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How ethics and status matter in young consumers' green purchase behavior? Evidence from Vietnam

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Abstract: This study examines some determinants of green purchasing behavior among Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, focusing on the roles of ethics and the need for status through the lens of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics. To test the proposed model, a survey was conducted with urban Generation Z consumers, a sustainability-aware cohort that is emerging as a key force in shaping ethical consumption in Vietnam. The results of Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) indicated that both deontological evaluation and teleological evaluation significantly impacted ethical judgment toward green purchasing. Importantly, ethical judgment, along with the need for status, were found to be significant predictors of green purchase intentions, with ethical judgment exerting a notably stronger influence. As expected, green purchasing behavior was strongly predicted by purchase intentions. These findings underscore the important roles of ethical evaluation and the need for status in understanding consumer pro-environmental purchasing decisions.

Keywords: *Gen Z, Green purchase behavior, Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics, Need for status, Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

The topic regarding ethical consumption, such as green or pro-environmental consumer behavior, has captured much global attention from both academics and practitioners, and has recently attracted increasing research efforts toward the understudied contexts of emerging economies [1, 2]. Past research has noted the importance of studying the topic in the context of emerging markets, given the great business opportunities and economic power associated with these economies, as well as their increasing role in advancing global sustainability [3]. However, prior research has mainly been conducted in the context of developed countries, predominantly the US and European countries [4, 5] while developing counterparts remain underrepresented [6] especially in the context of Asian developing economies [7]. The literature has suggested that there is a significant disparity between developed and developing countries in the adoption of sustainable consumption practices, and consumers in developing countries lag significantly behind their counterparts in developed nations when it comes to embracing and practicing sustainable consumption such as green purchase behavior [4]. Therefore, there is a need to further study the topic to gain a better understanding of this important consumption behavior, specifically in Asian emerging economies such as Vietnam, which is undergoing significant economic growth accompanied by serious environmental degradation [2]. Such research can significantly contribute to sustainable development in emerging economies and worldwide.

Past research has suggested investigating green consumption behavior from an ethical perspective, since green behaviors contain intrinsic moral components [8] and are often driven by ethically laden factors [9, 10]. While many previous studies on green consumption have applied general socio-psychological theoretical perspectives such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [2] this study adopts another theoretical lens. Specifically, it employs the well-known Hunt-Vitell model of ethics

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[11] by incorporating the concepts of deontological and teleological evaluation, along with ethical judgments, to examine green purchase behavior among Gen Z consumers in Vietnam. While the TPB model emphasizes intention formation through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [12] the Hunt-Vitell model allows for the examination of moral evaluations that underpin ethical consumer choices. This framework is particularly suited to contexts like Vietnam, where ethical concerns are often intertwined with cultural values and socio-economic aspirations [13, 14]. Employing this model not only broadens the scope of analysis beyond utilitarian motives but also enhances our understanding of ethical consumption in diverse cultural settings. Moreover, in our study, the Hunt and Vitell's theory of ethics [11] was employed with the integration of status perspective to explain factors driving green purchase behavior. Investigating how ethical considerations and the need for status interact among Gen Z consumers in Vietnam contributes not only to theoretical advancement but also to practical insights for policymakers and marketers aiming to promote sustainable consumption in emerging Asian markets.

Our study examines determinants of green purchase behavior among Gen Z consumers. Gen Z is widely defined as people born between 1997 and 2012. Prior research indicates that Gen Z consumers play a crucial role in environmental protection and ethical consumption due to their heightened awareness and concern for environmental and ethical issues [15, 16] and they represent an important market segment for pro-environmental products. With a high level of education and the largest number of university students, they are often seen as catalysts for change, being more open to embracing innovative concepts such as sustainable, eco-friendly, and ethical consumption [17]. In Vietnam, Gen Z comprises about one-fifth of the population, and this cohort is projected to account for one-fourth of the labor workforce by 2025, emerging as a vital group that shapes consumer trends and significantly influences the country's development [18].

The current study contributes to the extant literature by empirically investigating some determinants of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers' green purchase behavior from an ethical perspective, using the Hunt-Vitell theoretical model, and the lens of status perspective. Following this introduction, conceptual background and hypotheses are provided. After that, research methodology, followed by empirical results, are presented. The last section discusses the research findings and provides theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

2.1. The Hunt-Vitell Theory of Ethics and Green Purchase Behavior

The Hunt-Vitell (H-V) theory of ethics, introduced by Hunt and Vitell [11] offers a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer decision-making in ethical dilemmas. Unlike normative theories, the H-V model is descriptive and integrates two key components: deontological evaluation and teleological evaluation. Deontological evaluation represents rules-based evaluation grounded in moral principles, while teleological evaluation assesses actions based on their consequences. Together, these components predict ethical judgments, intentions, and behaviors, illustrating the multifaceted nature of ethical decision-making [11, 19]. This dual consideration makes the model highly relevant for examining ethical consumption, as it explains how individuals navigate ethical dilemmas through both moral principles and anticipated outcomes.

The H-V model of ethics has been widely applied in ethical consumption research, including green consumption behaviors across various economic and cultural settings. For example, a qualitative study by Nimri, et al. [20] explored UK consumers' intentions to dine at green restaurants based on the H-V framework. Likewise, the model was employed to investigate "food-wasting" behavior among Taiwanese consumers [21]. In the context of developing markets, a study by Chan, et al. [22] applied the H-V model to understand Chinese consumers' green consumption behaviors.

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2.2. Deontological Evaluation

Deontological evaluation refers to the assessment of the inherent rightness or wrongness of behaviors in ethical dilemmas by comparing actions against predetermined norms or personal values [11]. This evaluation process is critical in ethical decision-making, as individuals determine whether an action aligns with their moral obligations before considering its consequences. Deontological evaluation strongly influences ethical behaviors, stemming from a sense of duty and fairness. Prior studies indicate that those with strong biospheric or altruistic values tend to make judgments on sustainable choices out of moral responsibility [23, 24]. In Vietnam, Nguyen and colleagues suggest that young consumers consider purchasing green products to be a morally commendable action, while Halder, et al. [25] emphasize the role of ethical consumption in aligning with personal values. Nimri, et al. [20] also found that individuals who adopt green behavior lifestyle perceive dining at green restaurants as morally right because it contributes positively to the environment. The connection between biospheric values and pro-environmental behavior is further corroborated by Sivapalan, et al. [26] who found that consumers with a strong sense of duty toward environmental protection consistently prefer green products and practices. Thus, when consumers evaluate purchasing green products instead of conventional ones as the right behavior based on their norms and personal values, they tend to believe that green purchase is ethical. Based on the above discussion, it is expected that one's deontological evaluation toward green purchase can positively influence his/her ethical judgment toward green purchase behavior.

Despite its significance, deontological evaluation alone does not fully account for the complexities of ethical decision-making. Critics argue that real-world decisions often involve cognitive dissonance, where individuals struggle to reconcile conflicting moral principles and practical concerns [27]. Moreover, the interplay between deontological and teleological evaluation leads to nuanced ethical judgments, reflecting the complexity of moral reasoning [19].

2.3. Teleological Evaluation

Teleological evaluation assesses ethical implications by considering the perceived consequences of actions for various stakeholders. This perspective aligns with utilitarian principles, where individuals seek to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number [28]. In the context of green consumption, teleological evaluation highlights how individuals weigh both positive and negative consequences when deciding whether to adopt environmentally friendly practices. A study by Steg, et al. [24] suggests that consumers evaluate their actions toward pro-environment by considering perceived benefits and costs in terms of hedonic, gain, and normative goals, reinforcing the teleological perspective. Likewise, in Vietnam, a study by Nguyen and Dekhili [3] suggests consumers perceive that engaging in purchasing green products can bring benefits to both themselves and the society at large, reflecting both egoistic and altruistic motivations.

According to Hunt and Vitell [11] both deontological and teleological together form ethical judgments. Similarly to deontological evaluation, teleological evaluation can also shape ethical judgment, as consumers often deem an action "right" if its consequences are positive [8]. This has received empirical support from past research, specifically in Asian economies [21]. In Vietnam, we also expect to see similar findings regarding the significant impact of teleological evaluation on ethical judgment toward green purchase behavior.

Hunt and Vitell [11] have explicitly postulated the direct path from teleological evaluation to intention, and in the green consumption domain, this significant relationship is also supported by empirical findings in the literature [21]. Unlike deontological evaluation, which is grounded in absolute moral principles, teleological evaluation is context-dependent and influenced by cultural values and personal beliefs. For example, consumers from individualistic cultures may prioritize personal benefits, while those from collectivist cultures may emphasize societal impact. The fact that teleological evaluation involves assessing the consequences of the behavior (e.g., environmental impact, social approval) may exert a more direct influence on behavioral intentions, especially in a consumer context where tangible outcomes (such as social recognition or environmental benefit) play a prominent role in

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motivating green purchases. This is especially true in emerging or collectivist cultures like [22] China or Korea [29] where practical benefits and perceived societal outcomes can outweigh strict moral reasoning, making teleological concerns more behaviorally salient than deontological ones.

2.4. Ethical Judgments and Green Purchase Intention

According to Hunt and Vitell [19] ethical judgment is at the core of the H-V model and is postulated as a function of deontological and teleological evaluation. In the specific area of green behaviors, Zou and Chan [10] define ethical judgment as the extent to which a consumer makes a favorable or unfavorable judgment of a green or non-green practice. These judgments are crucial in shaping consumers' green purchase behavior. In the H-V model, aligned with foundational models in consumer behavior [30] ethical judgment is postulated as a predictor of intention. The significant impact of ethical judgment on intention has been found in several previous studies regarding pro-environmental behaviors [21]. In our study, it is expected that when consumers make a favorable judgment of green purchase, they are more likely to have intention to buy green products.

Based on all the above discussion, the following hypotheses are presented:

H_{1}: The deontological evaluation toward green purchase is positively related to ethical judgment for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

H_{2a}: The teleological evaluation toward green purchase is positively related to ethical judgment for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

H_{2b}: The teleological evaluation toward green purchase is positively related to green purchase intention for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

H_{3}: The ethical judgment toward green purchase is positively related to green purchase intentions for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

2.5. Green Purchase Intention and Green Purchase Behavior

Based on the H-V model Hunt and Vitell [11] intention is postulated to have a positive impact on behavior. The relationship between intention and actual behavior is established in general theories of consumer behavior, such as Theory of Reasoned Action [30] and TPB. This relationship has been widely tested in various research domains, including green consumption areas as well as consumer ethics. In our study, therefore, we expect that green purchase intention will play a significant role in predicting green purchase behavior as an ethical behavior. Thus, we posit:

H_{4}: Green purchase intention is positively related to green purchase behavior for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

2.6. Need for Status as a Driving Factor of Green Purchase Intention

Status, or more specifically sociometric status, refers to the amount of respect, admiration, and voluntary deference from others [31]. Research in the field of consumer behavior has paid significant attention to examining the relationship between the need for status and purchase intention [32]. Individuals with a strong need for status are more inclined to buy products associated with status Mai and Tambyah [33]. Eastman, et al. [34] refer consumer need for status as the motivational process through which individuals consume products that "confer and symbolize status for both the individual and surrounding significant others" (p.42). In this study, the construct need for status is integrated into the H-V model as an important and contextually relevant factor influencing green purchase intention. There are theoretical justifications for the inclusion of status motivation. While the H-V model traditionally explains ethical behavior through deontological, teleological evaluation, and ethical judgment, status-driven motivations can operate in parallel, particularly in contexts where consumption also serves a symbolic or social signaling function. In Vietnam, an Asian emerging economy, a recent study by Nguyen and Dekhili [3] found that ethical and status motivations are not mutually exclusive, but both play a significant role in driving consumer behaviors such as inconspicuous luxury consumption.

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Past research suggests that status-seeking behavior has been viewed as conflicting with public welfare or prosocial motives [35] which are often associated with pro-environmental and ethical behavior. Inconsistent findings regarding the effect of status seeking motivations are found in the literature. For instance, the findings from Kilbourne and Pickett [36] suggest that status cues did not significantly affect ethical consumption, highlighting the possible context-dependent nature of this relationship. On the other hand, Griskevicius, et al. [37] found that individuals who value social status are more likely to engage in pro-social behavior, even when these behaviors are more expensive or less functional. Such divergence in findings underscores the need to consider both ethical reasoning and status seeking as important co-determinants of green purchase intentions.

In the green consumption domain, some prior research has shown that individuals may engage in green behavior to gain social prestige [37] and the need for status can positively motivate green consumption, especially when such behaviors are public and symbolic [38, 39]. Due to the relatively higher cost and limited availability of green products, green product consumption often reflects not only environmental responsibility but also social distinction. Past research suggests that consumers are often willing to pay a premium for green and organic products, portraying green consumption as both a moral choice and an aspirational lifestyle statement [40]. This creates conditions for "virtue signaling," where consumers use ethical consumption to convey social identity and distinction [41].

In the context of emerging economies, status-driven motives have been suggested to significantly influence green consumption behaviors [41-44]. In Vietnam, green products are often available in urban areas, with the premium symbolic image and relatively expensive price. Consumers who engage in buying green products may be associated with the desirable image of being knowledgeable, unique, and altruistic. Young consumers like Gen Z in Vietnam are also considered status-conscious. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H_5: Need for status is positively related to green purchase intentions for Vietnamese Gen Z consumers.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework and proposed hypotheses.

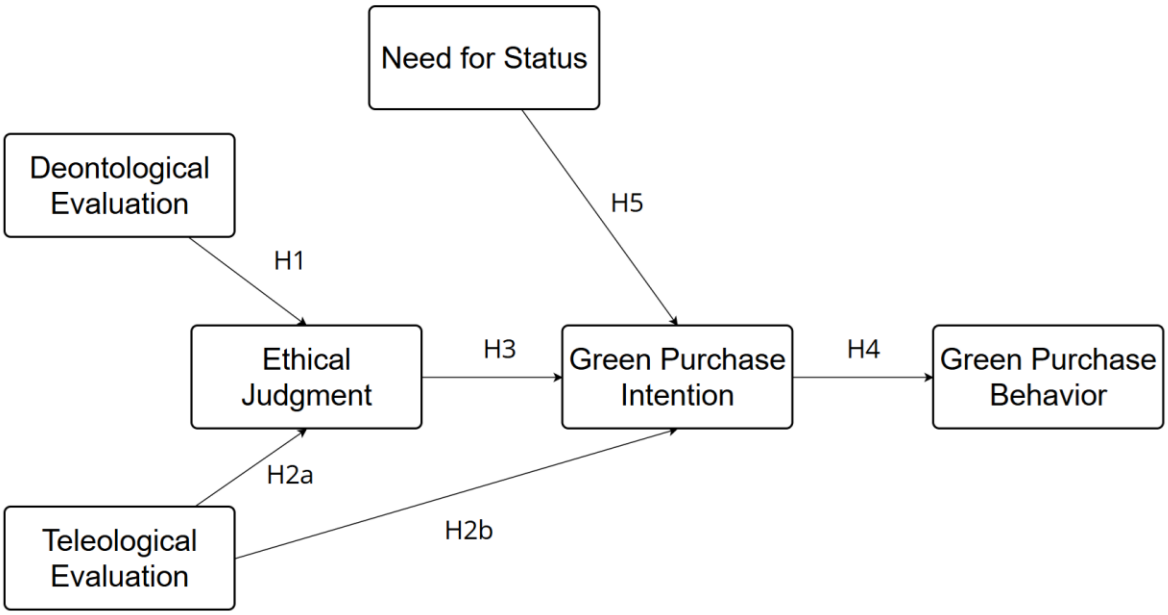

Figure 1.
Proposed Conceptual Framework.

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3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

Most participants in the survey were Vietnamese Generation Z consumers in urban areas. We focused our research on Hanoi, the capital city, and on the urban areas of the surrounding provinces. This selection was due to several factors: green products in Vietnam are typically more available and accessible in urban retail environments, which feature developed infrastructure and specialized distribution channels necessary for such niche markets. Additionally, these urban areas generally have higher living standards among young consumers and green products often have a premium price point, making them more relevant to consumers with greater purchasing power and urban access [45].

We employed a multi-mode sampling approach to aim for a highly diverse mix of participants. Our data was collected using a non-probability convenience sampling method, with the assistance of a well-trained marketing student team who participated in exchange for course credit. During survey administration, to ensure a common understanding, respondents were provided with a definition of green products at the beginning of the questionnaire, described as "those that are beneficial to the environment and society at any stage of their life cycle and, in many definitions, are also safe for human health and meet certain quality standard" [3]. Using the provided definition, they were instructed to base their responses on their typical purchasing behavior in everyday contexts. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted to confirm clarity and avoid any potential misinterpretation of the items. Completed paper-based questionnaires were collected on-site, allowing the team to address any questions or concerns from respondents and verify that the responses reflected a clear understanding of the questions. Both paper-based and online questionnaires were delivered to the targeted consumers at the end of 2024. The paper questionnaires were distributed by intercepting consumers in front of major supermarkets in Hanoi, Hung Yen, and Ninh Binh. For online questionnaires, we approached the targeted respondents through the use of social networks, which is a common practice in consumer behavior [46]. Consent was obtained implicitly through consumers' voluntary participation (e.g., clicking on the online survey link or completing the paper questionnaire). Data collected from each method was screened for validity and missing data before being merged into the final dataset.

In total, more than 400 self-administered questionnaires were delivered, and 331 valid responses were used for the final data analysis. To ensure data quality, responses were filtered based on the following criteria: (1) exclusion of non-returned or substantially incomplete questionnaires (e.g., missing data on key demographic or latent variables); and (2) removal of responses exhibiting suspicious patterns, such as straight-lining (selecting the same answer for all or most items in a scale) or extreme speeding (completing the survey in an unreasonably short time). To address the concern regarding potential differences between the two data collection modes, we conducted a MANOVA on the latent variables between the two data collection modes to compare responses from paper-based and online questionnaires. All four-dimensional mean vectors of the two modes were found to be the same. All four multivariate tests accepted the null hypothesis (p-value > 0.05), indicating no difference between the two sets of responses.

In our sample, respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 27 years (average 20.8), reflecting the typical Gen Z age range [47]. A large proportion of our respondents were students, and more than seventy percent were females. Regarding income, a significant portion of our sample had relatively low monthly income (less than VND 5m or approximately USD 200). This aligns with the typical profile of Vietnamese Gen Z consumers, many of whom are students with lower average incomes [48]. While their low income may slightly discourage them from paying more for sustainable products [49] this generation is the avid supporters of sustainable products, with a majority considering that purchasing sustainable or environmentally friendly products is important [50]. After graduating from high school, often at the age of 17, students usually go straight to university or college, which is typically a four-five-year period.

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Table 1 presents our sample characteristics.

Table 1.
Sample characteristics.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	16-21	224	67.67%
	22-27	107	32.33%
Gender	Male	89	26.89%
	Female	242	73.11%
Job	Student	220	66.47%
	Service-related	27	8.16%
	Administration	54	16.31%
	Other	30	9.06%
Income (Monthly)	≤ VND 5m	169	51.21%
	≤ VND 10m	93	28.18%
	≤ VND 18m	45	13.63%
	≤ VND 32m	18	5.45%
	≥ VND 32m	5	1.53%

3.2. Measurements and Questionnaire Development

In general, the constructs in our study were measured using scales adapted from literature. Specifically, three items measuring deontological evaluation and four items measuring ethical judgments toward green purchase were adapted from Chan [51] with some modifications to be suitable with the context of green purchase. The five-item scale measuring teleological evaluation was developed based on its conceptualization by Hunt and Vitell [11] with reference to the procedure used in Chan, et al. [22]. To measure need for status, we adopted a five-item status consumption scale developed by Eastman, et al. [34]. The three-item scale measuring green purchase intention was adapted from Chan [51]. Green purchase behavior was measured using a single-item scale adapted from Kacen and Lee [52]. "When I go to the market, I often buy green products." While single-item measures are sometimes viewed as limited, this item captures concrete and unidimensional behavior, which makes it appropriate for single-item measurement according to the criteria proposed by Bergkvist and Rossiter [53]. Moreover, the meaning of "green products" was clearly defined in the questionnaire to ensure consistency in interpretation among respondents. All the scale items in our study were scored on a 7-point Likert-type format (1: strongly disagree; 4: neutral; 7: strongly agree). The scale items used in our study are presented in Appendix.

To serve the purpose of data collection, all the scale items measuring the six constructs in our research model were included in the questionnaire. In addition, at the end of the questionnaire, we included personal questions such as age, gender, education, and income level. To ensure a common understanding of green products among our respondents, we provided the definition of green products at the beginning of the questionnaire. Since we collected data in Vietnam, all the scale items originally in English were first translated into Vietnamese by a bilingual person and then another person translated them back into English, following the back-and-forth translation process. After that, an English-fluent scholar carefully checked the translated version and the original one in English for any necessary adjustment. Before delivering questionnaires to the target respondents, a pilot test was conducted with a small student sample for the purpose of questionnaire clarity and understanding.

3.3. Data Analysis

We tested the proposed research framework by employing Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was the ideal method for investigating small sample without assumption of normality [54]. The analysis started with measurement model assessment to verify the reliability and validity of the constructs, which was followed by a structural model assessment and a

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bootstrapping procedure to examine the proposed paths [55]. The analysis was run on SmartPLS3 software.

4. Research Results

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

To assess the measurement model, we first checked the loadings of the measurements' items. After dropping two items (one from need for status scale and one from the scale measuring teleological evaluation) due to low outer loadings, the remaining loadings of all indicators exceeded the threshold value of 0.70 [55]. Next, the scale reliability and convergent validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The results were all above the satisfactory value of 0.70 for Cronbach's alpha, CR, and 0.50 for AVE, indicating that the measurement model had acceptable scale reliability and convergent validity (see Table 2). Finally, in order to establish discriminant validity, Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was examined. The HTMT ratio is considered a new and superior measure to overcome the traditional approach's bias [56]. As exhibited in Table 3, the results provided evidence for discriminant validity as the HTMT ratios for all constructs were lower than the required value of 0.90. Overall, the results demonstrated good reliability, convergent and discriminant validity for all the scales in our model.

Table 2.
Reliability and validity assessment.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Deontological evaluation	0.784	0.837	0.871	0.693
Teleological evaluation	0.838	0.842	0.891	0.673
Ethical Judgment	0.896	0.898	0.928	0.763
Need for status	0.856	0.883	0.902	0.698
Purchase intention	0.760	0.766	0.863	0.677
Purchase behavior*	-	-	-	-

Note: *: One-item construct.

Table 3.
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

	Deontological Evaluation	Teleological Evaluation	Ethical Judgment	Need for Status	Purchase Intention	Purchase Behavior
Deontological evaluation						
Teleological evaluation	0.803					
Ethical Judgment	0.799	0.830				
Need for status	0.558	0.500	0.466			
Purchase intention	0.800	0.720	0.707	0.462		
Purchase behavior	0.695	0.496	0.511	0.385	0.741	

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

Before assessing the structural model relationships, we first examined collinearity to ensure that it does not bias the results. The VIF values of all pairs of endogenous constructs and their respective predictors in our study were found less than 3.3, indicating no risk of collinearity [57]. Then, we employed the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) values to assess the structural model. The R^2 and the Q^2 values of our endogenous constructs also presented proof of the explanatory power and the predictive accuracy of the data, respectively. Specifically, our results demonstrated good R^2 values, ranging from 0.394 (for purchase intention) to 0.664 (for ethical judgment). Also, the Q^2 values ranged from 0.26 to 0.496, indicating that the model has predictive relevance.

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4.3. Hypotheses Testing

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 sub-samples at 0.05 significance level. Detailed hypotheses test results are presented in Table 4. In this study, a total of six hypotheses were tested. All hypothesized relationships were found to be significant and in the expected direction. Specifically, the empirical results showed that (1) both deontological evaluation and teleological evaluation were significantly related to ethical judgment (β = 0.313, p-value = 0.000; β = 0.569, p-value = 0.000, respectively), lending support to H1 and H2a; (2) teleological evaluation was significantly related to green purchase intention (β = 0.273, p-value = 0.000), thus, H2b was supported; (3) purchase intention was significantly influenced by ethical judgment (β = 0.315, p-value = 0.000) and by need for status (β = 0.139, p-value = 0.019), lending support to H3 and H5; (4) green purchase behavior was significantly influenced by purchase intention (β = 0.646, p-value = 0.000), so H4 received support from the data. The results of PLS-SEM are presented in Figure 2.

Table 4.
Hypotheses testing.

	Coeff.	f^2	P-values	Effect size	Hypothesis	Support
Deontological evaluation -> Ethical judgment	0.313	0.157	0.000	Medium	H1	Yes
Teleological evaluation -> Ethical judgment	0.569	0.519	0.000	Large	H2a	Yes
Teleological evaluation -> Intention	0.273	0.046	0.000	Medium	H2b	Yes
Ethical judgment -> Intention	0.315	0.062	0.000	Medium	H3	Yes
Intention -> Behavior	0.646	0.718	0.000	Large	H4	Yes
Need for status -> Intention	0.139	0.026	0.019	Small	H5	Yes

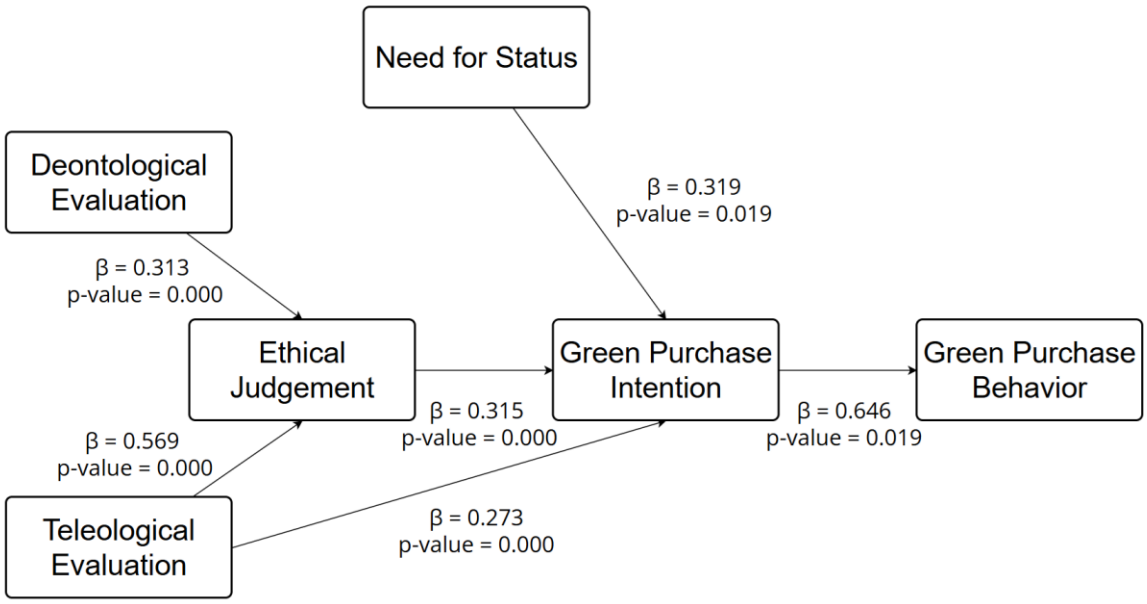

Figure 2.
The results of PLS-SEM.

5. Discussion and Implications

5.1. Discussion

The current study examines some determinants of green purchase behavior among urban Vietnamese Gen Z consumers through the lens of the Hunt and Vitell [11] theory of ethics and status perspective. In this study, six hypothesized relationships were tested, and all received support from the

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data. As expected, the current study provides empirical evidence supporting the H-V model in the domain of green purchase behavior. Specifically, it highlights the significant role of teleological evaluation in predicting ethical judgment and intention to buy green products. Our findings demonstrate that the impact of teleological evaluation on ethical judgment was stronger than that of deontological evaluation. This dominant influence of teleological evaluation can be attributed to the practical realism of Vietnamese consumers, who often place greater emphasis on the practical consequences of their actions (such as social approval, perceived benefits, or utility) rather than abstract moral obligations [42]. This aligns with the teleological component of the Hunt-Vitell model and resonates with the perspective of relativistic consumers, commonly found in collectivist cultures, who are more attuned to how their behavior affects others and have the tendency to evaluate ethical decisions based on consequences for the group rather than personal principles.

Interestingly, our findings corroborate an older study on Chinese consumers from Chan, et al. [22] but are different from a more recent study in Taiwan, also an East Asian context. As the rise of individualism in Asia implies important behavioral changes among its consumers [58] the results suggest a similarity between the current Vietnamese consumers and Chinese consumers in the past. This highlights a potentially context-specific shift in ethical decision-making: in an emerging Confucian economy like Vietnam, where predominantly collectivistic consumers engage in ethical behaviors out of concerns for others and the coming generations [59] consumers may justify green consumption based on perceived consequences (such as environmental benefits, personal pride, or social recognition) rather than internalized moral rules. On the other hand, individualistic consumers in Asian countries at higher stages of development (e.g., China, Taiwan) are less concerned by external influences [60] thus, they rely more on personal moral standards when considering green products. Such a finding adds nuance to the Hunt-Vitell model by suggesting that the relative influence of deontological and teleological reasoning may vary across cultural and economic contexts.

In addition, the current study proposes the addition of need for status to better understand Vietnamese consumers' ethical decision-making. While need for status has a statistically significant influence on intention, its effect size is modest. Our findings concur with past research on social status-driven ethical behaviors [61]. The modest effect size could be explained by our choice of generic green products in the questionnaire, which contrasts sharply with the luxury or premium context often employed in past studies [62]. In Vietnam, materialistic values assert a strong influence on young consumers' preference toward green apparel products. In such a context, status-driven motivation for generic green products tends to have a stronger effect for luxury green products [62]. It seems that the virtual signaling aspect of ethical consumption, where green products can convey social distinction [41] requires luxury or premium elements in order to be effective.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

The findings of the present study provide several important theoretical contributions. First, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical insights into the driving forces of pro-environmental consumption, especially from an ethical perspective, in the context of Vietnam, an Asian emerging market. Drawing on the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics, this study provides empirical evidence supporting the importance of both aspects of moral philosophy (i.e., deontological and teleological evaluation) and ethical judgment toward green purchase in the context of green consumption, which has been largely neglected in the extant literature [63, 64]. While the Hunt-Vitell model allows for this direct path, few empirical studies have explicitly examined it within green consumption; thus, our study provides novel evidence for the H-V framework's application in sustainable consumption, particularly within an under-researched emerging Asian market.

Second, this study helps clarify the current inconsistency between the impact of teleological evaluation compared to deontological evaluation on intention in an Asian context [21, 22]. Our findings indicate that teleological evaluation (consequences-based) asserts a stronger influence on green purchase intention than deontological evaluation (moral-based), in contrast to the recent findings of Chang [21]

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on Taiwanese consumers. We extend the discussion of the importance of individual moral philosophy within Confucian society in continuous development. Moreover, the focus on green purchase behavior among the crucial demographic of young consumers in an Asian emerging market further enriches the existing literature on green consumption.

Third, the findings from this study illustrate the significant role of status motivation, a factor previously marked by controversy and inconsistency in literature, alongside ethical motives in contribution to green purchase behavior. The results indicate that while status concern contributes to green purchase intention, ethical issues (judgment and its antecedents) hold comparatively more weight among Gen Z Asian consumers. By incorporating both purchase intention and actual green purchase behavior into our model, this study enhances the empirical understanding of the green consumption phenomenon.

5.3. Managerial Implications

Several important managerial implications are drawn based on the findings from this study. First, the results indicate that both ethical and status motivations significantly predict green purchase behavior, with ethical evaluation and ethical judgment emerging as the more influential motivations driving this important behavior. Managerial efforts should be focused on developing effective marketing strategies to promote ethical aspects as well as the symbolic image of status associated with green products. Second, as ethical motivations are suggested to be more influential among urban Gen Z consumers, purchases of pro-environmental products should be communicated as both an ethical and socially responsible activity, and it should become a common norm among consumers.

Furthermore, the findings from our study indicate that young consumers evaluate green purchase behavior strongly based on perceived consequences associated with this behavior, for themselves and for other stakeholders. Therefore, firms and industry associations are encouraged to develop relevant and effective communication programs to evoke consumers' positive self-rewarding feelings or self-satisfaction of doing the right thing when purchasing green products, rather than mainly focusing on perceived obligations. The benefits for different stakeholders brought about by buying green products should also be highlighted. By doing so, consumers' intention to buy and actual purchases of green products can be enhanced, as they will perceive that engaging in green product purchases can bring benefits not only to themselves, but also to the environment and the broader community.

5.4. Future Research Directions

The current research has several limitations that provide avenues for future studies. First, our study proposes and tests the hypotheses pertaining to determinants of green purchase behavior through the lens of H-V model and the status perspective. It has been suggested that the research results may be different if specific green products are considered [65]. Therefore, it would be useful for future studies to test the research model across various green products. Second, the current study employs a non-probability sampling method to collect data from young urban Gen Z consumers, with a majority being students. While our respondents share strong similarity with the typical Gen Z market in Vietnam, they may not fully represent the broader diversity of Gen Z consumers in Vietnam, such as those in rural regions or with different occupational or income backgrounds. Subsequent attempts to study Vietnamese young consumers should consider using more robust sampling methods, such as systematic random sampling or quota sampling, to ensure a higher degree of representativeness for the population of interest. Finally, our findings suggest a shift in ethical consumption patterns as the economy develops. Future studies may benefit from a longitudinal approach to ethical consumption and status-driven consumption to examine how consumers' ethical considerations evolve.

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Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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Appendix: Scales Used in the Study

Deontological Evaluation: Considering your own norms and values, how would you evaluate green purchase behavior?

1. Purchasing green products is my obligation to others and the environment
2. Purchasing green products is morally right
3. It is my duty to purchase green products

Teleological Evaluation: Considering possible consequences associated with green purchases, how would you evaluate green purchase behavior?

1. Purchasing green products benefits the community
2. Purchasing green products helps protect the environment
3. I feel proud when buying green products
4. I feel joyful when buying green products
5. Purchasing green products makes companies more environmentally conscious

Green Purchase Ethical Judgment: Considering your own norms and values, and the desirability of the estimated outcomes, how would you judge green purchase behavior?

1. Purchasing green products is a right behavior
2. Purchasing green products is an ethical behavior
3. It is good to purchase green products
4. Purchasing green products is a right behavior that benefits individuals and society

Need for status

1. I would buy a product just because it has status
2. I am interested in new products with status
3. I would pay more for a product if it had status
4. The status of a product is important to me
5. A product is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal

Green Purchase Intention

1. I will consider buying less poluted products
2. I will consider switching to other brands for ecological reasons
3. I plan to switch to a green version of a product

Green Purchase Behavior

1. When I go to the market, I often buy green products

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