

## Research Article

# THE IMPACT OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION ON WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRANDS: INSIGHTS FROM VIETNAMESE CONSUMERS

\*Bui Thanh Thanh and Le Phuong Nha An

International University – Vietnam National University, HCMC, Vietnam.

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how different forms of conspicuous consumption, specifically the desire to follow visible fashion trends and the intention to signal social or environmental awareness, could shape consumers' willingness to engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) advocacy for environmentally sustainable fashion brands in Vietnamese market. Environmental beliefs and environmental norms are also examined to understand how value-driven factors interact with socially expressive motives. A quantitative survey of 240 Vietnamese respondents was analyzed using PLS-SEM. The findings suggest that environmental beliefs, trend-related conspicuousness, and social-awaken signaling all play meaningful roles in predicting WOM intentions, whereas environmental norms show no significant direct effect. Furthermore, the findings show considerable variation in consumer behavior, with customers displaying varying levels of involvement in sustainable fashion advocacy. The results provide new insights for both academics and corporations into how both ecological considerations and social expression jointly influence communication about sustainable fashion in an emerging market.

**Keywords:** Sustainable fashion; Conspicuous consumption; Environmental beliefs; Environmental norms; Word-of-mouth.

### INTRODUCTION

Prior research has mostly focused on environmental sustainability while ignoring the social significance and symbolic role of fashion consumption (Legere & Kang, 2020; Stringer *et al.*, 2020). People are more motivated to tell others about things if they feel knowledgeable about them. Research on the motivations behind word-of-mouth marketing must adhere to this idea (Engel *et al.*, 1969; Jacoby & Hoyer, 1981; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Keller & Berry, 2003). People who regard themselves to be highly educated consumers (such as market mavens or opinion leaders) are motivated to preserve a favorable self-image by sharing their thoughts (Dichter, 1966; Feick & Price, 1987). The desire to maintain control over one's social reputation is the main driving force behind word-of-mouth (WOM). People use WOM to influence how other people see them, expressing and reinforcing their preferred identity through communication. This drive frequently works in the background, affecting the subjects they decide to talk about and share. By doing this, WOM becomes a social behavior that is focused on managing impressions rather than just exchanging information (Berger, 2014).

In Vietnam, where social recognition and collective identity play a significant role in consumer behavior, it is important to explore whether customers choose environmentally sustainable fashion brands for sustainability reasons or as a tool for conspicuous spending. Additionally, consumers seek to communicate their identity and beliefs by identifying with the significance of a brand. People "connect" with a brand's message when they decide to wear it, claim Escalas (2004) and Escalas and Bettman (2003). Therefore, people may use a brand more often to further their values when they identify with it.

This study aims to clarify how both environmental factors and conspicuous consumption motives jointly influence WOM about sustainable fashion brands among Vietnamese consumers. The specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate whether environmental beliefs contribute to the formation of environmental norms.
2. Examine how environmental beliefs and environmental norms influence consumers' WOM intentions.
3. Assess how fashion-trend visibility and social-awaken signaling affect WOM toward sustainable fashion brands.
4. Evaluate whether self-brand connection moderates the relationships between these predictors and WOM.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Framework

Goal-framing theory is often used in psychology (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). According to this theory, depending on present circumstances and value priorities, a certain goal may be activated or become focused (Steg *et al.*, 2014). Hedonic, gain, and normative goals are the three types of goal frames that are frequently employed to define sustainable decisions (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). This study examines the influence of conspicuous consumption on word-of-mouth marketing for sustainable fashion, Goal Framing Theory helps explain why consumers choose to discuss sustainable products. Others may use word-of-mouth (WOM) to promote normative goals such as environmental stewardship. Others, particularly those who engage in conspicuous consumption, may use word-of-mouth to attain hedonic or gain-oriented goals such as self-esteem or communication of social standing and ideals.

\*Corresponding Author : Bui Thanh Thanh,  
International University – Vietnam National University, HCMC, Vietnam.

## Hypotheses Development

### Environmental Beliefs and Norms

Environmental beliefs (EB) are established habits and views influencing pro-environmental actions (Gray *et al.*, 1985). As economies modernize, people's environmental concern rises, shaping EBs (Inglehart, 1995, 1997). Stronger EBs correlate with environmentally conscious purchasing (Mainieri *et al.*, 1997; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008; Tanner & Kast, 2003), making consumers more aware of greenwashing. Environmental norms (EN) represent moral obligations and social expectations that guide eco-friendly behavior (Stern, 2000; Cialdini *et al.*, 1991; Lee & Lee, 2024). Through the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) and the value-belief-norm (VBN) framework, individuals' values influence adoption of pro-environmental actions (Dunlap & van Liere, 1978; Dunlap *et al.*, 2000; Stern *et al.*, 1999). Norms often mediate between beliefs and behavior, creating moral responsibility that encourages ecological action (Tanner & Kast, 2003; Gadenne *et al.*, 2011).

#### H1: Environmental beliefs positively influence environmental norms.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) strongly influences consumer behavior, often more than mass media (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Engel *et al.*, 1969; Herr *et al.*, 1991). With social media, e-WOM facilitates feedback and reviews (Berger, 2014; Yang *et al.*, 2012). Environmental beliefs and norms impact brand advocacy and green purchasing intentions (Gatersleben *et al.*, 2002; Panda *et al.*, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2021; Jansson *et al.*, 2010).

#### H2: Environmental beliefs positively influence word-of-mouth intentions.

#### H3: Environmental norms positively influence word-of-mouth intentions.

### Fashion Trend and Social Awareness Conspicuousness

Conspicuous consumption allows individuals to display social status and identity (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Veblen, 1899; Amatulli *et al.*, 2018). Fashion trend conspicuousness (FTC) reflects how visibly trends are expressed and shared, influencing purchase and WOM behavior (Apaolaza *et al.*, 2022; Cervellon & Shamma, 2013; Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Social awareness conspicuousness (SAC) represents the use of fashion to signal social or environmental responsibility (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Goal-framing theory suggests that normative goals increase eco-friendly behavior, while hedonic or gain goals may not (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007; Mishra *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2020). Research shows conspicuous sustainable fashion drives WOM and eco-friendly actions (Apaolaza *et al.*, 2022; Cervellon & Shamma, 2013; Hammad *et al.*, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2016; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

#### H4: Fashion trend conspicuousness positively influences word-of-mouth intentions.

#### H5: Social-awaken conspicuousness positively influences word-of-mouth intentions.

### Self-Brand Connection

Self-concept motivates symbolic consumption, guiding brand choices aligned with personal identity (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Shavitt, 1990; Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Self-brand connection (SBC) strengthens emotional attachment, influencing

brand loyalty and WOM (Moore & Homer, 2008; Naletelich & Spears, 2020; Ferraro *et al.*, 2013). For sustainable fashion, SBC reinforces eco-friendly behavior and reduces skepticism toward green washing (Apaolaza *et al.*, 2022). Consumers identify with brands reflecting their environmental values, increasing WOM and sustainable purchases.

#### H6a: Self-brand connection moderates the effect of environmental beliefs on WOM.

#### H6b: Self-brand connection moderates the effect of environmental norms on WOM.

#### H6c: Self-brand connection moderates the effect of fashion trend conspicuousness on WOM.

#### H6d: Self-brand connection moderates the effect of social-awaken conspicuousness on WOM.

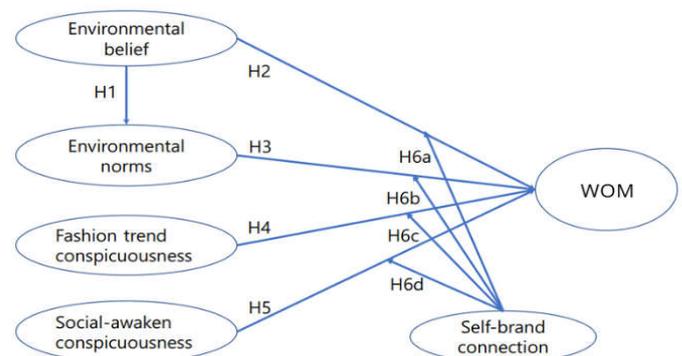


Fig 1. Research framework.

## METHODOLOGY

An online questionnaire was distributed through Facebook, Zalo, and Instagram, targeting Vietnamese consumers aged 18 and above who were familiar with sustainable fashion. After screening invalid submissions, 240 responses were retained. The survey included three parts: a short screening section, demographic questions, and measurement items adapted from established scales, all rated on 5-point Likert formats. Convenience sampling was applied due to practical constraints, though this limits generalizability. Data were cleaned and checked in SPSS 27, while SmartPLS 3.0 was used to evaluate the measurement and structural models.

Table 1. Measurement Items

Constructs	Items	Observed Variables	Sources
Environmental beliefs	EB1	Purchasing eco-friendly products helps to fulfill my social responsibility	Stern (2000).
	EB2	Using eco-friendly products prevents resource depletion	
	EB3	Helpful to solve environmental problems with little effort in environmental improvement	
Environmental norms	EN1	Companies should reduce their emissions even though they slow down their economic growth.	
	EN2	Sense of guilt about using eco-friendly products	
	EN3	Sense of personal obligation to buy eco-friendly products	

Fashion trend conspicuousness	FTC1	Fashionable styling is very important to me	Ki and Kim (2016).
	FTC2	One or more outfits of the new style	
	FTC3	My wardrobe up to date with the changing fashions	
Social-awaken conspicuousness	SAC1	Buy sustainable products because it shows me something about my sustainable consumption	Grace and Griffin (2009).
	SAC2	Wear/display sustainable brands, so people know I am a good person	
	SAC3	I like to show people for my sustainable consumption	
	SAC4	Sustainable brands because they make me look cool	
Word-of-mouth	WOM1	Due to its environmental image, this sustainable product is highly recommended by others	Molinari et al. (2008)
	WOM2	Due to its environmental functionality, this green product is positively recommended by others	
	WOM3	Due to its environmental advantages, I would personally recommend this green product to others.	
Self-brand connection	SBC1	The brand of this sustainable product reflects who I am	Van Der Westhuizen (2018)
	SBC2	I can identify with the brand of these sustainable products	
	SBC3	I can use the brand of these sustainable products to communicate who I am to other people	
	SBC4	I consider the brand of this sustainable product to be 'me'	

<b>Education</b>		
University/College	186	77.5
Postgraduate	39	16.3
High school or lower	15	6.3
<b>Job</b>		
Student	99	41.3
Full-time employee	84	35
Part-time employee	35	14.6
Self-employed	19	7.9
Unemployed	3	1.3
<b>Income</b>		
5-15 million VND	77	32.1
Below 5 million VND	71	29.6
15-25 million VND	48	20
25-35 million VND	26	10.8
Above 35 million VND	18	7.5

Table 3. Awareness of sustainable brands

Brand	Number of selections	Percentage
Biti's Hunter	55	15.45%
Couple TX	49	13.76%
Levi's	51	14.33%
Owen	49	13.76%
TheBlueTshirt	44	12.36%
Uniqlo (LifeWear Collection)	59	16.57%
Yody	49	13.76%

Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha)

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values met accepted thresholds, and AVE scores confirmed convergent validity. Indicator loadings exceeded recommended levels, so no items were removed. Overall, the measurement model met reliability and validity requirements for subsequent structural analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Information

Among the 240 valid respondents, most were female and primarily located in Southern Vietnam. The sample was relatively young, with the majority aged 18–24, and most participants had at least a college or university degree. Students formed the largest occupational group, and income levels were generally modest, consistent with the age profile. In terms of brand familiarity, Uniqlo's Life Wear line was the most recognized sustainable fashion brand, followed by Biti's Hunter and Levi's.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics

	Respondents	Percentage (%)
<b>Location</b>		
Northern region	38	15.8
Southern region	161	67.1
Central region	41	17.1
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	73	30.4
Female	167	69.6
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	160	66.7
25-34	57	23.8
35-44	20	8.3
Above 45	3	1.3

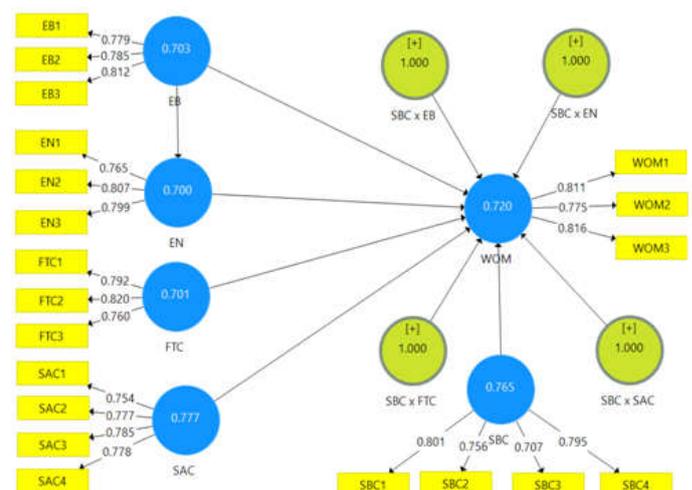
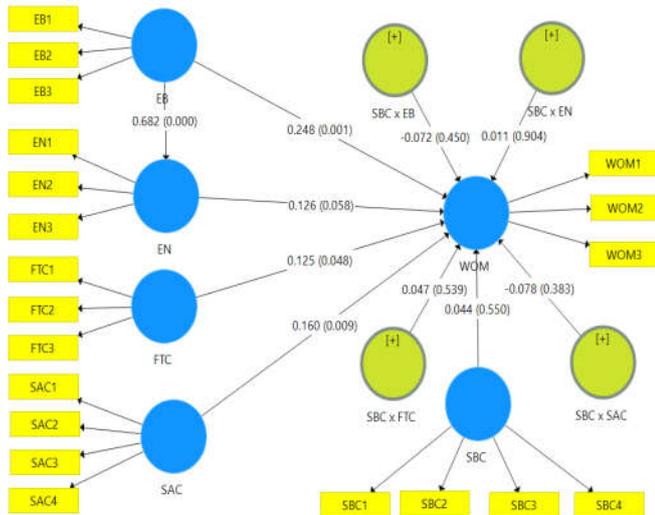


Fig 2. Cronbach's Alpha and outer loadings.

**Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing**



**Fig 3. Results of Structural Equation Modeling**

The hypotheses in which self-brand connection (SBC) interacts with word-of-mouth (WOM) were not supported by this investigation. Environmental beliefs significantly predicted both environmental norms and WOM intentions. Fashion trend conspicuousness and social-awakened conspicuousness also showed positive effects on WOM. However, environmental norms did not significantly influence WOM, and none of the moderation effects involving self-brand connection were supported.

**Table 4. Path coefficients for PLS-SEM**

Path	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Results
EB -> EN	0.682	0.07	9.72	0.000***	Supported
EB -> WOM	0.248	0.075	3.324	0.001**	Supported
EN -> WOM	0.126	0.065	1.928	0.054	Unsupported
FTC->WOM	0.125	0.063	1.977	0.048*	Supported
SAC->WOM	0.16	0.063	2.55	0.011*	Supported
SBC->WOM	0.044	0.075	0.587	0.557	Unsupported
SBC x EB -> WOM	-0.072	0.094	0.761	0.447	Unsupported
SBC x EN -> WOM	0.011	0.088	0.12	0.905	Unsupported
SBC x FTC->WOM	0.047	0.078	0.606	0.544	Unsupported
SBC x SAC -> WOM	-0.078	0.089	0.874	0.382	Unsupported

**Note:** Using two-tailed t-test; \*, p value < 0.05; \*\*, p value < 0.01; \*\*\*, p value < 0.001.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study help clarify how Vietnamese consumers engage with sustainable fashion in a context where environmental

awareness and social signaling increasingly intersect. Environmental beliefs emerged as an important driver of WOM, suggesting that when consumers genuinely recognize environmental issues, they are more willing to talk about brands that align with their views. These beliefs also strengthened environmental norms, although those norms did not translate into WOM behavior. This pattern may reflect a gap between what consumers feel they should do and what they actually communicate to others, especially when environmental norms are not strongly reinforced in daily social interactions.

The positive effects of fashion trend conspicuousness and social-awakened conspicuousness indicate that sustainable fashion is not only viewed through an ecological lens. Many consumers appear motivated by the social meaning attached to sustainability since it reflects being fashion-conscious, socially aware, and having desirable lifestyle. These symbolic motivations may be particularly salient among young Vietnamese consumers, who often express identity and status through fashion consumption.

Contrary to expectations, self-brand connection did not strengthen any of the proposed relationships. This may suggest that emotional or identity-based bonds with sustainable brands in Vietnam are still developing, as sustainability remains a relatively new concept in the mainstream fashion market. Consumers may like sustainable products but have not yet formed the deeper brand attachments necessary to influence recommendation behavior.

**CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS**

This study examined how environmental beliefs, environmental norms, and different forms of conspicuous consumption shape word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions toward sustainable fashion brands in Vietnam. The results show that consumers' willingness to talk about sustainable fashion is influenced both by their environmental understanding and by the social meanings attached to sustainable products. Environmental beliefs, trend-related visibility, and social-awakened signaling all contributed to stronger WOM intentions, while environmental norms did not. These findings suggest that in Vietnam, sustainable fashion communication is driven more by awareness and symbolic expression than by internalized moral obligations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Data were collected within a short time frame and through convenience sampling which may limit the generalizability of the results, especially beyond younger, urban consumers. Future studies could employ probability sampling, incorporate behavioral measures, or compare different demographic groups and cultural settings. Expanding the model to include additional psychological or contextual variables would also help build a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable fashion communication.

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