THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND IMAGE AND PURCHASE INTENTION FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

Sarinya L. SUTTHARATTANAGUL[1], Norawat CHUTIVONGSE[1], Benjamard JONGMAHASANCHAI[1] and Ruedee LIMPAIROJ[1]
1 Bangkok University, Thailand; sarinya.s@bu.ac.th (Corresponding Author)

ABSTRACT

With the growing emphasis on sustainability, consumers increasingly prioritize eco-friendly products that align with their values. However, despite the positive perceptions of sustainable brands, the factors that drive consumers' purchase intentions remain complex. This research investigates how sustainability consumption and perceived quality influence brand image, and how brand image, in turn, affects purchase intentions for sustainable products. Additionally, it examines the moderating role of social influence in shaping the relationship between brand image and purchase intentions. The results demonstrate that sustainability consumption and perceived quality significantly contribute to forming a positive brand image and subsequently impact purchase intentions. Importantly, social influence was shown to moderate the relationship between brand image and purchase intentions significantly. This study contributes to the understanding of sustainable consumption and quality impact on consumer perceptions and purchase behavior toward sustainable brands. The findings provide valuable implications for marketers aiming to effectively position sustainable products, allowing them to engage socially conscious consumers better and strengthen their brand image. Ultimately, this study offers a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the growing market for eco-friendly products.
Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Brand image, Quality perception, Purchase behavior, Green products

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sustainability has become a major factor in consumer behavior, with more people becoming aware of environmental and social issues (Peattie & Crane, 2005). As concerns about climate change, resource depletion, and social issues, many consumers are prioritizing sustainability. This shift in value has led businesses to focus more on promoting their sustainable offerings to meet the demand from eco-conscious buyers. However, despite the positive views of sustainable brands, the decision to purchase these products can be complicated, influenced by various psychological and social factors.

One of the key social factors affecting consumer decisions is social influence. It plays a crucial role in shaping how people think about and act toward brands, especially when it comes to sustainability (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Sustainable products often represent new behaviors or choices that consumers may not be fully familiar with, and social influence can significantly impact how these products are perceived and accepted within a social context (Bryla, Chatterjee, & Ciabiada-Bryła, 2022). Social media interactions, influencer endorsements, and peer recommendations contribute to building positive brand perceptions, particularly for sustainability-focused products. When a brand aligns with the values of a consumer's social group—whether it's a commitment to the environment or ethical practices—social influence can strengthen the impact of that brand's image on their purchase decision (Bryla, Chatterjee, & Ciabiada-Bryła, 2022). Positive cues from social media platforms, friends, family, or influencers can further enhance how consumers view a brand, making them more likely to purchase sustainable products (Keller, 1993).

This paper explores how sustainability and product quality impact brand image, and how social influence moderates the link between brand and purchase behavior for sustainable products. By investigating how social influence interacts with consumer behavior in the context of sustainability, this research aims to uncover how social influence shapes people's views of sustainable brands and their intention to buy eco-friendly products. Apart from the theoretical contribution to consumer behavior, the results of this study can support marketers and businesses with valuable insights into how sustainability, brand image, and social influence can be powerful tools for driving consumer engagement and purchase decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Sustainable consumption emphasizes the importance of making informed choices that contribute to long-term ecological balance and social responsibility, and it is increasingly seen as a key factor in addressing issues like climate change and resource depletion (Gao & Bansal, 2013). Consumers who engage in sustainable consumption prioritize environmental and social concerns over conventional mass-market consumption. This behavior is often linked to ethical consumption, green consumerism, and eco-friendly practices (Cohen, 2019).

Sustainability consumption and its impact on green brand image and purchase decisions

As sustainability becomes an increasingly important issue, many businesses are striving to position themselves as responsible brands. Research indicates that brands adopting sustainable practices are often viewed more favorably by consumers (Luchs et al., 2010). A sustainable brand image helps a company stand out in a competitive market, boosting brand equity and fostering consumer loyalty (Peattie & Crane, 2005). For example, consumers are more likely to support brands that engage in practices such as reducing carbon footprints, using recyclable packaging, or ensuring ethical labor practices. A study by Branco and Rodrigues (2006) highlights the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in building a positive brand image, showing that consumers tend to trust and view companies with strong CSR initiatives as more socially responsible. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H1: Sustainability consumption has a positive effect on brand image.

David A. Aaker's Brand Equity Model (1996) provides a useful framework for understanding the role of perceived quality in shaping brand image. According to Aaker, brand equity consists of components such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Perceived quality is one of the most important drivers of brand equity and plays a key role in shaping consumer perceptions of a brand. Several studies support the idea that perceived quality has a positive influence on brand image. For instance, Keller's research (1993) across various product categories confirms that perceived quality is a key factor in shaping brand image. His model suggests that consumer perceptions of a brand's quality directly influence their overall impressions of the brand, which in turn affects brand loyalty and preference. Park et al. (2010) demonstrated that perceived quality significantly impacts how consumers evaluate a car brand's image, which ultimately influences their decision-making. Brands with higher perceived quality tend to maintain a more favorable image and a competitive edge. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived quality has a positive effect on brand image.

Numerous studies confirm that brand image has a direct, positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions. A strong, favorable brand image not only affects consumer attitudes toward the brand but also drives the likelihood of purchase. In the context of consumer behavior, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argue that brand image plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes and, subsequently, purchase intentions. It is found that when consumers have positive associations with a brand, they are more likely to express favorable purchase intentions toward that brand. They suggest that brand image, shaped by consumers' emotional and functional associations, is a strong predictor of whether they will consider or purchase a product. Consumers who have a favorable perception of a brand are more likely to be influenced by those perceptions when making purchasing decisions. Many researchers (ie., Chen, 2010) suggest that a brand image is a powerful tool for brands to enhance consumer engagement and drive purchasing behavior. Therefore, H3 is proposed that;

H3: Brand Image has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Social influence and its moderating role on green brand image and Purchase Intention

Social influence in consumer behavior encompasses several psychological and sociological processes by which individuals' perceptions, preferences, and purchase decisions are influenced by the opinions or behaviors of others. It refers to how individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped by the presence and actions of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the fashion retail industry, by influencing purchasing decisions and enhancing brand engagement (Chowdhury et al., 2024). The marketing via social media has significantly transformed consumer engagement by fostering direct interactions between brands and consumers, which enhances brand perception and drives purchase decisions through personalized content and peer influence (Bryla & Ciabiada-Bryła, 2022). Research has consistently shown that social influence significantly strengthens the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) highlight that social media communication plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions of brands, emphasizing the importance of interactive and engaging content.

Additional studies further support the moderating role of social influence in consumer behavior. Sohn and Kim (2020) showed that consumers were more likely to form purchase intentions for brands with strong images when exposed to positive social influence through online reviews, celebrity endorsements, or word-of-mouth. In online shopping contexts, social influences such as reviews and influencer endorsements can provide a positive brand image and reinforce consumers' purchase decisions. Therefore, social influence plays a crucial role in strengthening the impact of brand image on consumers' purchase intentions, as hypotheses in H4;

H4: Social influence moderates the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. From the conceptual model, this research examines the direct effects of sustainability consumption and perceived quality on brand image (H1 and H2) and the subsequent impact of brand image on purchase intentions (H3). By integrating the moderating role of social influence (H4), this study advances current understanding by demonstrating that social factors can amplify or weaken the impact of brand image on purchase behavior for sustainable products.
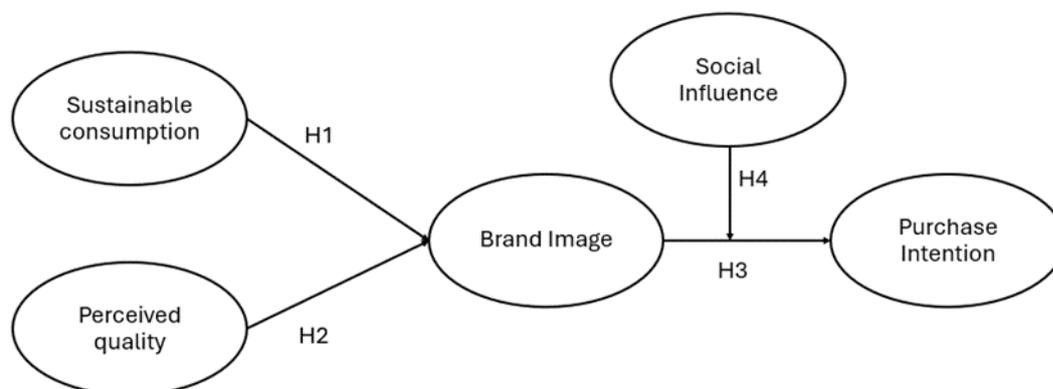

Figure 1 Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a quantitative approach, collecting data online. The focus was on individuals aged 18-24, as this group is anticipated to be pivotal in advancing mindful consumption in the future. Studies have also indicated that this generation is more concerned with sustainability and environmental matters than other age groups (Prakash & Pathak, 2017). To minimize common method bias, the researchers emphasized confidentiality and anonymity, and assured participants they could withdraw from the questionnaire at any time if they felt uneasy.

The structured questionnaires were designed using items from previous research. Sustainability consumption value was assessed using the six-item green consumption value scale developed by Haws et al. (2010), which is commonly applied to environmentally friendly products. The perceived quality scale was adapted from Wang and Teo (2020). To measure purchase intention, five questions from the green purchase intention scale by Sun and Wang (2020) were included. Additionally, five questions from the Green Brand Image scale (Cretu & Brodie, 2007), which reflects consumer perceptions of a brand's environmental commitment and concerns were used. An example of such a question is, "The brand is regarded as the best benchmark of environmental commitments." Lastly, four questions from Chen et al. (2022) were included to assess social influence.

RESEARCH RESULTS

A total of 880 respondents were received after the data cleaning from convenience sampling to meet the study's objectives. The sample includes 41.1% males (362 respondents) and 58.9% females (518 respondents), with a higher proportion of females (Table 1). The largest income group in the sample consists of 55.6% who earn between 10,000-30,000 Baht. Additionally, 37.2% earn less than 10,000 Baht, indicating a significant number of lower-income respondents. As the study focuses on younger generations aged 18-24, the majority of participants are students pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	362	41.136
	Female	518	58.864
Income	Less than 10,000 THB	327	37.159
	10,000-30,000 THB	489	55.568
	30,001-50,000 THB	46	5.227
	50,001-70,000 THB	9	1.023
	70,001-90,000 THB	2	0.227
	More than 90,000 THB	7	0.795

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were analyzed as an initial assessment of the data (Table 2). A reliability test (Cronbach's alpha) was conducted for the measurement items: SusC (alpha = 0.877), PerQual (alpha = 0.922), BI (alpha = 0.903), SOC (alpha = 0.916), and PI (alpha = 0.897). All results exceeded the 0.7 threshold, which is considered acceptable according to Hair et al. (2010).

Table 2 Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlations

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	Correlations				
				SusC	PerQual	BI	SOC	PI
SusC	4.137	0.602	0.877	1	.671**	.405**	.665**	.753**
PerQual	4.065	0.734	0.922	.671**	1	.349**	.775**	.689**
BI	4.236	0.607	0.903	.405**	.349**	1	.295**	.481**
SOC	3.941	0.826	0.916	.665**	.775**	.295**	1	.649**
PI	4.216	0.599	0.897	.753**	.689**	.481**	.649**	1

Note **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); SC = sustainability consumption value, PerQual = Perceived Quality; BI = Brand Image; SOC = social influence; PI = purchase intention

The regression model demonstrates strong direct effects across all paths. Specifically, sustainability consumption and perceived quality both significantly influence the brand image. The path from SusC to BI has a coefficient of 0.311 (t-value = 7.505; $p<0.001$), this result is highly significant, indicating that sustainability consumption positively influences brand image. The relationship between Perceived quality and Brand image shows a coefficient of 0.140 (t-value = 3.384, $p<0.001$) representing a statistically significant positive effect, though it is smaller than the effect of SusC on BI. These results support both H1 and H2.

The coefficient for the path from Brand Image to Purchase Intention is 0.4819 (t-value = 16.266, $p<0.001$). This confirms that brand image has a substantial impact on purchase intention as hypothesized in H3. Moreover, the interaction between Social Influence (SOC) and Brand Image (BI) on Purchase Intention is significant with a coefficient of 0.706 (t-value of 29.496, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the moderating role of social influence has a very strong positive effect on the relationship between brand image and purchase intention, confirming H4.

The regression model demonstrates a strong explanatory power, with R^2 values of 0.175 for brand image, 0.232 for purchase intention, and 0.498 for the moderation model. These values suggest that the model accounts for a substantial portion of the variance in purchase intention, particularly when considering the moderating effect of social influence. The high F-statistics (F = 92.689, F = 264.597, F = 869.990) and low p-values (all p-values < 0.001) indicate that the relationships tested in the model are highly statistically significant.

Table 3 Path analysis

		Std. Error	Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.
Direct effect: Brand Image					
$(R^2 = 0.175, F=92.689, p\text{-}value = 0.000)$					
H1	SC -> BI	0.042	0.311***	7.505	0.000
H2	PerQual -> BI	0.034	0.140***	3.384	0.001
Direct effect: Purchase Intention					
$(R^2 = 0.232, F=264.597, p\text{-}value = 0.000)$					
H3	BI -> PI	0.029	0.481***	16.266	0.000
Direct effect: Purchase Intention					
$(R^2 = 0.498, F=869.990, p\text{-}value = 0.000)$					
H4	SOC*BI -> PI	0.003	0.706***	29.496	0.000

Note ***$p < 0.000$; SC = sustainability consumption value, PerQual = Perceived Quality; BI = Brand Image; SOC = social influence, PI = purchase intention

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of social influence in shaping consumer behavior toward sustainable products. By exploring how sustainability consumption and perceived quality impact brand image, and how brand image subsequently affects purchase intentions, the research explores the complexity of factors that drive consumer decisions in the context of sustainability. The results reveal that sustainability consumption and perceived product quality are key drivers of brand image, with sustainability playing a more dominant role. A positive brand image significantly enhances purchase intention, confirming its importance in consumer decision-making. This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that brands emphasizing sustainability can enhance their reputation and appeal to eco-conscious consumers. Moreover, products that are perceived as high-quality tend to be viewed more favorably, which in turn strengthens the brand's image. However, the stronger influence of sustainability consumption suggests that consumers are increasingly prioritizing environmental considerations over traditional product quality when forming brand perceptions.

Consistent with consumer behavior theory, which asserts that a positive brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' intentions to buy. A favorable brand image can create trust and emotional connection with consumers, increasing the likelihood of purchase. In this study, it is confirmed that consumers' perceptions of a brand's image significantly impact their willingness to engage in purchase decisions. The moderating role of social influence is especially relevant in the age of digital marketing and social media, where recommendations from friends, influencers, or online communities can sway purchasing decisions. The interaction term has a very high coefficient of 0.706, indicating that social influence substantially strengthens the impact of brand image on purchase intention. This result highlights the importance of social factors, such as peer recommendations, social media influence, and societal trends, in shaping consumer behavior. It indicates that when consumers perceive that their social circle values or endorses a brand, their intention to purchase is significantly amplified. Overall, these findings suggest the importance of brands focusing on sustainability, maintaining high product quality, and leveraging social influence to enhance consumer engagement and drive purchasing behavior.

The investigation of the moderating role of social influence, adding valuable insights to existing consumer behavior theories, especially in sustainability-focused markets where social factors are often overlooked. The findings offer important implications for marketers and businesses, particularly in industries where sustainability sets brands apart. One of the main challenges for marketing and brand managers is generating consumer interest in sustainable lifestyles while making these options both accessible and attractive (Aleksandar & Milovanov, 2017). By emphasizing sustainability and product quality, brands can enhance their image and

boost purchase intentions. Additionally, leveraging social influence through targeted campaigns and influencer partnerships can further amplify the effect of brand image, making it crucial for companies to incorporate social factors into their strategies. Brands that effectively manage their image and engage consumers through social channels are likely to experience greater customer loyalty and higher sales. Future research could investigate other moderate factors and apply these findings across various cultural contexts to deepen our understanding of sustainable markets.

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