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Ethical Consumerism and Natural Product Consumption Behavior: The Role of Brand Trust and Generational Differences Between Millennials and Gen Z

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ABSTRACT: Growing concerns about environmental sustainability and ethical business practices have significantly influenced consumer behavior in recent years. This study investigates the impact of ethical consumerism on consumers' purchase intention toward natural products in Vietnam, with brand trust serving as a mediating factor. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Signaling Theory, the research examines three key dimensions of ethical consumerism, including sustainability perception, supply chain transparency, and ethical production perception. 311 data of young consumers were collected from consumers in Vietnam and analyzed using structural equation modelling with SmartPLS 3 and SPSS 27. The results indicate that sustainability perception, supply chain transparency, and ethical production perception all have significant positive effects on brand trust, with ethical production perception showing the strongest influence. Brand trust is also found to significantly influence purchase intention toward natural products and mediates the relationships between ethical consumerism factors and purchase intention. In addition, the study identifies significant differences in purchase intention across generational groups, individualism–collectivism orientation, and levels of exposure to foreign environments. These findings highlight the important role of ethical perceptions and trust in shaping consumer behavior in emerging markets. The study contributes to the literature on ethical consumerism by providing empirical evidence from Vietnam and offers practical insights for businesses seeking to strengthen consumer trust and promote sustainable consumption.

KEYWORDS: Brand trust; consumption behavior; ethical consumerism; natural products; purchase intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, increasing concerns about environmental degradation, social inequality, and unsustainable production practices have intensified public scrutiny of corporate activities. Businesses are no longer evaluated solely based on economic performance but are increasingly expected to demonstrate responsibility toward society and the environment. This shift has contributed to the transformation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from a largely philanthropic activity into a strategic business imperative, shaped by rising societal expectations and growing demands for corporate transparency and accountability (Carroll, 2008). In economies undergoing recovery, which is often characterized by financial constraints, institutional fragility and socio-political uncertainty, CSR plays a particularly important role in rebuilding trust and strengthening sustainable relationships between firms and consumers. Within this evolving landscape, consumers are becoming more aware of the social and environmental implications of their purchasing decisions. Rather than acting merely as passive buyers, consumers increasingly participate in shaping markets through value-driven consumption choices (Jing & Rasiah, 2025). One of the most visible manifestations of this shift is the growing demand for natural and environmentally friendly products, which reflects consumers' attempts to reconcile personal health concerns with broader environmental and social responsibilities (Kim & Lee, 2023). Such consumption patterns highlight the expanding role of consumers as active participants in promoting sustainable development.

These developments have contributed to the growing prominence of ethical consumerism in both academic research and market practice. Ethical consumerism has been conceptualized in diverse ways across business and social science disciplines (Carrington et al., 2021). Early definitions primarily framed it as an individual-level phenomenon, referring to consumption decisions influenced by moral considerations. From this perspective, ethical consumerism involves the deliberate purchase or avoidance of products based on political, ethical, or environmental concerns. Other scholars have approached the concept from a firm-centered perspective, describing it as a strategy whereby companies offer products that appeal to consumers' ethical

values. More recently, the notion of ethical consumer literacy has been introduced, emphasizing consumers' ability to make informed consumption decisions that minimize negative social, animal, and environmental impacts. Despite these conceptual differences, a common element across definitions is the recognition that consumption practices are closely connected to broader societal and environmental consequences.

Emerging and recovering markets represent particularly relevant contexts for examining ethical consumerism and the consumption of natural products. While these markets serve as key drivers of global economic growth, they are also locations where the social and environmental costs of production are often most visible (Kutaula et al., 2024). Processes associated with globalization have frequently generated economic gains while simultaneously creating pressures on workers, communities, and ecosystems, thereby reinforcing inequality and marginalization. At the same time, consumers in such contexts are becoming increasingly aware of ethical and environmental concerns and are demanding greater transparency from firms. Nevertheless, the majority of existing research on ethical consumerism remains concentrated in developed economies, resulting in limited understanding of how these dynamics unfold in transitional or recovering markets (Hassan et al., 2022). This imbalance raises questions about the applicability of theories developed in affluent contexts to environments where affordability and economic instability strongly shape consumer priorities.

Generational differences further add complexity to the ethical consumption landscape. Generation Z has emerged as a transformative consumer cohort whose purchasing behaviors are strongly shaped by digital connectivity, social awareness, and expectations of authenticity in corporate communication (Chatzopoulou, 2020). In contrast, Millennials, as an older but still influential generation, generally possess greater purchasing power and more established consumption patterns, including a stronger willingness to pay for ethically positioned products. Generation Z occupies a unique position as both a cohort shaped by global crises and economic turbulence and a socially conscious group capable of influencing markets through value-driven consumption. Research suggests that this generation is more likely to support firms whose ethical commitments align with their personal values while demonstrating low tolerance for symbolic or inconsistent messaging (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). These differences indicate that the relationship between ethical consumerism and natural product consumption may vary across generational cohorts.

To explain these behavioral patterns, this study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) and Signaling Theory by Spence (1973) as complementary theoretical foundations. TPB explains how consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions. In the context of ethical consumption, individuals who hold positive attitudes toward ethical practices and perceive social support for responsible consumption are more likely to purchase ethically positioned products. While TPB focuses on the psychological drivers of consumer behavior, Signaling Theory explains how firms communicate ethical attributes to consumers under conditions of information asymmetry. Companies use observable signals such as ethical branding and sustainability claims to convey their ethical commitments and reduce consumer uncertainty (Spence, 1973). These signals can strengthen consumers' perceptions of credibility and contribute to building brand trust. Therefore, this study is aim to investigate the impact of ethical consumerism on consumers' brand trust which is lead to purchase intention of natural product, as well as the controlling role of consumers ' demographics. The study is divide into 5 part inluding (1) Introduction; (2) Conceptual framework and hypothesis development; (3) Methodology; (4) Results and discussion; and (5) Implications and conclusion.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Ethical Consumerism

Ethical consumerism refers to consumption choices guided by political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social, or other moral motives when selecting one product over another (Goodman et al., 2012). It encompasses products associated with concerns for animal welfare, environmental protection, human rights and fair trade (Beck & Ladwig, 2021). This form of consumerism represents ethical action based on subjective moral judgments applied to individual products and brands across the stages of production, consumption and disposal . By exercising choice in this manner, consumers create market-based incentives that encourage producers to align their production practices with prevailing consumer values. In the context of natural products, ethical consumerism is expressed through preferences for goods perceived as environmentally friendly, cruelty-free, and socially responsible, which may link individual purchasing decisions with broader sustainability goals.

Ethical consumers can be differentiated into three strands: positive ethical behavior, negative ethical behavior and consumer action . Positive ethical behavior refers to the purchase of products that are socially responsible (Khoiruman & Haryanto, 2017) and that promote positive attributes related to ethical or environmental causes. Negative ethical purchase behavior involves actions such as boycotting products that are not produced ethically (Kushwah et al., 2019), with boycott participation, including

cancel culture, representing one of the most prominent expressions of ethical consumerism. In this form, consumers express negative evaluations of products by deliberately avoiding their purchase. The third strand, consumer action, involves engagement in activities such as lobbying and advocacy aimed at encouraging brands to reform unethical production practices (Uche, 2018). Together, these strands illustrate that ethical consumerism extends beyond purchasing behavior to include resistance and activism directed at firms perceived as violating ethical standards.

Generational differences are increasingly relevant in shaping ethical consumerism. Generation Z is often described as more inclined toward positive ethical action, particularly through digitally mediated forms of engagement such as sharing government petitions and encouraging direct societal action (Graj, 2020). Their ethical orientations have been amplified by the growing availability of high-quality ethical products and the heightened visibility of human rights campaigns, political movements, environmental demonstrations and animal welfare initiatives. Consequently, many consumers, especially younger cohorts, have developed a strong interest in the ethical attributes of products. Compared with Millennials, who are frequently characterized by greater purchasing power and established consumption routines, Generation Z's ethical consumerism is more closely tied to social activism and identity expression. These generational distinctions suggest that ethical motivations may translate differently into natural product consumption behavior, which highlights the importance of examining how ethical consumerism operates across cohorts and how trust in brands mediates this process.

Dimensions of Ethical Consumerism

Ethical consumerism is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing various forms of value-driven consumption behaviors and perceptions. At its core, ethical consumerism reflects consumers' efforts to align purchasing decisions with moral, social and environmental concerns (Carrington et al., 2021). In contemporary markets, these ethical considerations extend beyond simple product choice and increasingly involve consumers' evaluation of firms' sustainability commitments, transparency practices and production ethics.

One key dimension of ethical consumerism relates to sustainability perception, which refers to consumers' evaluation of the environmental and social sustainability of products and brands. Consumers who engage in ethical consumption often prioritize products perceived as environmentally friendly, resource-efficient and socially responsible. This includes preferences for natural or organic products, eco-friendly packaging, and environmentally responsible sourcing practices. Research has shown that sustainability perceptions significantly influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward green and ethical products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; White et al., 2019). In the context of natural products, sustainability perception often manifests through consumers' concern for environmental protection, health consciousness and long-term ecological well-being.

Besides, supply chain transparency which reflects the extent to which consumers perceive firms as openly communicating information about sourcing, production processes and labor practices. Transparency plays a critical role in ethical consumption because many ethical product attributes such as fair labor practices or responsible sourcing are not directly observable by consumers. As a result, consumers rely on corporate disclosures, certifications, and communication signals to assess whether firms operate responsibly. Previous studies suggest that greater transparency in supply chains can strengthen consumer trust and enhance perceptions of corporate responsibility (Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2016; Mol, 2015). Transparent communication about sourcing practices, supplier relationships, and environmental standards therefore becomes an important mechanism through which firms support ethical consumer decision-making.

Another important dimension is ethical production perception, which refers to consumers' beliefs about whether products are produced under fair, humane and socially responsible conditions. This includes concerns related to labor rights, fair wages, safe working environments, and the avoidance of harmful or exploitative practices. Ethical production perceptions are particularly salient in globalized markets where production often occurs in distant locations, making it difficult for consumers to directly evaluate manufacturing conditions. Studies indicate that consumers are increasingly attentive to ethical production standards and may reward firms that demonstrate responsible labor and production practices (Auger et al., 2003; Shaw et al., 2006). Such perceptions influence both consumer trust and their willingness to support ethically positioned brands. These dimensions highlight that ethical consumerism extends beyond individual purchasing behavior to encompass broader evaluations of corporate sustainability, transparency, and ethical production practices. By integrating these elements, ethical consumerism reflects consumers' growing expectations that firms operate responsibly across the entire value chain. In this sense, ethical consumerism emerges not only from personal moral values but also from consumers' assessments of how firms manage environmental sustainability, communicate transparently and ensure ethical production standards.

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Natural Product Consumption Behavior

Natural product consumption behavior refers to consumers' patterns of evaluation, choice, and purchase of products perceived as natural or environmentally friendly, and it is strongly shaped by the characteristics and attributes of such products. It is almost impossible to discuss green or natural products without considering their intrinsic and extrinsic features, as these characteristics provide consumers with cues to assess product credibility and value. Cheung et al (2019) found that green product information plays a crucial role in determining consumers' green purchase behavior, as it reduces uncertainty and enhances perceived transparency regarding product benefits. In line with this view, Zhang & Dong (2020) argued that a green product must be perceived as credible in order to be appreciated by potential buyers, highlighting the important role of eco-labels as informational signals that influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Eco-labels serve as visible indicators of environmental performance and help consumers differentiate green products from conventional alternatives.

Beyond eco-labels, consumers increasingly consider multiple product-related factors when forming their purchasing decisions. Prior studies indicate that perceived quality is one of the most influential determinants of consumer behavior toward green product (Wasaya et al., 2021). High perceived quality reassures consumers that green products are not only environmentally responsible but also functionally reliable and worth their price. Similarly, awareness and knowledge of green products have been found to significantly affect purchasing behavior, as informed consumers are more likely to recognize and value the benefits of environmentally friendly products. When consumers possess higher levels of awareness, they are more capable of evaluating product claims and distinguishing genuinely green products from those engaging in superficial environmental marketing.

A comprehensive review of the literature shows that consumer behavior toward green products is influenced by a wide range of product characteristics, including price, quality, availability, packaging, eco-labels, material, functional value and green product information (Ansu-Mensah, 2021). Price plays a dual role, as green products are often perceived as more expensive, which may discourage some consumers while simultaneously reinforcing perceptions of superior quality and environmental value. Availability is also a critical factor, as the presence of green products across different retail channels increases consumers' opportunities to compare brands and make environmentally responsible choices. Greater availability not only facilitates access but also normalizes green consumption by integrating such products into everyday purchasing contexts. Perceived quality has been consistently shown to exert a strong impact on green purchasing intentions (Rozenkowska, 2023). Consumers tend to associate natural and green products with health benefits, safety, and environmental protection, however, these associations must be supported by tangible product performance in order to sustain long-term consumption behavior. Packaging further contributes to shaping quality perceptions, as it acts as a visual and symbolic cue that communicates product values and reinforces green positioning. Environmentally friendly packaging can strengthen consumers' belief in a product's naturalness and ethical orientation, which thereby encourages repeated purchase behavior. These findings suggest that natural product consumption behavior is not driven solely by moral or environmental concern but is also deeply rooted in consumers' evaluations of product attributes.

Brand Trust

Brand trust encapsulates the faith and confidence consumers harbor regarding the sincerity and integrity embodied in a brand's actions and communications. This trust extends to an anticipation that the brand will act favorably even under conditions of uncertainty or lack of consumer control (Gretry et al., 2017). The pivotal role of brand trust lies in its ability to foster and sustain long-term relationships between firms and consumers. Trust in a brand reduces perceived risk in purchasing decisions thereby cultivating consumer loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth. Moreover, consumers are often willing to pay a premium for products from trusted brands because trust signals superior safety and quality.

The influence of brand trust on purchasing behavior has received substantial attention in marketing research, particularly in digital and retail environments. Empirical evidence suggests that brand trust directly affects purchase intention (Zuech et al., 2015). It has also been identified as a mediator between perceived website quality and purchase intention, and as a driver of consumer loyalty and repeat purchase behavior in retail contexts. This effect is especially pronounced in high-risk product categories, where consumers rely on brand credibility and consistency to mitigate uncertainty. Furthermore, brand trust can buffer the negative impact of adverse information, such as unfavorable reviews or negative publicity as consumers with established trust are more likely to interpret such information leniently (Folse et al., 2013).

In the context of ethical consumerism and natural product consumption, brand trust increasingly overlaps with the notion of green trust. Green trust reflects the degree of confidence that a brand will fulfill its environmental and product-related commitments (Gupta, 2021). It plays a critical role in explaining why consumers choose one green or natural product over

another and helps shield them from uncertainty when purchasing eco-friendly products. Positive consumption experiences further reinforce trust in green products (Ching, 2025). However, despite the growing availability of green and natural products, many consumers still exhibit limited understanding of environmental responsibility and product ethics, which constrains market penetration. Green purchase intention, which reflects environmentally conscious attitudes, serves as the foundation for actual green purchasing behavior, and the raising awareness of green products can facilitate a shift from conventional to environmentally friendly consumption patterns. Practically, Gen Z has demonstrated strong concern for environmental protection. Large-scale youth protests, such as the global climate demonstrations illustrated this cohort's active engagement with sustainability issues (BBC News, 2019). These movements have compelled firms to reconsider production and distribution practices by adopting greener operations. In the footwear industry, for instance, Timberland integrated recycled rubber into its product lines, Adidas produced shoes using recycled ocean plastics, and Nike utilized recycled factory waste (Borah et al., 2024). Additionally, collaborations such as the low-carbon footwear initiative between Allbirds and Adidas further reflect how corporate responses to ethical and environmental concerns can enhance consumer trust.

Hypothesis Development

Ethical Consumerism Dimensions and Brand Trust

Consumer concern about the environmental and social impacts of food production has increased demand for sustainability-related information, as all stages of the food chain affect environmental and social outcomes. Sustainability attributes of food products are largely credence attributes that cannot be directly verified at the point of purchase, which create information asymmetry between producers and consumers. According to the signalling theory, sustainability information communicated through labels and packaging serves as a credible signal that helps consumers infer firms' environmental and social responsibility, thereby reducing uncertainty and strengthening trust toward brands. Empirical evidence supports this mechanism, for examples, Aprile & Punzo (2022) find that perceived sustainability information significantly enhances consumer trust in food brands by clarifying production practices, while Skordoulis et al. (2024) demonstrate that perceptions of environmental and social responsibility of organic and sustainable products positively affect brand evaluations and trust. Although positive associations between organic food consumption and environmental concern have been reported in several European contexts , empirical evidence remains limited in emerging markets such as Vietnam. Given the growing demand for natural and sustainable products, examining the effect of sustainability perception on brand trust is therefore warranted. Younger consumers appear particularly sensitive to sustainability and eco-friendly values when evaluating food brands, although existing evidence mainly derives from European contexts. From above agurements, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Sustainability perception positively influences brand trust towards natural products in Vietnam.

Supply chain transparency defined as the extent to which firms disclose information regarding sourcing, production and distribution processes, functions as a critical signal of ethical and sustainable business conduct. From the perspective of signalling theory, transparent disclosure reduces information asymmetry and enables consumers to infer the credibility and integrity of firms' claims, thereby strengthening brand trust. Recent research emphasizes that transparency in sustainability-related practices significantly enhances consumer confidence, particularly in markets where ethical and environmental concerns increasingly shape purchasing decisions (Holloway, 2024). Empirical evidence further indicates that consumers are more likely to trust brands perceived as transparent and socially responsible, as transparency demonstrates accountability and commitment to stakeholder welfare. Moreover, rising consumer awareness of environmental and social issues has intensified expectations for responsible supply chain practices making transparency especially relevant for natural products, whose ethical attributes are largely credence-based. Although transparency initiatives are often challenged by technological and resource constraints (Emon & Khan, 2023), technology-enabled solutions such as blockchain and collaborative supplier management have been shown to enhance traceability and credibility (Emon et al., 2024). Despite this growing body of research, empirical evidence remains limited in emerging markets such as Vietnam. From above agurements, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Supply chain transparency positively influences brand trust towards natural products in Vietnam.

Ethical production perception reflects consumers' evaluation of whether a firm's production processes comply with moral, social, and environmental standards such as fair labor practices, animal welfare and environmentally responsible manufacturing. From the perspective of ethical consumerism, consumers increasingly rely on such ethical cues to reduce uncertainty and evaluate the credibility of product claims. In this sense, ethical production perception functions as an important cognitive signal that shapes consumers' beliefs about the reliability and integrity of a brand. Trust is considered a critical determinant of consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions, as it reduces perceived risk and enhances confidence in product attributes (Filip et al., 2025). In ethical and eco-friendly consumption contexts, trust refers to consumers' willingness to rely on the attributes of

ecological products. Empirical evidence supports the positive link between ethical or green perceptions and trust. A previous study indicates that eco-trust can transform potential barriers such as higher prices into drivers of purchase intention, while the lack of trust may hinder consumers' willingness to buy eco-products even when they are motivated and financially capable. Ethical production perception therefore strengthens brand trust by signaling authenticity and moral responsibility, especially in markets where production processes are difficult to directly observe. Such perceptions reassure consumers that the brand's ethical claims are credible and value-driven rather than opportunistic (Mochla & Tsourvakas, 2024). In emerging markets such as Vietnam, where concerns about product authenticity and misleading environmental claims remain prevalent, ethical production perception is expected to play an even more crucial role in building brand trust toward natural products. From above agurements, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Ethical production perception positively influences brand trust towards natural products in Vietnam.

Brand Trust and Purchase Intention Towards Natural Products

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, purchase intention plays a central role in explaining and predicting consumer behavior. In ethical and natural product consumption, brand trust functions as an important cognitive belief that reduces uncertainty and perceived risk associated with product quality and ethical claims. When consumers trust a brand, they are more confident that the product truly reflects its environmental and ethical promises, which strengthens their willingness to purchase. Thus, brand trust operates as a psychological mechanism translating ethical perceptions into purchase intention. Empirical studies indicate that purchase intention is crucial for understanding and predicting actual consumer behavior (Constantino et al., 2022). In the context of eco-friendly products, Putri et al (2024) demonstrated that consumers' perceptions significantly influence purchase intention, which in turn drives actual purchase behavior of organic foods. This suggests that trustworthy perceptions toward brands are essential in motivating consumers to form purchase intentions for eco-friendly and natural products. Moreover, in ethical consumption contexts, insufficient trust in firms' claims may weaken the intention and behavior linkage, which indicates the importance of trust in shaping purchase intention. Therefore, when consumers perceive a natural product brand as reliable and credible in delivering ethical and environmental value, their intention to purchase such products is likely to increase. Although prior research has examined the link between perception, intention, and behavior in eco-friendly products (Kim & Lee, 2023), limited studies have focused on the role of brand trust in forming purchase intention toward natural products in emerging markets such as Vietnam. Given the growing importance of ethical consumerism and concerns over misleading green claims, brand trust is expected to play a decisive role in motivating Vietnamese consumers to choose natural products. From above agurements, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand trust positively influences purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Brand trust plays a central role in transforming ethical and sustainability-related perceptions into actual purchase intentions. From a theoretical perspective, brand trust reflects consumers' willingness to rely on a brand's ability and integrity in fulfilling its promises (Hollebeek et al., 2024). When consumers perceive that a brand is committed to sustainability, transparent supply chains, and ethical production practices, these perceptions act as signals of reliability and moral responsibility. Such signals reduce uncertainty and strengthen consumers' confidence that the brand genuinely delivers on its environmental and social claims, thereby fostering trust. Empirical evidence supports the mediating role of trust between firm practices and consumer behavioral outcomes. Prior studies demonstrate that reliable organizational practices and consistent delivery on promises enhance long-term relationships between consumers and firms through trust . High-quality performance and value delivery increase customer-based brand equity and loyalty by strengthening trust (Silva-Treviño et al., 2021). Moreover, when firms meet consumer expectations, they generate satisfaction and perceived reliability, which in turn reinforces brand trust. Trust has also been shown to be positively associated with consumers' willingness to rely on brands and translate favorable perceptions into behavioral intentions. Delivering on ethical and sustainability promises further strengthens perceptions of integrity and credibility, which are essential for trust formation.

In the context of ethical consumerism and natural products, sustainability perception, supply chain transparency and ethical production perception can be viewed as antecedents that shape consumers' evaluations of a brand's moral and functional credibility. However, these perceptions are unlikely to directly influence purchase intention unless they are internalized as trust in the brand. Therefore, brand trust is expected to function as a psychological mechanism that channels the effects of these ethical perceptions into consumers' willingness to purchase natural products. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a: Brand trust mediates the relationship between sustainability perception and purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

H5b: Brand trust mediates the relationship between supply chain transparency and purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

H5c: Brand trust mediates the relationship between ethical production perception and purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

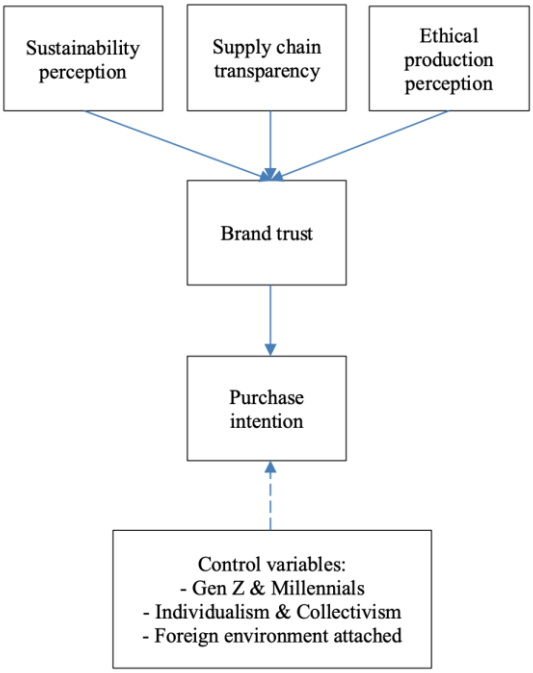


Figure 1. Research Model

Control Variables

Differences in purchase intention toward natural and organic products can be explained through generational theory, which posits that cohorts shaped by distinct historical, technological, and socio-cultural contexts develop different values and consumption patterns . Millennials (born 1980–1994) and Generation Z (born 1995–2015) exhibit different relationships with luxury, sustainability and food consumption (Windasari et al., 2022). Organic and natural products are increasingly perceived as luxury items associated with ethical and environmental values. Empirical studies indicate positive associations between organic consumption and environmental concern, while evidence from European contexts suggests that younger generations may redefine luxury by integrating sustainability and eco-friendliness into their consumption choices (Wiedenroth & Otter, 2021). These findings imply that Millennials and Gen Z are likely to differ in their purchase intentions toward natural products.

Cultural value orientation further explains variations in ethical and sustainable consumption. Individuals with collectivist orientations are more likely to prioritize social and environmental welfare, whereas individualists focus on personal benefits and self-expression. Since organic and natural products are closely linked to environmental stewardship and ethical responsibility, consumers' individualism–collectivism orientation is expected to influence their purchase intention. Empirical research has reported positive associations between pro-environmental values and organic product preferences , suggesting that cultural orientation can generate significant differences in purchasing behavior. Exposure to foreign environments shapes consumer perceptions through acculturation and social learning processes. Consumers with greater international exposure tend to adopt global sustainability norms and associate organic products with prestige, quality, and environmental responsibility (Brand et al., 2022). The luxury positioning of organic products, reinforced by marketing strategies emphasizing exclusivity and ethical sourcing, further strengthens this effect. Empirical evidence shows that environmental concern and organic consumption are positively related, which implying that consumers with higher exposure to foreign environments may develop stronger intentions to purchase natural products. Based on the above theoretical arguments and empirical findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6a: There are significant differences between Generation Z and Millennials in purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

H6b: There are significant differences across individualism–collectivism orientation in purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

H6c: There are significant differences between levels of exposure to foreign environments in purchase intention towards natural products in Vietnam.

III. METHODOLOGY

Measurement and Questionnaire Development

The measurement instrument was developed based on previously validated scales from prior research on sustainability, ethical consumption and green consumer behavior. The questionnaire included several key constructs: sustainability perception (SP), supply chain transparency (SCT), ethical production perception (EPP) brand trust (BT), and purchase intention (PI). All construct items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - Strongly disagree" to "5 - Strongly agree". A pilot test with a small group of participants was conducted to verify the clarity, readability and reliability of the measurement items before proceeding with the full-scale data collection.

Accordingly, sustainability perception was measured using 3 items adapted from Aprile & Punzo (2022) and Skordoulis et al. (2024). Supply chain transparency was assessed with 4 items based on Holloway (2024), while ethical production perception was measured using 4 items adapted from Mochla & Tsourvakas (2024). Brand trust was evaluated using 4 items derived from Borah et al. (2024) and Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos (2025), and purchase intention was measured using 5 items adapted from Kim & Lee (2023) and Filip et al. (2025). All items were slightly refined to ensure suitability for the context of ethical consumerism and natural product consumption in Vietnam while preserving their original theoretical meaning.

Sample, data collection and analysis

The data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to Vietnamese consumers to examine ethical consumerism and natural product consumption behavior, with particular attention to the role of brand trust and generational differences between Generation Z and Millennials. The questionnaire was distributed through both online and offline channels, including social media platforms, university networks, and direct in-person distribution at educational institutions and public locations. This mixed-mode distribution strategy enabled the study to reach a diverse group of respondents who represent potential consumers of ethical and natural products.

A stratified sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across the two key generational cohorts and gender groups. Specifically, the sample was stratified based on generation (Generation Z and Millennials) and gender (male and female) to ensure balanced representation across these categories, which are central to the research objectives. Within each stratum, respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling method, allowing the study to efficiently access participants while maintaining variation across demographic backgrounds. In addition to the stratification criteria, the questionnaire collected several demographic and socio-cultural characteristics to capture potential variations in ethical consumption behavior and brand trust formation. These included educational level (high school or below, college/bachelor's degree, postgraduate) and monthly personal income (less than 15 million VND, 15–30 million VND, 30–50 million VND, and above 50 million VND). Respondents were also categorized based on their cultural orientation (individualistic or collectivistic) and their exposure to foreign environments, such as through education, living arrangements, parental influence, or other international or cross-cultural experiences. Although these characteristics were not used as stratification criteria, they were collected to enhance the diversity of the sample and to better capture socio-cultural factors that may influence ethical perceptions and consumption behavior.

Accordingly, a total of 311 valid responses were obtained and included in the final dataset for analysis. The combination of stratified sampling across generation and gender, together with convenience-based recruitment across other demographic characteristics, provided a sufficiently diverse sample for examining the relationships between ethical consumerism, brand trust, and natural product consumption behavior, as well as for comparing differences between Generation Z and Millennial consumers in Vietnam.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3 to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model and to test the proposed hypotheses regarding ethical consumerism and natural product consumption behavior. In addition, SPSS 27 was used to perform descriptive statistical analyses and Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA to examine differences in purchase intention toward natural products across generational groups (Generation Z and Millennials), cultural orientation (individualism–collectivism), and levels of exposure to foreign environments.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics of Respondents

A total of 311 respondents participated in this study, representing both Generation Z and Millennial consumers. Among them, Generation Z accounted for 193 respondents, while 118 respondents belonged to the Millennial cohort, indicating that younger consumers constituted the majority of the sample. In terms of gender distribution, the sample included 142 male respondents and 169 female respondents, reflecting a relatively balanced representation with a slightly higher proportion of females. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents held a college or bachelor's degree (233 respondents), followed by 52 respondents with a high school education or below, and 26 respondents with postgraduate qualifications. This suggests that the sample largely consisted of individuals with higher education levels, which is consistent with consumer groups that are more aware of sustainability and ethical consumption issues.

With respect to monthly personal income, 128 respondents reported earning less than 15 million VND, while 109 respondents earned between 15 and 30 million VND. In addition, 49 respondents reported income between 30 and 50 million VND, and 25 respondents earned above 50 million VND, indicating variation in purchasing power and economic capacity among participants. In terms of cultural orientation, the majority of respondents identified as collectivistic (270 respondents), while 41 respondents were classified as individualistic, reflecting the dominant collectivist cultural characteristics commonly observed in Asian contexts. Furthermore, respondents reported different levels of attachment to foreign environments, with 158 respondents indicating exposure through living environments, 55 through educational settings, 54 through parental influence, and 44 through other forms of international or cross-cultural exposure.

The demographic profile in Table 1 demonstrates that the sample includes diverse generational, socio-economic, cultural and international exposure characteristics, which provides an appropriate basis for examining ethical consumerism, brand trust and natural product consumption behavior among Generation Z and Millennial consumers.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Demographics		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	142	45.7
	Female	169	54.3
Generation	Generation Z	193	62.1
	Millennials	118	37.9
Educational level	High school or below	52	16.7
	College/ Bachelor's degree	233	74.9
	Postgraduate	26	8.4
Monthly personal income	Less than 15 million	128	41.2
	15 million – 30 million	109	35.0
	30 million – 50 million	49	15.8
	Above 50 million	25	8.0
Cultural orientation	Individualism	41	13.2
	Collectivism	270	86.8
Foreign environment attached	School	55	17.7
	Living	158	50.8
	Parents	54	17.4
	Others	44	14.1
Total		**311**	**100**

Scale Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table 2 reports the reliability and convergent validity statistics for the study constructs, including sustainability perception (SP), supply chain transparency (SCT), ethical production perception (EPP), brand trust (BT), and purchase intention (PI), as well as the grouping variables Generation, Orientation, and Foreign environment attachment. The results indicate strong internal consistency reliability, as all Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70. In particular, purchase intention (PI) demonstrates the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.940$; CR = 0.954), followed by sustainability perception (SP) ($\alpha = 0.919$; CR = 0.949), ethical production perception (EPP) ($\alpha = 0.895$; CR = 0.927), and brand trust (BT) ($\alpha = 0.881$; CR = 0.919). Supply chain transparency (SCT) also shows acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.785$; CR = 0.850).

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SP	0.919	0.923	0.949	0.861
SCT	0.785	0.868	0.850	0.587
EPP	0.895	0.902	0.927	0.762
BT	0.881	0.884	0.919	0.738
PI	0.940	0.942	0.954	0.806

Source: *Data analysis by SmartPLS 3*

Convergent validity is also confirmed, as all AVE values range from 0.587 to 0.861, exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50. Sustainability perception (AVE = 0.861) and purchase intention (AVE = 0.806) show particularly strong convergent validity, indicating that their indicators explain a high proportion of construct variance. Overall, these results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and convergent validity.

In addition to reliability and convergent validity, discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. Two commonly used methods were applied: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BT	EPP	Foreign	Generation	PI	SCT	SP	Orientation
BT	0.859							
EPP	0.629	0.873						
Foreign	0.319	0.046	1.000					
Generation	-0.173	-0.358	0.550	1.000				
PI	0.415	0.180	0.321	0.126	0.898			
SCT	0.519	0.391	0.306	-0.191	0.276	0.766		
SP	0.578	0.638	0.272	-0.112	0.500	0.401	0.928	
Orientation	0.227	0.102	0.119	-0.498	-0.135	0.238	-0.090	1.000

Source: *Data analysis by SmartPLS 3*

Table 3 presents the discriminant validity results using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE values for the main constructs, including brand trust (0.859), ethical production perception (0.873), purchase intention (0.898), supply chain transparency (0.766), and sustainability perception (0.928), are all higher than their correlations with other constructs. This indicates that each construct is empirically distinct and adequately captures different dimensions of ethical consumerism and natural product consumption behavior. The constructs such as Generation, Orientation, and Foreign environment attachment show values of 1.000 for Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE because they are measured as single item or categorical variables, rather than multi item latent constructs.

The HTMT results in Table 4 further support discriminant validity, as all HTMT values range from 0.059 to 0.706, which are below the recommended threshold of 0.85. This indicates that the constructs are sufficiently different from one another and measure separate conceptual dimensions. Overall, both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT analysis confirm satisfactory discriminant validity of the measurement model, which supportes the suitability for structural equation modelling.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	BT	EPP	Foreign	Generation	PI	SCT	SP	Orientation
BT								
EPP	0.706							
Foreign	0.338	0.059						
Generation	0.184	0.382	0.550					
PI	0.452	0.193	0.330	0.127				
SCT	0.549	0.442	0.306	0.218	0.289			
SP	0.638	0.701	0.284	0.116	0.538	0.430		
Orientation	0.241	0.128	0.119	0.498	0.137	0.231	0.097	

Source: *Data analysis by SmartPLS 3*

Research Model Assessment and Discussion

Table 5 presents the structural equation modelling results estimated using SmartPLS, examining the relationships among sustainability perception, supply chain transparency, ethical production perception, brand trust, and purchase intention toward natural products in Vietnam, as well as the mediating role of brand trust and generational, cultural, and foreign exposure differences. Overall, the model explains 50.8% of the variance in brand trust (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.508$) and 27.2% of the variance in purchase intention (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.272$), indicating moderate explanatory power and confirming the relevance of ethical and trust-related factors in shaping natural product consumption behavior.

The structural model results show that sustainability perception has a positive and statistically significant effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.225$, $t = 3.997$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H1. This finding indicates that when consumers perceive natural product brands as environmentally responsible and committed to sustainability, their level of trust in those brands increases. Sustainability perception serves as an important signal of corporate responsibility, reflecting the brand's commitment to environmental protection, resource conservation, and long-term ecological balance. In the context of natural products, where consumers often rely on intangible environmental claims, perceived sustainability helps reduce uncertainty and strengthens confidence in the brand. This result is consistent with prior studies (Aprile & Punzo, 2022; Skordoulis et al., 2024), which emphasize that sustainability perceptions significantly enhance consumer trust and strengthen positive brand evaluations, particularly among environmentally conscious consumers.

The findings indicate that supply chain transparency has a positive and significant effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 5.358$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H2. This result suggests that when consumers have access to clear and reliable information about sourcing, manufacturing, and distribution processes, they are more likely to trust the brand. Transparency reduces information asymmetry between companies and consumers and enhances perceptions of honesty and accountability. In the natural product sector, where authenticity and ethical sourcing are critical concerns, transparent supply chain communication reassures consumers about product origin and ethical compliance. This finding aligns with Holloway (2024), who argues that supply chain transparency plays a crucial role in strengthening consumer trust by improving perceived credibility and organizational integrity. Therefore, brands that openly disclose their production and sourcing practices can enhance trust and strengthen long-term consumer relationships.

The results demonstrate that ethical production perception has the strongest positive effect on brand trust among the antecedents examined ($\beta = 0.375$, $t = 5.028$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H3. This finding indicates that consumers are highly sensitive to ethical aspects of production, such as fair labor practices, environmentally responsible manufacturing, and socially responsible business conduct. When consumers perceive that natural products are produced ethically, they are more likely to view the brand as trustworthy and morally responsible. Ethical production enhances the perceived integrity and authenticity of the brand, which strengthens emotional and cognitive trust. This result is consistent with Mochla & Tsourvakas (2024), who highlight that ethical consumption values significantly influence trust and positive consumer responses, especially among younger generations. The relatively strong effect size suggests that ethical production is a key determinant of trust formation in the natural product market.

Table 5. Structural Equation Modelling Results Estimates

Paths	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
SP -> BT	0.225	0.220	0.056	3.997	0.000
SCT -> BT	0.282	0.284	0.053	5.358	0.000
EPP -> BT	0.375	0.384	0.075	5.028	0.000
BT -> PI	0.353	0.357	0.059	5.970	0.000
SP -> BT -> PI	0.079	0.078	0.023	3.414	0.001
SCT -> BT -> PI	0.100	0.102	0.025	3.962	0.000
EPP -> BT -> PI	0.132	0.137	0.035	3.756	0.000
Generation -> PI	-0.174	-0.181	0.084	2.082	0.038
Orientation -> PI	-0.343	-0.343	0.072	4.767	0.000
Foreign -> PI	0.345	0.345	0.083	4.143	0.000
Adjusted R^2: BT = 0.508; PI = 0.272					

Source: *Data analysis by SmartPLS 3*

The analysis shows that brand trust has a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention (β = 0.353, t = 5.970, p < 0.001), thereby supporting H4. This finding confirms that brand trust plays a central role in translating favorable ethical and sustainability perceptions into actual behavioral intentions. When consumers trust a brand, they are more confident in the credibility, safety, and authenticity of its natural products, which strengthens their willingness to purchase. Trust functions as a risk-reduction mechanism, particularly in the natural product market where environmental and ethical attributes are not always directly observable or easily verified by consumers. As a result, consumers rely heavily on trusted brands as a signal of product reliability and ethical integrity. Furthermore, trust enhances both emotional assurance and cognitive evaluation, enabling consumers to form stronger purchase commitments even when products are priced higher than conventional alternatives. This result is consistent with Borah et al. (2024), who found that green brand trust significantly increases sustainable purchase behavior, and Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos (2025), who emphasize that trust is a key mechanism through which sustainability-related brand attributes influence consumer decision-making, particularly among younger and environmentally aware consumers.

The mediation analysis confirms the significant mediating role of brand trust in the relationships between sustainability perception, supply chain transparency, ethical production perception, and purchase intention, thereby supporting H5a, H5b, and H5c. Specifically, sustainability perception has a significant indirect effect on purchase intention through brand trust (β = 0.079, t = 3.414, p = 0.001), indicating that consumers' perceptions of environmental sustainability are more likely to translate into purchase intention when they strengthen trust in the brand. This suggests that sustainability initiatives alone may not be sufficient to directly influence consumer behavior unless they are perceived as credible and trustworthy. Similarly, supply chain transparency also demonstrates a significant indirect effect on purchase intention via brand trust (β = 0.100, t = 3.962, p < 0.001). This finding implies that transparent disclosure of sourcing, production, and operational practices enhances consumer confidence, reduces skepticism, and ultimately strengthens trust, which then increases purchase intention. Furthermore, ethical production perception shows the strongest indirect effect through brand trust (β = 0.132, t = 3.756, p < 0.001), highlighting that consumers who perceive ethical labor practices, responsible sourcing, and socially responsible production are more likely to trust the brand and, consequently, develop stronger purchase intentions. Collectively, these results emphasize that brand trust serves as a critical psychological mechanism that converts ethical and sustainability-related perceptions into actual behavioral intentions. Rather than influencing purchase intention directly, sustainability perception, transparency, and ethical production primarily exert their influence by reinforcing consumers' confidence in the brand's integrity and authenticity. This finding

underscores the central role of trust in ethical consumerism, suggesting that sustainability and ethical initiatives are most effective when they contribute to building credible and trustworthy brand relationships rather than functioning solely as informational or promotional signals.

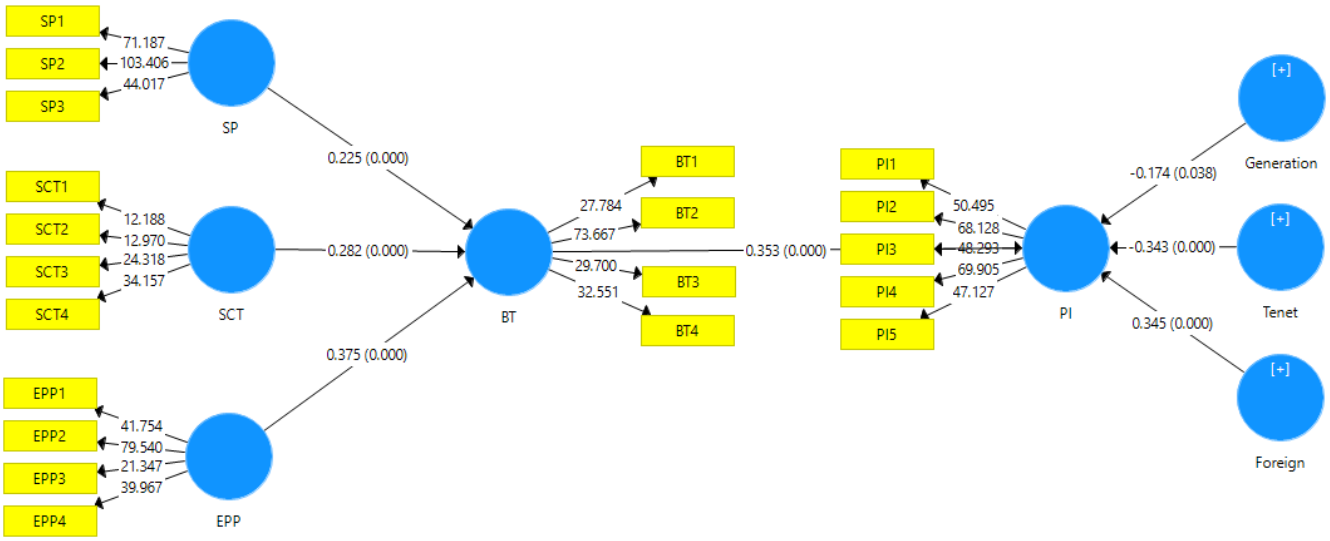


Figure 2. PLS Bootstrapping Model

Source: *Data analysis by SmartPLS 3*

The results confirm that generation, orientation, and foreign environment attachment significantly influence purchase intention toward natural products. Specifically, generation (Generation Z vs. Millennials) has a statistically significant effect on purchase intention (β = −0.174, t = 2.082, p = 0.038), indicating that purchase intention differs between Generation Z and Millennials. The negative coefficient suggests that differences in financial independence, sustainability awareness, consumption priorities, and life experience influence how consumers evaluate natural products. Millennials, who generally have greater purchasing power and more stable consumption patterns, may demonstrate stronger purchase intention, while Generation Z consumers may still be developing consistent ethical consumption habits. In addition, orientation (Individualistic vs. Collectivistic) shows a strong and statistically significant effect on purchase intention (β = −0.343, t = 4.767, p < 0.001), confirming that consumers with different orientation orientations exhibit different levels of intention to purchase natural products. Consumers with a collectivistic orientation may be more motivated by social responsibility, environmental protection, and collective well being, whereas those with an individualistic orientation may prioritize personal benefits such as convenience, price, or product effectiveness. Furthermore, foreign environment attachment (school, living, parents, or other foreign related exposure) has a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention (β = 0.345, t = 4.143, p < 0.001). This finding indicates that consumers exposed to foreign environments through international education, overseas living experiences, family background, or other global influences are more likely to develop stronger purchase intention toward natural products. Such exposure may increase awareness of sustainability standards and ethical consumption practices. Overall, these findings highlight that generation, orientation, and foreign environment attachment are important contextual factors shaping ethical consumerism and natural product purchase intention in Vietnam.

To test hypotheses H6a, H6b, and H6c, the study used SPSS27 to assess mean differences between generation and cultural orientation groups using T-tests and employed one-way ANOVA with the foreign environmental attached group.

In the Tbale 6, Levene's test is not statistically significant (F = 2.937, p = 0.088), indicating that the assumption of equal variances between Generation Z and Millennials is satisfied. Therefore, the equal variances assumed result is used. The independent samples t-test shows a statistically significant difference in purchase intention between the two generations (t = −2.191, p = 0.029). The negative mean difference (−0.26489) indicates that one generation reports lower purchase intention toward natural products compared to the other. In addition, the 95% confidence interval does not include zero (−0.50275 to −0.02703), confirming the robustness of the difference. The effect size (Cohen's d ≈ −0.256) indicates a small to moderate practical effect. Overall, these findings support the presence of generational differences in ethical consumerism, suggesting that

Generation Z and Millennials differ in their willingness to purchase natural products, likely due to variations in sustainability awareness, consumption values, and purchasing power.

Table 6. T-test Results for Generation and Cultural Orientation Groups

Statistic	Generation	Cultural orientation
Group	Gen Z/Millennials	Individualism/ Collectivism
t	-2.191	2.359
df	309	309
p (2-tailed)	0.029	0.019
Mean Difference	-0.265	0.409
95% CI	[-0.503, -0.027]	[0.068, 0.749]
Cohen's d	-0.256	0.395

Source: *Data analysis by SPSS 27*

Besides, Levene's test for equality of variances is not statistically significant (F = 0.454, p = 0.501), indicating that the assumption of equal variances is satisfied. Therefore, the equal variances assumed result is used. The independent samples t-test reveals a statistically significant difference in purchase intention between the two individualism–collectivism orientation groups (t = 2.359, p = 0.019). Specifically, consumers in group 1 report a higher level of purchase intention (Mean = 3.8293) compared to those in group 2 (Mean = 3.4207), with a mean difference of 0.40853. The 95% confidence interval (0.06778 to 0.74928) does not include zero, confirming the reliability of this difference. Furthermore, the effect size is moderate (Cohen's d ≈ 0.395), indicating meaningful practical significance. Overall, the findings suggest that cultural orientation plays an important role in shaping ethical consumerism, as consumers with stronger collectivist or socially oriented values tend to show greater willingness to purchase natural and ethically produced products.

Table 7. ANOVA Result for Foreign Environment Attachment Group

Test	df	F / Statistic	p-value
Levene's Test (Homogeneity of Variances)	(3, 307)	14.229	< 0.001
One-way ANOVA	(3, 307)	45.737	< 0.001
Welch Robust Test	(3, 109.207)	25.239	< 0.001

Source: *Data analysis by SPSS 27*

For foreign environment attachment group, the Levene's test for equality of variances is statistically significant (p < 0.001), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is violated. Therefore, a robust test was conducted to ensure the reliability of the results. The Welch test confirms that there are statistically significant differences in purchase intention across different levels of foreign environment attachment (Welch = 25.239, p < 0.001), supporting the robustness of the ANOVA findings. Similarly, the ANOVA results show a significant difference between groups (F = 45.737, p < 0.001), indicating that exposure to foreign environments significantly influences consumers' purchase intention toward natural products. These findings suggest that individuals with greater international exposure tend to demonstrate stronger ethical consumption tendencies and higher intention to purchase natural products. Thus, research hypotheses H6a, H6b, and H6c are all supported.

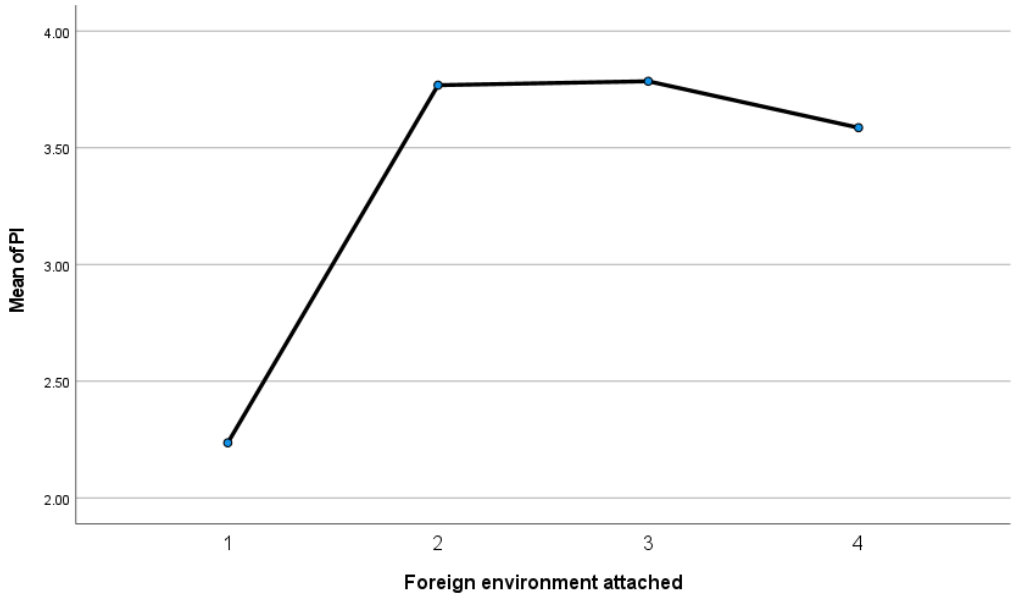


Figure 3: Mean Plots of Foreign Environment Attachment Group

Source: *Data analysis by SPSS 27*

V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on ethical consumerism by clarifying how ethical perceptions influence consumer behavior toward natural products in an emerging market context. The findings demonstrate that key dimensions of ethical consumerism such as sustainability perception, supply chain transparency and ethical production perception, significantly shape consumers' trust toward brands. Among these factors, ethical production perception shows the strongest influence, highlighting the importance of responsible production practices in building consumer trust. The study also emphasizes the central role of brand trust as a mechanism linking ethical perceptions to purchase intention. The results confirm that brand trust not only directly influences consumers' intention to purchase natural products but also mediates the relationships between ethical consumerism factors and purchase intention. This finding strengthens existing theoretical discussions by showing that ethical values are more likely to translate into purchasing behavior when consumers perceive the brand as credible and trustworthy.

In addition, the research integrates insights from the Theory of Planned Behavior and Signaling Theory to explain how consumers interpret ethical information communicated by firms. Ethical signals related to sustainability, transparency, and responsible production help reduce information asymmetry and strengthen trust, thereby influencing consumer decision-making. Finally, the study extends the literature by examining ethical consumerism in Vietnam, an emerging market where empirical evidence remains limited. The findings further reveal that generational characteristics, cultural orientation, and exposure to foreign environments significantly influence purchase intention toward natural products. These results highlight the importance of demographic and cultural factors in shaping ethical consumption behavior in transitional economies.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several important implications for businesses operating in the natural product market. The significant influence of ethical consumerism factors on brand trust suggests that companies should place greater emphasis on integrating ethical practices into their core business strategies. In particular, ethical production perception was found to be the strongest determinant of brand trust. This indicates that firms should ensure responsible production processes, including fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and environmentally responsible manufacturing. Communicating these practices clearly can strengthen consumers' trust and improve the credibility of natural product brands.

Supply chain transparency also plays a significant role in building brand trust. Companies should therefore improve the visibility of their sourcing and production processes by providing clear and accessible information about product origins, raw materials, and production standards. Tools such as traceability systems, certification labels, and transparent product information can help reduce consumer uncertainty and reinforce the perception that the brand operates responsibly.

The results also highlight the importance of brand trust in influencing purchase intention toward natural products. Managers should focus on developing consistent and authentic sustainability communication strategies to maintain long-term trust with

consumers. Ethical claims should be supported by verifiable evidence to avoid skepticism or accusations of greenwashing. Building trust requires not only responsible practices but also consistent communication that aligns with consumers' expectations of authenticity and accountability.

In addition, the significant differences across generational groups, cultural orientations, and levels of exposure to foreign environments suggest that firms should adopt more targeted marketing strategies. Younger consumers and those with greater international exposure tend to show stronger interest in ethical consumption, indicating that marketing campaigns emphasizing sustainability values, social responsibility, and environmental protection may resonate particularly well with these segments. Meanwhile, companies may also need to consider price sensitivity and purchasing power when promoting natural products to different consumer groups in emerging markets.

Limitation and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focuses on young consumers in Vietnam, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and economic contexts. In addition, the study relies on self-reported survey data and examines purchase intention rather than actual purchasing behavior, which may lead to potential response bias and the well-known intention–behavior gap in ethical consumption. Future research could conduct cross-country comparisons, apply experimental or behavioral data, and investigate additional factors such as environmental knowledge, perceived product quality, price sensitivity, or corporate reputation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of ethical consumer behavior.

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