

ROLE OF GEN Z IN GREEN BEHAVIOR: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS ON THE INFLUENCE OF GREEN ADVERTISING AND ECO-LABELS IN VIETNAM'S EMERGING MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to investigate the extent to which green advertising and eco-labels influence Generation Z's purchasing behavior of green products, either through direct effects or indirectly via the mediating mechanisms of environmental awareness and attitudinal factors. Generation Z (Gen Z), comprising individuals born between 1995 and 2010, has shown a strong commitment to environmental protection. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the respondents, utilizing both online and offline data collection methods. To assess the theoretical framework of the study, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) applied to analyze 268 usable samples, ensuring a robust evaluation of the proposed relationships. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing novel insights into the role of Generation Z in fostering green behavior within the context of an emerging market. This study suggests that green marketers should actively promote environmental consciousness among consumers to influence and shape their intentional behavior toward green purchasing. This can be achieved by strategically prioritizing efforts and investments in green advertising initiatives and the widespread implementation of eco-labeling to enhance consumer awareness and drive sustainable consumption choices.

Keywords: Green behavior, green purchase, green advertising, environmental awareness, eco-labels, Gen Z.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Vietnam has experienced a notable shift toward the adoption and promotion of green products, driven by rising consumer awareness and strong government support. This movement aligns with the country's broader strategy to promote sustainable production and consumption practices nationwide. In 2025, Vietnam's trade promotion efforts are prioritizing green and environmentally friendly products, aiming to support the country's green transition while enhancing the global competitiveness of local businesses [1]. Leading retailers in Vietnam are embracing biodegradable packaging as part of their sustainability initiatives. Supermarkets such as Coopmart, Aeon Vietnam, and Big C have launched eco-friendly campaigns, with Big C partnering with An Phát Holdings to replace single-use plastic bags with biodegradable alternatives. Lotte Mart has also committed to phasing out plastic bags entirely by 2025 demonstrating the retail sector's dedication to environmental responsibility. From 2021 to 2023, demand for green products in Vietnam grew at an average

annual rate of 15%. Furthermore, 72% of Vietnamese consumers express a willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products, underscoring a growing preference for sustainable living [2]. This trend reflects increased the young awareness of environmental issues and a strong commitment to responsible consumption [3].

As environmental concerns continue to rise globally, there is increasing interest in understanding the psychological and behavioral drivers behind green consumption [4]. Prior studies have shown that green advertising and eco-labels are widely used marketing tools to influence consumer behavior [5]. These tools are aimed at promoting environmentally friendly products by highlighting their ecological benefits and fostering sustainable purchasing decisions [6]. However, despite widespread use, their effectiveness remains inconsistent, often limited by consumer skepticism and a perceived lack of credibility. Several researchers have found that environmental attitudes and awareness are crucial mediators in green purchasing behavior, influencing how consumers respond to marketing efforts [7, 8]. However, the literature also reveals significant gaps, especially regarding the mediating role of environmental awareness and how it is shaped by marketing communications like green advertising and eco-labels [4]. This gap is particularly pronounced in emerging markets such as Vietnam, where rapid economic development, increasing environmental issues, and a youthful population intersect.

Gen Z, who make up a large and influential demographic in Vietnam, are digital natives known for their high exposure to information, social media, and global sustainability movements [9]. They represent a critical consumer group whose values and behaviors are likely to shape future trends in sustainable consumption. Despite their importance, little is known about how Gen Z in Vietnam responds to green advertising and eco-labels, and to what extent their environmental awareness mediates their purchasing behavior. Given these gaps, this research aims to explore the role of Gen Z in green behavior in Vietnam, specifically examining how environmental awareness mediates the relationship between green advertising, eco-labels, and green purchasing behavior. By focusing on Vietnam's emerging market and a generation at the forefront of change, this study will contribute valuable insights for marketers, policymakers, and educators seeking to foster more effective sustainability strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESE DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Green advertising

Green advertising refers to promotional messages that highlight the environmental benefits of a product, service, or practice, aiming to influence consumer behavior toward more sustainable choices [8]. It is a key marketing tool used to raise awareness about ecological issues and promote products that contribute to environmental protection [5]. Green advertising plays a crucial role in communicating the environmental value of products, encouraging consumers to make environmentally responsible purchasing decisions [10]. The effectiveness of such advertising is often attracted by consumers who are concerned over environmental claims [11]. Green advertising is a promotional strategy employed by businesses to communicate the desirable green attributes and benefits of a product to potential consumers. These appeals are designed to evoke emotional or rational responses that influence consumer attitudes and behaviors [12-14].

Green advertising is a tool for influencing consumer judgments and encouraging eco-friendly purchasing behavior by emphasizing ecological benefits such as resource conservation and pollution reduction [15]. Research suggests that green advertising can positively impact consumers' intentions to purchase green products [10, 16] especially when the messages are perceived as credible and relevant.

In the burgeoning landscape of Vietnam's emerging market, the intersection of green advertising and the purchasing behaviors of Generation Z consumers presents a compelling area of investigation [17]. This demographic cohort, known for its digital fluency and heightened awareness of social and environmental issues, is increasingly becoming a pivotal force in shaping market trends and consumer preferences. Gen Z, often described as digital natives, are highly exposed to digital content and value transparency and authenticity in advertising. When green messages in advertisements align with their personal values and environmental concerns, they are more likely to engage in green purchasing behavior [18]. Vietnamese Gen Z—who are digitally savvy, socially aware, and value authenticity—are likely to respond positively to credible and well-framed green advertisements. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Green advertising positively influences the green purchasing behavior of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

2.2. Eco-label

Eco-labels are symbols or certifications on product packaging that indicate the product meets specific environmental standards, aiming to inform consumers about the sustainability of their choices [19]. Eco-labels (ECLs) serve as vital communication tools that provide consumers with information about the environmental attributes of products [20]. They are designed to guide consumers toward environmentally conscious choices by identifying products that meet certain sustainability standards. Research suggests that Eco-labels influence consumer perceptions by signaling a product's reduced environmental harm, thereby encouraging green purchasing behavior [10]. Consumers view eco-labels as assurances that products are produced without harmful materials, enhancing trust and product value [19].

Gen Z consumers in Vietnam, who are typically well-informed and values-driven, may be particularly receptive to eco-labeling. As Alamsyah et al. (2020) argue, Eco-labels are not only marketing tools but also value propositions that align with ethical and sustainable consumption [21]. While past studies have linked eco-labels to purchase intentions [4], few have examined this relationship in the context of Gen Z in emerging markets. In Vietnam's emerging market, where consumer education and awareness of environmental issues are growing, eco-labels help reduce information asymmetry and build confidence in green products [15]. Gen Z's receptiveness to visual and credible sustainability indicators makes eco-labels an influential factor in shaping green purchase behavior. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Eco-labels positively influence the green purchasing behavior of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

2.3. Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness refers to the understanding and knowledge individuals have about environmental issues and the impact of their consumption behaviors [22]. Numerous studies have identified environmental awareness as a key determinant of green purchasing behavior [23], [24]. Research has shown that Environmental awareness significantly contributes to pro-environmental behaviors, including green purchasing, recycling, and conservation efforts [25]. Previous papers emphasize that individuals with high Environmental awareness tend to make more ecologically responsible choices, supporting the notion that awareness leads to a greater predisposition to purchase green products [26].

Generation Z, often characterized by strong social consciousness and environmental concern, tends to make more sustainable consumption choices when they are more aware of

environmental consequences [17]. Environmental awareness, a cornerstone of sustainable consumption, significantly shapes consumer behavior, particularly among Gen Z, who are becoming increasingly influential in driving market trends. This heightened awareness translates into a greater propensity to support environmentally friendly products and practices, fostering a market shift towards sustainability.

H3: Environmental awareness is positively associated with Gen Z consumers' green buying intention in Vietnam's emerging market.

Previous studies suggest that green advertising utilizes digital platforms to promote environmentally friendly products and practices—can influence consumer behavior by enhancing environmental awareness [27]. Environmental awareness, in turn, has been shown to significantly affect consumers' intention and willingness to engage in green purchasing behavior [24]. Generation Z, known for its digital nativity and environmental concern, is particularly responsive to digital green messages and more likely to translate awareness into sustainable consumption actions [26].

The escalating environmental concerns globally have spurred the emergence of a new consumer archetype, one whose purchasing decisions reflect a heightened sensitivity towards ecological issues [4]. This shift towards environmentally conscious consumption is particularly evident among younger generations, such as Generation Z, who are increasingly aware of the environmental consequences associated with their consumption patterns [28]. Within this context, the role of eco-labels as a mechanism for conveying environmental information and influencing consumer behavior has gained considerable attention [10]. Eco-labels, which are designed to inform consumers about the environmental attributes of products, have the potential to guide purchasing decisions towards more sustainable options. The effectiveness of eco-labels, however, is contingent upon consumers' understanding and internalization of environmental values, suggesting that environmental awareness may play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between eco-labels and green purchasing behavior.

Given the increasing environmental challenges and the pivotal role of consumer behavior in mitigating these challenges, it becomes imperative to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive green purchasing behavior among Gen Z consumers in Vietnam.

H4: Environmental awareness mediates the relationship between green advertising and green purchasing behavior among Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

H5: Environmental awareness mediates the relationship between eco-labels and green purchasing behavior among Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

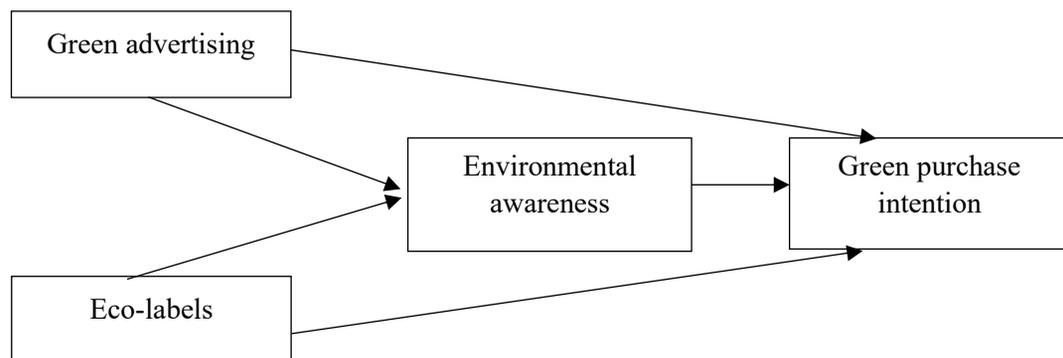


Figure 1. The theoretical framework

Source: by author (2025)

3. METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was designed to examine the proposed research variables and test the formulated hypotheses. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0, applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess measurement and structural models. To ensure content validity and contextual relevance, all measurement items were adapted from well-established scales in previous literature. The Green advertising (GRAD) construct was measured using items adapted from [11]; Eco-label (LABEL) was assessed using the scale developed by [4]; measurement items for Environmental Awareness (AWARE) were adapted from [21]; Buying intention (GRBUY) was measured using items adapted from [15]. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

The target population for this study consisted of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers (born between 1997 and 2012) who have had prior experience with or interest in green products. Given Gen Z's strong presence in the digital space, data were collected through an online survey distributed via popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Prior to participation, respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. A total of 268 valid responses were obtained for analysis. The sample reflected a diverse demographic profile in terms of age (within Gen Z range), gender, education level, and income, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the behavioral patterns and attitudes of Gen Z consumers toward digital responsibility and green consumption.

4. RESULTS

The study collected a total of 268 valid responses, forming the basis for analyzing the role of Gen Z in green consumer behavior in Vietnam. The sample displayed a diverse demographic composition reflective of the target population. In terms of gender distribution, the sample consisted of 101 males (37.7%) and 167 females (62.3%), indicating a stronger female representation in the study. Regarding occupation, 131 respondents (48.9%) identified as students, while 135 (50.4%) were employed, and a small proportion of respondents were freelancers. With respect to monthly income, 168 participants (62.7%) reported earning under 10 million VND, while 100 respondents (37.3%) earned above 10 million VND. This distribution provides valuable insight into how income levels may relate to environmental awareness and green purchasing behavior among young Vietnamese consumers.

The outer model was assessed through four key criteria: individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and multicollinearity. As shown in Table 1, all item loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating strong item reliability across the constructs. The only slight exception was GRAD3 (0.733), which still meets the acceptable minimum criterion of 0.50, confirming that all indicators appropriately reflect their respective latent constructs. Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs were above the acceptable threshold of 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency reliability. Specifically, CR values ranged from 0.858 to 0.924, supporting the notion that the items within each construct are homogenous and consistently measure the same underlying concept. For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.601 to 0.753, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50 [29]. These results confirm that a sufficient proportion of variance in the observed variables is captured by the latent constructs.

Table 1. Cronbach's α , CR, & AVE

Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	VIF
Green advertising			0.797	0.868	0.622	
	GRAD1	0.828				1.710
	GRAD2	0.854				1.749
	GRAD3	0.733				1.237
Eco-label			0.779	0.858	0.601	
	LABEL1	0.750				1.381
	LABEL2	0.806				1.820
	LABEL3	0.798				1.822
	LABEL4	0.746				1.436
Environmental Awareness			0.891	0.924	0.753	
	AWARE1	0.855				2.300
	AWARE2	0.889				2.689
	AWARE3	0.861				2.306
	AWARE4	0.868				2.341
Buying intention			0.785	0.862	0.610	
	GRBUY1	0.710				1.398
	GRBUY2	0.782				1.580
	GRBUY3	0.787				1.622
	GRBUY4	0.841				1.914

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all items were below the critical value of 5, indicating the absence of multicollinearity concerns among the indicators. Therefore, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity, providing a solid foundation for further structural model analysis. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct be greater than its correlations with any other construct. The results confirmed that each construct shared more variance with its own indicators than with those of other constructs, thereby supporting discriminant validity. This ensures that the constructs are empirically distinct and measure unique concepts within the model (Table 2).

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	AWARE	GRAD	GRBUY	LABEL
AWARE	0.868			
GRAD	0.465	0.807		
GRBUY	0.563	0.521	0.781	
LABEL	0.449	0.481	0.623	0.775

The findings presented in Table 3 demonstrate that all hypothesized in the model are statistically significant, indicating strong support for the conceptual framework. Firstly, environmental awareness (AWARE) has a significant and positive influence on green buying intention (GRBUY), with a path coefficient of 0.282 and a p-value of 0.000. This result highlights that consumers who are more aware of environmental issues are more likely to express an intention to purchase environmentally friendly products. Awareness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior towards sustainability. Green advertising (GRAD) also has a significant impact in two important ways. It directly influences environmental awareness (path coefficient = 0.343, $p = 0.000$), confirming that green advertisements effectively raise public understanding of environmental issues. Furthermore, green advertising has a direct positive effect on green buying intention (path coefficient = 0.229, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that well-crafted green messages not only inform but also persuade consumers to act in environmentally responsible ways. Together, these findings underline the dual role of green advertising as both an informational and motivational tool.

Table 3. Testing the direct relationship

Relationships	Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	P Values	note
AWARE → GRBUY	0.282	0.280	0.076	0.000	Accepted
GRAD → AWARE	0.343	0.344	0.068	0.000	Accepted
GRAD → GRBUY	0.229	0.231	0.057	0.000	Accepted
LABEL → AWARE	0.273	0.276	0.078	0.000	Accepted
GRAD → AWARE → GRBUY	0.097	0.096	0.032	0.002	Accepted
LABEL → AWARE → GRBUY	0.077	0.078	0.033	0.018	Accepted

Eco-labels (LABEL) contribute significantly to enhancing environmental awareness (path coefficient = 0.273, $p = 0.000$). This supports the notion that credible and clear labeling helps consumers understand the environmental benefits of products, thereby increasing their consciousness about sustainability. Although eco-labels do not have a direct path to GRBUY in this model, their influence is captured in the indirect effects. The mediation effect of awareness in the relationship between green advertising and green buying intention (GRAD → AWARE → GRBUY) is statistically significant, with a coefficient of 0.097 and a p-value of 0.002. Similarly, the indirect effect of eco-labels on green buying intention via awareness (LABEL → AWARE → GRBUY) is also significant (coefficient = 0.077, $p = 0.018$). These mediation paths reinforce the role of awareness as a key psychological mechanism through which marketing and informational interventions translate into behavioral intentions.

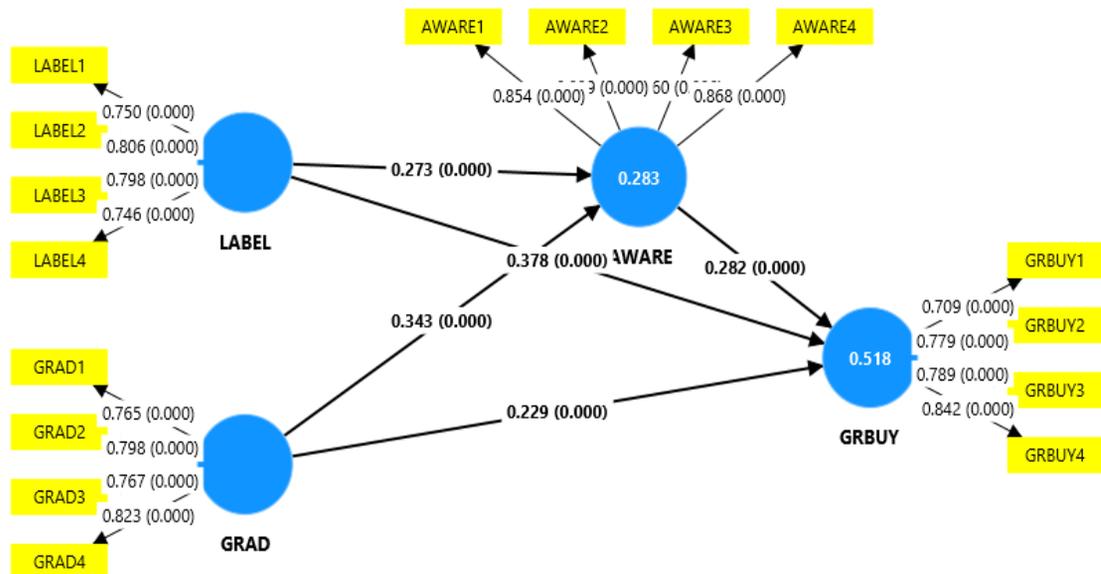


Figure 2. Results of hypotheses testing

In summary, both green advertising and eco-labels play crucial roles in fostering environmental awareness, which in turn enhances green purchase intention. The presence of both direct and indirect effects emphasizes the importance of integrated communication strategies that not only inform but also inspire consumers to adopt sustainable purchasing behaviors. These results provide valuable insights for marketers, policymakers, and organizations seeking to promote environmentally responsible consumption.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study aimed to explore the influence of green advertising, eco-labels, and environmental awareness on consumers' green buying intentions. The results confirm that all proposed relationships are statistically significant, suggesting robust support for the hypothesized model. The findings indicate that environmental awareness significantly affects green buying intention, aligning with previous studies that have emphasized awareness as a critical predictor of sustainable consumption behavior [11, 15]. When consumers are aware of environmental issues and the impact of their consumption choices, they are more likely to form favorable intentions toward purchasing environmentally friendly products. Green advertising plays a dual role. It significantly enhances environmental awareness and directly influences green buying intention. These findings are consistent with earlier research suggesting that persuasive green messages can both educate and motivate consumers [26]. The significant indirect effect from green advertising to green buying intention via awareness further underscores the importance of using informative content in advertising strategies to strengthen consumers' environmental attitudes and intentions.

Eco-labels also positively contribute to environmental awareness, supporting the idea that clear and credible labeling serves as a useful informational cue for consumers [4, 15]. Although eco-labels do not directly influence green purchase intention in this model, their indirect effect via increased awareness is significant. This finding highlights that the effectiveness of eco-labels may depend more on their ability to educate and raise consumer consciousness than on persuasion alone. The mediation effects of environmental awareness

further emphasize its central role in shaping green behavior. Both green advertising and eco-labels influence green buying intention through increased awareness, indicating that awareness acts as a key psychological mechanism in sustainable consumption. This supports the findings of prior research asserting that knowledge and awareness are necessary precursors to action [21].

5.2. Managerial implications

The results of this study offer several important implications for marketers aiming to influence green consumer behavior among Gen Z in Vietnam and promote environmentally friendly products effectively. The significant effect of environmental awareness on green buying intention suggests that educating Gen Z should be a central objective in green marketing strategies. This generation is digital-savvy, socially conscious, and values authenticity. Marketers should create campaigns that not only promote products but also raise awareness about environmental issues and how individual choices can impact the planet. Tactics such as Instagram reels, TikTok storytelling, gamified challenges, or short-form documentaries featuring real-world examples of eco-friendly practices can deeply resonate with Vietnamese Gen Z audiences. The dual impact of green advertising—both directly on purchase intention and indirectly through increased awareness—suggests that green advertising is most effective when it combines emotional appeal with transparent, factual content. For Gen Z, who often seek brands that reflect their personal values, green advertisements should be visually compelling, value-driven, and socially interactive. Collaborations with Vietnamese eco-influencers or youth-led sustainability initiatives can enhance relatability and drive engagement, while consistency in messaging across digital platforms will help build trust and brand loyalty.

While eco-labels do not directly drive purchase intention, their influence on raising awareness makes them valuable in the consideration stage of Gen Z's buying journey. Vietnamese Gen Z consumers are increasingly conscious of product authenticity, so eco-labels should be clearly visible, backed by credible third parties, and accompanied by simple explanations (e.g., through QR codes or interactive labels). Such efforts help bridge the knowledge gap and empower informed decision-making. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of integrated marketing strategies. Marketers should align advertising, packaging, labeling, and social media content around a cohesive environmental message. For Gen Z, who often engage in multi-platform brand exploration, a unified message across channels enhances brand recall and encourages consistent action toward green consumption. Marketers targeting Vietnamese Gen Z should approach green communication as a two-step process: first, building awareness and trust through education, authenticity, and interactivity; then, reinforcing that awareness with action-oriented messages that are culturally relevant and emotionally resonant. By meeting Gen Z where they are—digitally and socially—brands can build lasting influence in Vietnam's growing green market.

While this study provides meaningful insights into the relationships between green advertising, eco-labels, environmental awareness, and green buying intention, it is not without limitations. The study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Respondents might overstate their awareness or intentions to appear environmentally responsible, leading to inflated associations. Future research could incorporate actual behavioral data or observational methods to validate whether stated intentions translate into real purchasing behavior.

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TÓM TẮT

VAI TRÒ CỦA GEN Z TRONG HÀNH VI XANH: KHÁM PHÁ TÁC ĐỘNG TRUNG GIAN CỦA NHẬN THỨC MÔI TRƯỜNG ĐỐI VỚI ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA QUẢNG CÁO XANH VÀ NHÃN SINH THÁI ĐẾN Ý ĐỊNH MUA HÀNG TẠI THỊ TRƯỜNG VIỆT NAM

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Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá mức độ ảnh hưởng của quảng cáo xanh và nhãn sinh thái đến hành vi mua sắm sản phẩm xanh của thế hệ Gen Z, thông qua các tác động trực tiếp hoặc gián tiếp của nhận thức môi trường và các yếu tố thái độ. Thế hệ Gen Z - bao gồm những cá nhân sinh từ năm 1995 đến 2010 - được ghi nhận là nhóm có cam kết mạnh mẽ trong việc bảo vệ môi trường. Phương pháp chọn mẫu thuận tiện được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu, kết hợp giữa hình thức khảo sát trực tuyến và trực tiếp. Để kiểm định mô hình lý thuyết nghiên cứu, phương pháp Mô hình phương trình cấu trúc bình phương bé nhất một phần (PLS-SEM) được áp dụng trên 268 mẫu hợp lệ, đảm bảo phân tích vững chắc các mối quan hệ được đề xuất. Nghiên cứu đóng góp vào nền tảng tri thức hiện có bằng cách cung cấp những hiểu biết mới về vai trò của thế hệ Gen Z trong việc thúc đẩy hành vi tiêu dùng xanh tại bối cảnh thị trường mới nổi. Kết quả cho thấy các nhà tiếp thị xanh nên chú trọng nâng cao nhận thức môi trường trong cộng đồng người tiêu dùng như một chiến lược tác động đến hành vi có chủ đích trong tiêu dùng xanh. Điều này có thể được thực hiện thông qua việc ưu tiên đầu tư vào các chiến dịch quảng cáo xanh và mở rộng áp dụng hệ thống nhãn sinh thái nhằm tăng cường nhận thức và định hướng lựa chọn tiêu dùng bền vững.

Từ khóa: Hành vi xanh, mua sắm xanh, quảng cáo xanh, nhận thức môi trường, nhãn sinh thái, thế hệ Gen Z.