

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON GREEN PURCHASE INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SUBJECTIVE NORM*

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Abstract

This research article aims to: 1) examine the direct effect of social media marketing on green purchase intention; 2) test the influence of social media marketing on subjective norm and the effect of subjective norm on green purchase intention; and 3) verify the mediating role of subjective norm in the relationship between social media marketing and green purchase intention. A quantitative survey was conducted among residents in Yunnan Province, China, collecting data from 454 valid respondents, which were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

The research results found that:

- 1) Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on green purchase intention.
- 2) Social media marketing significantly influences subjective norm, and subjective norm significantly influences green purchase intention.

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3) Subjective norm partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and green purchase intention.

As global environmental concerns such as climate change and resource scarcity escalate, understanding the psychological drivers of sustainable consumption has become imperative. This study investigates the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on green purchase intention (GPI) among residents in Yunnan Province, China, specifically examining the mediating mechanism of subjective norm (SN). Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the research conceptualizes SMM as an external stimulus that shapes the internal organismic state (SN), which subsequently drives the behavioral response (GPI). Data were collected via an online survey from 454 valid respondents and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The empirical results demonstrate that SMM exerts a significant positive impact on both SN and GPI. Furthermore, mediation analysis reveals that SN significantly influences GPI and serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between SMM and GPI. These findings suggest that social media fosters green consumption not only through direct information dissemination but also by reinforcing social expectations and perceived peer pressure. Theoretically, this study refines the S-O-R model and the Theory of Planned Behavior within a regional, collectivist context. Practically, the results suggest that marketers and policymakers should leverage influencer endorsements and community-centric content to normalize sustainable behaviors and cultivate pro-environmental social norms.

Keywords: Green purchase intention, Social media marketing, S-O-R theory, Subjective norm, Yunnan Province

Introduction

The global community currently faces a critical juncture defined by escalating environmental challenges such as climate change, extensive pollution,

and the increasing scarcity of natural resources. This growing environmental consciousness has significantly transformed consumer priorities, placing sustainable consumption at the forefront of global development strategies. Within this evolving landscape, the digital revolution has introduced innovative tools that redefine how individuals interact with sustainability. Specifically, social media marketing has emerged as a transformative force in influencing consumer decision-making processes. Platforms such as WeChat and Douyin provide unique environments for disseminating environmental information and shaping consumer attitudes toward sustainable products (Sun & Wang, 2020).

To understand these behavioral shifts, researchers often utilize the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This theoretical model posits that external environmental cues influence an individual's internal cognitive and emotional states, which subsequently lead to specific behavioral outcomes. In the context of sustainable commerce, social media marketing acts as a potent external stimulus capable of modifying consumers' internal psychological structures (Jacoby, 2002). These platforms extend beyond simple information sharing to actively cultivate social expectations and collective values (Xie & Madni, 2023).

A critical component of this internal psychological process is subjective norm, which represents perceived social pressure to perform a specific behavior. Subjective norms are foundational to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and serve as an essential organism element within the S-O-R model. Research indicates that when consumers witness peers or influential figures endorsing sustainable products on social platforms, they experience heightened social obligation (Xu et al., 2022). Furthermore, subjective norms play a pivotal mediating role between exposure to electronic word-of-mouth on social media and eventual green purchase intention (Parveen & Chaudhary, 2025).

While these relationships have been explored in various global settings, a significant research gap exists regarding their interaction within specific regional markets in China, such as Yunnan Province. Yunnan presents a unique case due to its diverse demographic profile, rich ecological heritage, and rapidly increasing digital engagement (Yunnan Provincial Government, 2024). In China's collectivist culture, the influence of social circles is especially pronounced, suggesting that subjective norms may function differently in this regional context compared to individualistic Western markets. Despite the proliferation of green marketing studies, few have integrated social media marketing, subjective norms, and green purchase intentions within a single empirical framework focused on an inland Chinese province.

This study aims to address this gap by applying the S-O-R framework to analyze how social media marketing influences green purchase intentions among consumers in Yunnan Province. The findings offer theoretical refinements to existing models of sustainable behavior and provide actionable insights for marketers and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable consumption through digital channels (Hu et al., 2024). This research contributes to understanding how digital ecosystems can drive positive environmental change in regional China.

Objectives

This study objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the direct effect of social media marketing (SMM) on green purchase intention (GPI) among consumers in Yunnan Province, China.
2. To test whether social media marketing (SMM) shapes consumers' subjective norm (SN), and whether subjective norm predicts green purchase intention (GPI).

3. To verify the mediating role of subjective norm (SN) in the relationship between social media marketing (SMM) and green purchase intention (GPI) within the S-O-R framework.

Literature Review

1. S-O-R Theory (Stimulus–Organism–Response)

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), explains how external stimuli influence internal organismic states to drive behavioral responses. In consumer research, stimuli include marketing cues, organism encompasses cognitive and emotional processes, and response denotes behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention (Jacoby, 2002). Within green consumption literature, S-O-R has been applied to examine how social media marketing, as a stimulus, evokes internal mediators like subjective norm, ultimately shaping green purchase intention. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes social media marketing as the stimulus, subjective norm as the organismic mediator, and green purchase intention as the response.

2. Social Media Marketing and Green Purchase Intention

Social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a powerful tool influencing consumer behavior, particularly in the context of green consumption. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Xiaohongshu enable brands to engage with consumers through targeted content, influencer collaborations, and interactive campaigns, fostering awareness and shaping attitudes toward sustainable products.

Empirical studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between SMM and green purchase intention. For instance, research by Sun & Wang (2020) found that engaging social media content significantly enhances consumers' intentions to purchase eco-friendly products. Similarly, Hu et al. (2024)

highlighted that informative and persuasive green marketing on social media platforms effectively influences consumers' sustainable purchasing decisions.

These findings suggest that SMM not only raises awareness about green products but also positively affects consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable consumption. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media marketing positively influences consumers' green purchase intention.

3. Social Media Marketing and Subjective Norm

Social media marketing shapes social pressure by exposing consumers to peer, influencer, and community content endorsing green behaviors. Subjective norm—individuals' perception of social expectations—can be influenced by normative cues embedded in social media campaigns (Ajzen, 1991; Parveen & Chaudhary, 2025; Sun & Wang, 2020).

Empirical research supports this positive relationship. A study of Chinese youth found that information shared via social media significantly enhances perceived social expectations toward green consumption (Gan et al., 2025). Similarly, Xu et al. (2022) reported that social media marketing positively influences consumers' subjective norms. Through narrative, endorsements, and peer validation, social media marketing cultivates normative pressure toward sustainable consumption. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media marketing positively influences consumers' subjective norms towards green purchase.

4. Subjective Norm and Green Purchase Intention

Subjective norm—individuals' perception of social pressure from significant others—plays a key role in determining green purchase intention within the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that subjective norm exhibits a moderate positive correlation with green purchase intention among TPB antecedents (Liu et al., 2020).

Empirical studies in China further affirm subjective norm's influence. Xu et al. (2022) found that subjective norm significantly mediates the effects of environmental knowledge and perceived behavioral control on green purchase intention. In collectivist cultures like China, normative influence tends to be particularly salient, as social expectations from family, peers, and community strongly motivate individuals to conform to green consumption behaviors. Consequently, integrating subjective norm into predictive models is critical for understanding green purchase intention in such contexts. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed: H3: Subjective norm positively influences consumers' green purchase intention.

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Based on the above analysis, the research framework of this study is as follows:

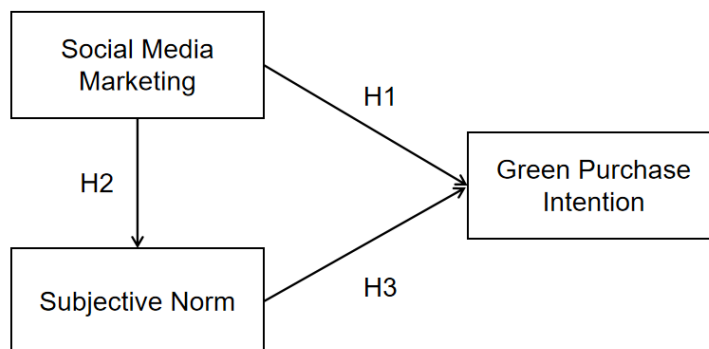


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by the researcher)

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative survey-based approach to empirically investigate the relationships among social media marketing, subjective norm, and green purchase intention among residents of Yunnan Province, China.

The target population consists of adult residents aged 18 and above in Yunnan Province, which reached approximately 37.56 million by 2024 (Yunnan Provincial Government, 2024). Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was 385 respondents. To account for potential invalid responses, the target was inflated by 20%, resulting in a goal of 480 questionnaires.

Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through WeChat and Douyin using convenience and snowball sampling. The survey remained active for four weeks. The questionnaire comprised two sections: demographic information and standardized measurement scales for the three core constructs. All items were adapted from established scales and measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling with IBM SPSS AMOS. A two-stage procedure was implemented. First, the measurement model was assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha and CITC, and validity was evaluated through factor loadings, AVE, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, 2009). Second, the structural model was tested to examine hypothesized paths. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2/df , RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and IFI. Finally, mediation analysis employed bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test the indirect effect of subjective norm.

Results

1. Descriptive Profile and Measurement Quality

A total of 475 questionnaires were collected online. After screening for quality, 21 invalid responses were removed, leaving 454 valid samples.

The gender distribution was balanced, with males at 49.34% and females at 50.66%. Most respondents were aged 26–40 years (63.65%). Nearly half held a bachelor's degree (49.56%), and 9.69% had a master's or higher. Monthly

household income was mainly between 15,000 and 30,000 RMB (44.93%), followed by less than 15,000 RMB (30.18%). This sample provides a reliable basis for studying green purchase behavior in Yunnan.

Cronbach's alpha and Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) were used to assess the reliability of each construct. According to Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, CITC values greater than 0.30 suggest that individual items contribute meaningfully to their corresponding constructs (Hair et al., 2009). In this study, all constructs demonstrated high reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.894 for Social Media Marketing, 0.908 for Subjective Norm, and 0.926 for Green Purchase Intention, all well above the recommended threshold. Furthermore, all CITC values ranged from 0.488 to 0.605, exceeding the minimum requirement. These findings confirm that the measurement items are consistent and contribute adequately to the internal coherence of each scale.

Construct validity was evaluated using factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). Factor loadings above 0.70 indicate good indicator reliability, while AVE values above 0.50 support convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). CR values over 0.70 further confirm internal consistency (Hair et al., 2009). In this study, all factor loadings exceeded 0.77, and AVE values were 0.69 (SMM), 0.785 (SN), and 0.769 (GPI), all meeting the convergence standard. CR values ranged from 0.898 to 0.939, indicating strong construct reliability. These results collectively demonstrate that the measurement model possesses solid convergent validity and internal consistency.

Table 1 Results of Validity and Reliability Analysis

Factors	Indicators	CITC	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	SMM1	0.513	0.948	0.69	0.898	0.894
	SMM2	0.524	0.804			
	SMM3	0.556	0.789			
	SMM4	0.549	0.771			
Subjective Norm (SN)	SN1	0.488	0.943	0.785	0.916	0.908
	SN2	0.56	0.854			
	SN3	0.544	0.857			
Green Purchase Intention (GPI)	GPI1	0.545	0.935	0.769	0.93	0.926
	GPI2	0.602	0.863			
	GPI3	0.605	0.837			
	GPI4	0.584	0.871			

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which requires that the square root of each construct's AVE be greater than its correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 2, the square roots of AVE for Social Media Marketing (0.831), Subjective Norm (0.886), and Green Purchase Intention (0.877) all exceed their respective inter-construct correlations. For instance, the correlation between SMM and SN is 0.268, which is lower than both 0.831 and 0.886. Similarly, the correlation between SN and GPI is 0.286, also below the square root values of both constructs. These results confirm that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other constructs, thus establishing satisfactory discriminant validity for the measurement model.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation and AVE Square Root Value

	SMM	SN	GPI
SMM	0.831		
SN	0.268	0.886	
GPI	0.241	0.286	0.877

The measurement model was evaluated using multiple fit indices to assess its adequacy. As shown in Table 3, all values meet or exceed commonly accepted thresholds. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 2.861, which is below the threshold of 3. RMSEA is 0.064, indicating an acceptable error of approximation. Goodness-of-fit indices (GFI = 0.956, AGFI = 0.929, IFI = 0.980, TLI = 0.973, CFI = 0.980) all exceed the recommended value of 0.90, suggesting an excellent model fit. Additionally, parsimony fit indices (PGFI = 0.594, PNFI = 0.722) are above the 0.50 benchmark, further supporting the model's adequacy. These results collectively indicate that the measurement model fits the observed data well and provides a solid foundation for structural path analysis.

Table 3 Model fitting index results

	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	PGFI	PNFI
Judging standard	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.5	>0.5
Fitting result	2.861	0.064	0.956	0.929	0.980	0.973	0.98	0.594	0.722

2. Structural Effects of Social Media Marketing on Subjective Norm and Green Purchase Intention

The structural model was examined to validate the hypothesized relationships. As shown in the results, all three proposed hypotheses were

supported. H1 confirmed that Social Media Marketing (SMM) has a significant positive effect on Green Purchase Intention (GPI) ($\beta = 0.149$, $p = 0.002$), indicating a direct influence. H2 revealed a strong relationship between SMM and Subjective Norm (SN) ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that social media interactions significantly shape normative beliefs. H3 showed that SN significantly impacts GPI ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < 0.001$), validating the mediating role of subjective norms in green consumption decisions. All path coefficients exceeded the threshold for statistical significance ($z > 1.96$), and p-values were below 0.05. These findings demonstrate a well-supported model in which both direct and indirect effects contribute to consumers' green purchase intentions, aligning with the theoretical framework.

Table 4 Test Results of Research Hypothesis

Hypot hesis	Path	β	SE	z (CR)	p	Estimate	Results
H1	SMM→GPI	0.149	0.049	3.059	0.002	0.153	Supported
H2	SMM→SN	0.258	0.051	5.079	0	0.25	Supported
H3	SN→GPI	0.228	0.048	4.788	0	0.24	Supported

3. Mediation Mechanism of Subjective Norm

The mediating effect of Subjective Norm (SN) between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Green Purchase Intention (GPI) was tested using a bootstrap approach. Results indicate that SMM has a significant direct effect on GPI ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, the indirect path through SN is also significant, with SMM positively influencing SN ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$), and SN subsequently affecting GPI ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$). The total effect of SMM on GPI is 0.246, and the 95% confidence intervals for both direct and indirect effects (LLCI–ULCI) do not include zero, confirming significance. These findings demonstrate that SN partially mediates the relationship between SMM and GPI, suggesting that social

media marketing not only directly enhances green purchase intentions but also indirectly influences them by shaping consumers' perceived social expectations.

Table 5 The mediating effect test results

Effect	Paths	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct	SMM→GPI	0.18	0.047	3.841	0	0.088	0.273
Mediating	SMM→SN	0.294	0.05	5.924	0	0.197	0.391
	SN→GPI	0.222	0.043	5.18	0	0.138	0.306
Total	SMM→GPI	0.246	0.047	5.282	0	0.155	0.337

Discussion

This study examined the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on green purchase intention (GPI) among consumers in Yunnan, China, focusing on the mediating role of subjective norm (SN). The findings support all three hypotheses and offer theoretical and empirical contributions to sustainable consumption research.

The direct positive effect of SMM on GPI aligns with prior studies (Sun & Wang, 2020; Hu et al., 2024) and supports the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), where SMM acts as an external stimulus directly eliciting behavioral response. Unlike earlier research focused primarily on informational content, this study contextualizes this relationship within a collectivist regional setting, highlighting cultural embeddedness even in direct effects.

The finding that SMM significantly shapes SN is consistent with research emphasizing social influence mechanisms in digital marketing (Parveen & Chaudhary, 2025; Gan et al., 2025). Within the S-O-R model, this positions SN as a key organismic variable mediating external stimuli and behavioral outcomes. This extends the model by demonstrating how normative cues transmitted

through social platforms are internalized, particularly in collectivist cultures where group expectations carry substantial weight (Xu et al., 2022). While prior research has established links between social media and norms, this study clarifies the relationship within a unified framework integrating S-O-R and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Regarding the mediating role, SN partially mediates the SMM–GPI relationship. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing indirect pathways in social media’s influence on green consumption (Xie & Madni, 2023). However, it reveals a notable divergence from prior research: while some Western, individualistic-context studies report full mediation, the partial mediation observed here suggests that in collectivist settings like Yunnan, SMM influences GPI through both direct and normative pathways. This difference may reflect social media’s dual role—serving simultaneously as an information source and a vehicle for reinforcing social expectations.

Collectively, these findings refine the S-O-R framework by empirically validating SN as a critical organismic mediator in a non-Western regional context. They also reinforce the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior when subjective norms are shaped through digital platforms. Compared with past research, this study converges with studies affirming social media’s role in promoting green behavior while extending them by situating analysis within a specific Chinese province. It diverges from studies treating SN as a standalone antecedent by embedding it within S-O-R logic, offering a more nuanced explanation of how SMM translates into consumer intentions. By integrating direct and indirect pathways into a coherent mediation model, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying green purchase intentions in digital environments.

Recommendations

From a practical perspective, marketers and policymakers should strategically utilize social media platforms to promote green consumption. Since subjective norm plays a partial mediating role, campaigns should focus not only on delivering environmental information but also on strengthening perceived social expectations. Influencer endorsements, peer-generated content, and community-oriented narratives can help normalize sustainable purchasing behavior and create a sense of collective participation. In addition, enhancing the credibility, transparency, and interactivity of green marketing content may further reinforce consumers' confidence and behavioral intention.

From a policy perspective, public institutions can collaborate with digital platforms to design regionally tailored sustainability campaigns. Educational initiatives that integrate environmental awareness with digital engagement strategies may also strengthen the long-term effectiveness of green consumption promotion.

For future research, several directions are suggested. First, additional psychological variables such as environmental concern, perceived behavioral control, or green trust may be incorporated to further refine the explanatory model. Second, comparative studies across different provinces or cultural contexts may help determine whether the mediating mechanism of subjective norm varies under different social structures. Third, longitudinal research designs could provide stronger causal evidence and capture changes in consumer perceptions over time. Finally, qualitative approaches may deepen understanding of how consumers interpret and respond to green marketing messages in digital environments.

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