sample characteristics

The dataset consists of 447 valid responses, encompassing 183 males and 264 females, which accounts for 40.9% and 59.1%, respectively. There are 366 green consumers in the group of 18-34 years

old, 70 responses in the group of 35-54 years old, and 11 ones in the group of over 54 years old, accounting for 81.8%, 15.7%, and 2.5% of the sample, respectively. The second attribute in demographic, the income of collected survey data presented that there are 256 participants in groups of upper USD 450 and less than USD 1500, 139 persons in the group of monthly income of USD 450 or less, and 43 ones in group of over USD 1500, which constitutes 59.5%, 31.20%, and 9.6% in the descending order. The last item in the demographic data is education level, which showed the majority of responses: 361 persons are in the group of post-graduates, then 83 participants in the group of college and university, and 3 respondents in the group of high school or less, which decreases accordingly: 80.8%, 18.6%, and 0.7%. In short, the sample is largely composed of young and well-educated consumers, which is consistent with the profile of individuals who are more likely to engage in green consumption in emerging markets. Prior research suggests that environmental awareness and sustainable consumption behaviors are more prevalent among younger and more educated consumers, as these groups tend to possess higher levels of environmental knowledge and pro-environmental attitudes (Testa et al., 2021).

3.3. Measurement scales

The seven-point Likert scale is applied to measure all survey statements; 7 indicates complete agreement with the item and gradually descends to 1, which represents complete disagreement.

The measurements of GAD were measured by 3 items that were developed from Rahbar and Abdul Wahid (2011). CSR is a second-order construct with three components that were adopted from Alvarado-Herrera et al. (2017). GRQ is inherited from Nyffenegger et al. (2015). Finally, GBL is measured by five items that were modified from Lin et al. (2017).

3.4. Data analysis technique

This research applied the structural equation model (SEM) technique and the criteria of Hair et al. (2012) to assess the measurements and models. The recommendation of Hair et al. (2012) is that if the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit index (IFI) are 0.9 or higher, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.08 or less, and the Chi-square/df would be more than 2 and less than 5, the model is considered acceptable.

4. Results

The analyzing results of SEM technique show that $X^2(68) = 182.39$ ($p = 0.000$), Chi-square/df = 2.793, GFI = 0.947; TLI = 0.964; CFI = 0.974; NFI = 0.960; RMSEA = 0.063. These indices indicate that the proposed research model demonstrates a good fit. The analysis results from survey data represented in Tables 1-3 illustrate the specific accepted indices of the measurements, constructs, and research model. The structural model results are presented in Fig. 1.

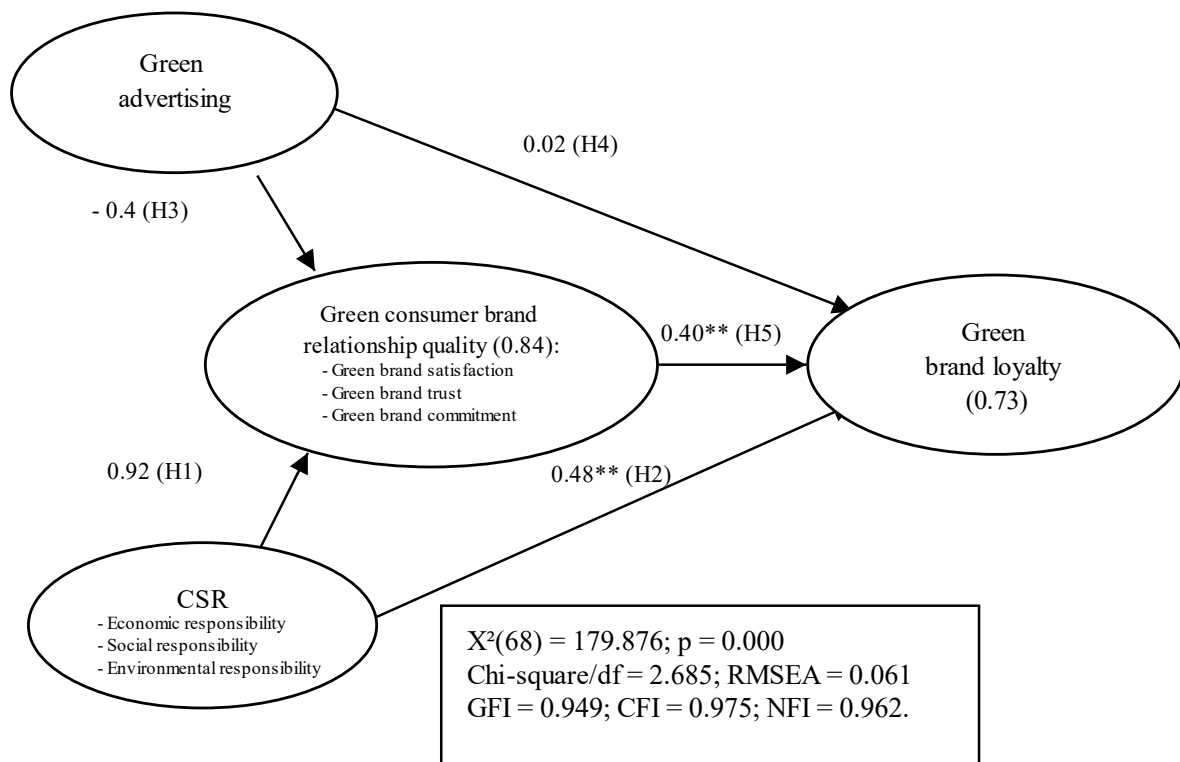


Fig. 1: Structural results (standardized estimates)

Table 1: The assessment results of the construct validity

First-order dimension	Item	Measurement item	Standardized loading	t-value	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Green advertising	GAD1	Green advertising informs me more about the environment.	0.804	15.738	0.845	0.749	0.650
	GAD2	Green advertising is really differentiated.	0.864	15.944			
	GAD3	Green advertising provides sufficient information for me to make purchasing decisions.	0.746	Ref.			
Economic responsibility	ECO1	I believe X strives to offer the best pricing policy for its customers.	0.625	18.623	0.826	0.774	0.535
	ECO2	I believe X tries his best to be more productive.	0.769	19.986			
	ECO3	I believe that X provides the best economic benefits to the customer.	0.790	Ref.			
Social responsibility	SOC1	I believe X strives to fund philanthropic activities.	0.657	11.891	0.800	0.812	0.521
	SOC2	I believe that X tries to sponsor a noble social good.	0.701	14.754			
	SOC3	I believe X strives to fully commit to ethical principles in business.	0.797	Ref.			
Environmental responsibility	SOC4	I believe that X always endeavors for the consumers' rights and interests.	0.725	15.443	0.857	0.829	0.619
	ENV1	I believe X strives to sponsor eco-friendly programs.	0.829	15.723			
	ENV2	I believe X tries to execute programs to reduce pollution.	0.782	19.986			
Green brand trust	ENV3	I believe that X tries to protect the environment: use recycled packaging, biodegradable packaging, ...	0.747	Ref.	0.876	0.884	0.657
	GBT1	I believe X is a green brand for the benefit of the community.	0.763	17.977			
	GBT2	I believe X is an actual green brand.	0.819	19.995			
Green brand commitment	GBT3	I believe X is a safe brand for health.	0.846	Ref.	0.893	0.891	0.734
	GBT4	In general, I trust in X.	0.740	17.524			
	GBC1	I am always accompanying X.	0.884	20.835			
Green brand satisfaction	GBC2	I will always stick with X.	0.914	21.544	0.872	0.873	0.642
	GBC3	I am engaged with X.	0.782	Ref.			
	GBS1	I am pleased when I see X.	0.855	16.563			
Green brand loyalty	GBS2	I am completely satisfied with X.	0.785	18.430	0.908	0.912	0.675
	GBS3	X owns what I expect.	0.719	Ref.			
	GBS4	I am always gratified with what X provides.	0.839	16.327			
Green brand loyalty	GBL1	I will repurchase X since it cares about environmental protection.	0.792	Ref.	0.908	0.912	0.675
	GBL2	I prefer repurchasing X instead of others for its environmental protection programs.	0.820	19.084			
	GBL3	I will continue to purchase X because it is environmentally friendly.	0.840	19.663			
Green brand loyalty	GBL4	I will always use X as it is always concerned with protecting the environment.	0.807	16.993	0.781	17.908	
	GBL5	I would recommend X to others as it is environmentally friendly.	0.781	17.908			

CR: Composite reliability; AVE: Average variance extracted; X is a specific green brand that the customer has bought and is referring to

Table 2: Discriminant validity testing results

	Paths		Estimate	Standard error	Critical ratio	P-value
CSR	<->	GAD	0.106	0.047137	2.248742	0.025
GBL	<->	GAD	0.098	0.047176	2.077312	0.038
GRQ	<->	GBL	0.843	0.0255	33.05941	0.000
GRQ	<->	CSR	0.932	0.017182	54.24228	0.000
GBL	<->	CSR	0.859	0.02427	35.39353	0.000
GRQ	<->	GAD	0.099	0.047172	2.098717	0.036

Table 3: Structural paths (unstandardized estimates)

Paths				Estimate	Standard error	Critical ratio	P-value	Results
H1	CSR	→	GRQ	1.218	0.068	17.912	0.000	Supported
H2	CSR	→	GBL	.184	0.044	4.200	0.000	Supported
H3	GAD	→	GRQ	-.091	0.075	-1.217	0.224	Not supported
H4	GAD	→	GBL	.014	0.020	0.688	0.491	Not supported
H5	GRO	→	GBL	.115	0.032	3.544	0.000	Supported

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide several important insights into the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and green advertising (GAD) in shaping green consumer-brand relationships and loyalty within an emerging market context.

First, the results confirm that CSR has a strong and significant positive effect on both green consumer-brand relationship quality (GRQ) and green brand loyalty (GBL). This finding is consistent with prior studies suggesting that CSR enhances

trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which are key components of relationship quality. From a theoretical perspective, this result reinforces the role of CSR as a credible and observable signal that reduces uncertainty and strengthens consumers' confidence in green brands. In the context of sustainable consumption, CSR activities - especially those related to environmental protection, ethical practices, and community engagement - appear to function as tangible evidence of a firm's commitment, thereby fostering deeper relational bonds with consumers.

Second, and more importantly, the study finds that green advertising does not significantly influence either GRQ or GBL, contrasting with prior studies conducted in developed markets. This discrepancy highlights the context-dependent nature of green marketing and points to a critical distinction between symbolic communication and substantive actions.

In emerging markets such as Vietnam, environmental claims may be perceived as less credible due to growing concerns about greenwashing, leading to consumer skepticism (Chen et al., 2020). As a result, green advertising may lose its effectiveness in building trust, particularly when it is not supported by observable CSR practices.

Additionally, contextual factors such as price sensitivity and limited institutional trust further weaken the influence of green advertising. Consumers in such contexts are more likely to rely on firms' actual behaviors rather than promotional messages when evaluating green brands.

Third, the study confirms that green consumer-brand relationship quality significantly influences green brand loyalty. This finding aligns with relationship marketing theory, emphasizing that trust, satisfaction, and commitment are fundamental drivers of long-term consumer behavior. In the green context, relationship quality plays an even more critical role, as consumers must rely on their perceptions and beliefs about a brand's environmental performance, which is often difficult to verify directly.

From a theoretical perspective, this study makes several significant contributions. First, it advances the green marketing literature by integrating key constructs—CSR, GAD, and GRQ—into a unified framework. Although prior research has examined these constructs in isolation, their joint effects on green brand loyalty remain underexplored. Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence from an emerging market context (Vietnam), demonstrating that consumers place greater emphasis on substantive CSR initiatives rather than symbolic green communication in shaping long-term relationships with green brands.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that firms operating in emerging markets such as Vietnam should prioritize authentic CSR initiatives over heavy investments in green advertising. Specifically, companies should focus on implementing visible and credible environmental and social practices, such as sustainable production processes, transparent supply chains, and community engagement programs. Moreover, firms should ensure that their communication strategies are aligned with their actual practices to avoid perceptions of greenwashing.

Lastly, managers should recognize that building green brand loyalty is a long-term process that depends on strengthening relationship quality. Therefore, strategies aimed at enhancing customer trust, satisfaction, and commitment - through

consistent and responsible behavior - are likely to be more effective than short-term promotional campaigns.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of CSR and GAD on GRQ and GBL in Vietnam. The findings reveal that CSR plays a crucial role in strengthening both relationship quality and brand loyalty, whereas green advertising does not significantly influence either construct. In addition, green consumer-brand relationship quality was found to be a strong predictor of green brand loyalty.

The research results provide deep insight into the vital role of CSR in building green brand relationship quality and green brand loyalty for enterprises. Although the findings provide a deep understanding of the distinctive market in a developing country like Vietnam and expand the marketing literature review, this study has several limitations that should be addressed.

Firstly, CSR is a complex, multidimensional concept and is measured from many different lenses, but this study only mentions CSR from the customer's perspective with a high-order construct based on the sustainable development theory. For future studies, it is possible to consider researching and measuring CSR from the stakeholder or resource perspectives.

Secondly, the antecedents of green relationship quality mentioned two factors named CSR and GAD. It should be examined with other factors such as consumers' brand experience, service quality, or brand reputation for further research.

Thirdly, the study examined the role of CSR and GAD in the context of building long-term relationship quality between brand and consumers, but it has not yet been examined in the case of increasing green brand awareness, image, or performance. Hence, it should be expanded to the role of CSR and GAD in other business contexts. Additionally, the sample is dominated by young and highly educated respondents, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. Although this group represents a key segment of green consumers, future research should consider more diverse demographic groups to enhance external validity.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study involved human participants through a questionnaire survey. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation. The study complied with ethical principles for research involving human participants and was approved by the Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment (IRB approval No. 09/2026-KKT).

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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