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Understanding the Influences on Green Purchase Intention with Moderation by Sustainability Awareness

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Abstract: The concept of sustainable development has gained significant traction in recent years, leading to a growing emphasis on green consumption. Previous studies have rarely emphasized the important role of sustainability awareness in influencing green consumption. This study explores the mechanism of the influence of sustainability awareness on green purchase intention, using the theory of planned behavior as a conceptual framework. The aim is to contribute to the promotion of environmental protection and green consumption. The research used an online five-point Likert scale questionnaire and collected data from university students in China. Useable data were collected from 419 respondents and were then validated and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) and the PROCESS macro for SPSS 22.0. The findings suggest that attitudes toward green purchases, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have a positive effect on green purchase intention; sustainability awareness significantly and positively moderates the direct effect of attitudes toward green purchases on green purchase intention and the predictive effect of subjective norms on green purchase intention; and sustainability awareness significantly and negatively moderates the direct effect of perceived behavioral control on green purchase intention. The findings can be used to develop strategies that influence university students' intention to purchase green products.

Keywords: green purchase intention; theory of planned behavior; sustainability awareness; university students

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1. Introduction

With the impact of resource shortage and ecological deterioration on human society, there is a growing social demand for the full implementation of green and low-carbon consumption [1], and the public's concern for environmental issues is increasing [2]. In developing countries, especially China, rapid economic growth has led to the overconsumption of natural resources and ecological degradation [3,4]. Purchasing environmentally friendly products for daily use is considered an effective approach to addressing environmental issues [4–6]. In China, public recognition of the importance of green consumption is high, but only 5% of the surveyed public engage in green consumption [7]. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore the factors and internal mechanisms that influence consumers' willingness to purchase green products to better promote green consumption behavior.

The environmental significance of promoting green consumption in the entire society is self-evident and has received attention from consumers in recent years [8–10]. Green consumption refers to consumer behavior characterized by moderate consumption, avoiding or reducing environmental damage, respecting nature, and protecting the environment. Green purchasing is the prerequisite and foundation for green consumption. It is not only the provision of green contents and objects for consumption, but also the guarantee of the environmental consequences of consumption. Green purchasing is significant in promoting environmental protection. It refers to consumer purchasing behavior that minimizes the depletion of natural resources and the production of pollutants and hazardous substances to

satisfy needs and improve quality of life. The current research literature on green consumption explores how to promote green purchasing and the factors influencing green purchase behavior from the perspectives of emotion, consciousness, and information [11,12]. The previous literature has examined the difference between consumers' positive attitudes toward green products and their purchase of green products [13,14]. For example, 30% of UK consumers claim to prioritize products that take environmental impact and social responsibility into account when shopping, but they struggle to translate this concern into green purchases [15]. Previous studies have attempted to narrow the "green attitude–behavior gap" by using the TPB model [16,17]. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been used to explore the decision-making framework regarding ethical behavior and has become one of the most widely utilized rational choice models [18,19]. TPB posits that behavior is influenced by behavioral intentions, which are in turn influenced by three antecedents: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of green products, research has found that attitude is one of the most important determinants of purchase intention [18]. Despite the growing positivity toward green products, actual purchases remain relatively low [20]. The theory of planned behavior suggests that in addition to attitudes, green consumer behavior is also influenced by subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls. For example, even if a consumer has a green consumption attitude, it will be difficult to translate this into green consumption behavior if he or she does not have sufficient capacity [18]. University students tend to chase after new products with special symbolic value because they are in the critical period of value formation and have the psychological characteristic of striving for individuality. Such unrestrained consumption and wasteful lifestyles undoubtedly accelerate the waste of limited resources and the degradation of the ecological environment and make university students fall into the vortex of material expansion, becoming "one-sided human beings" without the ability to engage in rational criticism [21]. University students are a major force of consumption, especially online consumption, and it is of great practical significance to study the influence mechanism of university students' green purchasing willingness to cultivate their awareness of green consumption and ecological environmental protection. Compared with other groups, university students are more likely to accept new things. Studying their green consumption behavior can improve the market and expand the variety of green products so that more people can choose green products. Therefore, it is important to establish green purchasing intentions among university students to create opportunities for green product purchasing. Individuals' purchasing behavior may be influenced by the awareness of sustainable consumption [22]. Simultaneously, companies have become increasingly concerned with sustainable development [23–25]. Individual consumption of green products can achieve sustainable development. From the perspective of current green consumption practices in China, although residents have positive attitudes toward purchasing green products, actual purchase levels are not high, and there is less research on student consumption behavior. To complement the existing literature, this study adds a psychological variable of sustainability awareness to the theory of planned behavior framework and develops an extended model of the theory of planned behavior. The study aims to contribute to the promotion of environmental protection and green consumption and further investigates the mechanism of the influence of sustainability awareness on green purchase intent of university students.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

2.1. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Ajzen put forward the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in 1991, holding that people's behavior results from their careful consideration. There are five elements in this theory, which are attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intention, and behavior. Attitude is the tendency of an individual to have a stable positive or negative mood about a particular action; subjective norms refer to whether individuals are subjected to social pressure from individuals or groups with influence on behavior decision-making;

perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's judgment of experience and expected obstacles, where the more the experience and the fewer the obstacles, the stronger the perceived behavioral control [26]; behavioral intention refers to an individual's willingness to take a certain action; and behavior is the actual action taken by an individual [27]. Ajzen considers that all possible behaviors reflect behavioral intention, and the more positive an individual's attitude toward a certain behavior, the stronger his behavioral intention; and that the more positive the subjective norms are regarding a certain behavior, the stronger the individual's behavioral intention will be. When the attitude and subjective norms are more positive and the perceived behavioral control is stronger, the individual's behavioral intention will be stronger. Planned behavior theory provides a framework of related factors to explain behavior relating to specific problems and allows us to discover the influence of other related variables on behavior [13]. This flexibility allows researchers to add more variables to expand the variables in the basic theory, thus further clarifying the understanding of behavior. As a result, in order to investigate the impact of sustainability awareness on the green purchasing intentions of university students, our study incorporates sustainability awareness into the theoretical framework of planned behavior.

2.2. Attitudes toward Green Purchases

Attitude is an individual's overall evaluation of whether something is good or bad, while green purchase attitude refers to an individual's value judgment on purchasing green products. In this study, purchase attitude is used to represent the overall evaluation of the consumer's behavior to buy green products. The attitude of consumers toward green products can affect their decisions regarding green consumption [28], and consumption attitude can significantly positively affect consumption behavior [29]. Consumers with positive attitudes consider that green consumption can improve the existing environment, meet their spiritual needs, and stimulate their willingness to buy green products [30]. In the past, most studies on consumer behavior included attitude as a predictive indicator in the research framework of behavioral intention, aiming at predicting consumers' purchase intention. The more positive consumers' purchase attitudes are toward products, the more likely they are to have consumption intention [17,31,32]. Based on this, we put forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Attitudes toward green purchases positively impact green purchase intention among university students.*

2.3. Subjective Norms

Subjective norms refer to the individual's perception of pressure from the surrounding reference group. Against the backdrop of increasingly serious environmental problems and greater attention to green environmental protection, the increase in external pressure encourages consumers to carry out green consumption, thus enhancing individual subjective norms. Many scholars believe that subjective norms are important determinants of willingness, such as willingness to buy organic food, willingness to revisit green hotels, and willingness to recycle for environmental protection [33–35]. Subjective norms and the willingness to engage in green consumption have been empirically demonstrated in many studies. For example, Emekci studied the green consumption behavior of Turkish people, which verified that subjective norms can promote green purchase willingness [36]. Other studies have found that consumers' subjective norms positively influence the purchase of green food [37]. Based on this, we put forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Subjective norms positively impact green purchase intention among university students.*

2.4. Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control refers to the degree of difficulty that an individual perceives when performing a certain behavior. Individuals will make considerations based on their experience of practical actions. Consumers usually assess the feasibility and difficulty of green purchasing when making decisions [38]. Wang et al. studied the sustainable consumption behavior of rural residents in China, and the results showed that perceived behavioral control could positively affect sustainable consumption behavior [39]. Previous research conclusions also support the notion that perceived behavioral control has a significant positive impact on green purchase intention [40–42]. On this basis, we believe that students have a degree of judgment about their ability to have control over their purchasing behavior. If they are confident in their control, they will have lower perceived barriers to green purchasing, and the stronger their sense of behavioral control, the easier it will be to generate purchase intention. Therefore, we put forward the following assumption:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Perceived behavioral control positively impacts green purchase intention among university students.*

2.5. Sustainability Awareness

Currently, there is no unified definition of sustainability awareness. Panda et al. [43] divide sustainability awareness into social sustainability awareness and environmental sustainability awareness. Missimer et al. [44] considered that social sustainability includes the multiple dimensions of health, influence, ability, fairness, and meaning creation, while Holdren et al. [45] stated that the focus of environmental sustainability is to maintain or improve the integrity of the Earth's survival support system. Many scholars have shown that social sustainability and environmental sustainability are interrelated in their studies [46–48], and Punyatoya [49] emphasizes that when consumers have a high awareness of their environmental behaviors, they will have a greater chance of choosing green lifestyles, and only by achieving balanced and stable development at both the social and environmental levels can sustainable development be realized. Therefore, in this study, awareness of sustainable development is defined as people's views and levels of social and environmental sustainability, as well as their conviction that development needs to take account of environmental considerations to achieve a unity of the economy, the environment, and society.

Sustainability awareness highlights consumers' concern for the environment. On the one hand, the existing studies incorporate environmental cognition and environmental values into the theoretical model of planned behavior, which can more accurately predict the willingness to engage in green purchase behavior. For example, Lin et al. concluded that consumers' green consumption efficacy has a significant positive impact on green consumption behavior based on social cognitive theory [50]. Sun et al. found that people's environmental attitudes and awareness can promote green consumption through psychological factors [51]. On the other hand, previous studies have also confirmed that consumers' awareness of the environment has a moderating effect on purchase intention to a certain extent [52,53], and consumers with high green concerns are more likely to engage in environmental protection behaviors [54]. Asif et al. [55] show that consumers' awareness plays a positive role in regulating the purchase intention of organic food. According to Coddington [56], consumers are aware of the deterioration of environmental conditions and their impact on human health, and this awareness of the environment affects their purchasing decisions, further leading them to be more inclined to buy organic food. Fraj et al. [57] pointed out that consumers who care about environmental pollution will engage in green consumption behavior out of concern for the environment. Based on this, we believe that the awareness of sustainable development has an important impact on green purchase intention. Therefore, we put forward the following assumption:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Sustainability awareness moderates the relationship between attitudes toward green purchases and green purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Sustainability awareness moderates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and green purchase intention.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Sustainability awareness moderates the relationship between subjective norms and green purchase intention.*

2.6. The Current Study

On the basis of the extended TPB, this study aims to address the following questions about the relationship between purchase attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and green purchase intention and explores the moderating role of sustainability awareness. This will help deepen understanding of the mechanisms of the influences on green purchase intention and provide theoretical support for improving the green purchase behavior of university students. The moderation model is shown in Figure 1.

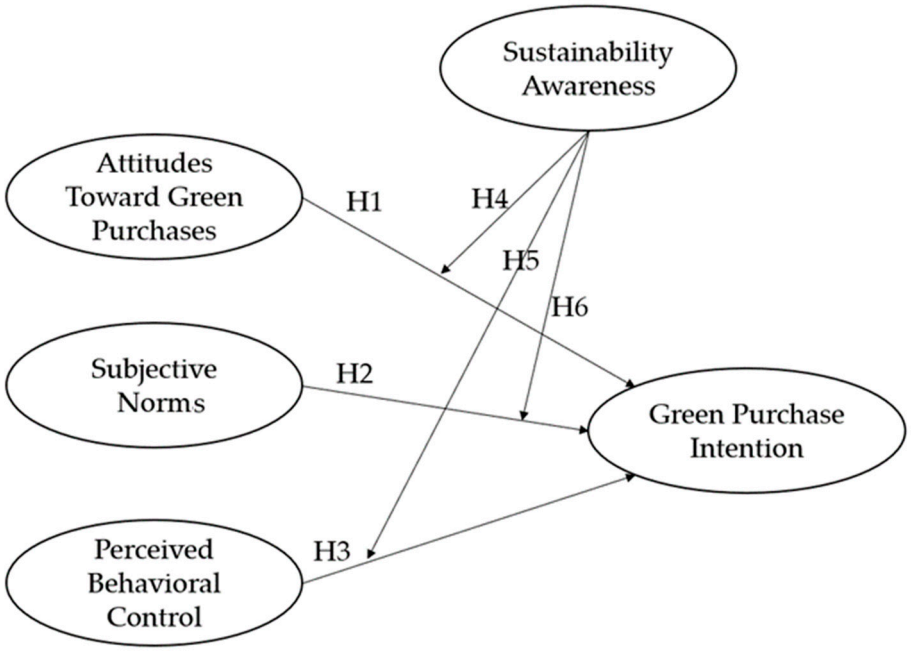

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Data were collected using an online survey hosted on the Wenjuanxing platform. The link provided to the participants contained the questionnaire and instructions on how to complete it. The research subjects of our survey are university students. They were told that it was anonymous, voluntary, and confidential, with no time limit to complete the questionnaire.

The survey period was October–November 2023, and the questionnaire consists of 19 items. We used SPSS 22.0 software and AMOS 22.0 software for the processing of the collected data and adopted the research method of a questionnaire survey followed by empirical quantitative analysis. The sample consisted of 419 students from universities in Shanghai, Jilin, and Henan provinces, with a response rate of 90.83% after the exclusion of invalid questionnaires through the inspection of the logic of the answers and the completeness of the answers. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 23 years (see Table 1). Most of the participants were women (65.2%). The distribution of participants' monthly living expenses was as follows: <RMB 1500: 20%; RMB 1501 to 2500: 56.1%; RMB 2501 to 3500:

15.5%; RMB 3501 to 4500: 4.3%; and more than RMB 4500: 4.1%. Regarding household registration, 62.5% were from urban areas and 37.5% were from rural areas.

Table 1. Individual characteristics of respondents.

Main Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	146	34.8%
	Female	273	65.2%
Monthly Living Expenses	<RMB 1500	84	20%
	RMB 1501–2500	235	56.1%
	RMB 2501–3500	65	15.5%
	RMB 3501–4500	18	4.3%
	>RMB 4501	17	4.1%
Grade	1st-year Undergraduate	229	54.7%
	2nd-year Undergraduate	70	16.7%
	3rd-year Undergraduate	21	5%
	4th-year Undergraduate	24	5.7%
	Postgraduate Student	75	17.9%
Household Registration	Urban	262	62.5%
	Rural	157	37.5%

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Attitudes toward Green Purchases

Attitudes toward green purchases were evaluated using scale items adapted from Taylor and Todd [58]. It is a measure of the degree of liking, importance, and support for green consumer behavior. The survey included the following three items: "I think it is wise to buy green products"; "I think buying green products is good for everyone"; and "I think we should find ways to promote the use of green products". Respondents answered on a five-point scale, from "completely disagree" (1) to "completely agree" (5), with higher values denoting greater expression of attitudes toward green purchases. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for this sample was good ($\alpha = 0.82$).

3.2.2. Subjective Norms

Subjective norms were measured using scale items adapted from Cialdini and Kallgren [59]. Subjective norms consist of personal norms (including moral norms and self-identification), exemplary norms, and directive norms. The questionnaire included the following four items: "I feel that green products are more in line with my morals"; "I think green products are in line with my family's wishes"; "I think green products are in line with the trend of social development"; and "I think green products are more in line with the national industrial policy". Respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.80, indicating a good level of reliability.

3.2.3. Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control was measured using scale items adapted from Lao [60]. Perceived behavioral control consists of internal control beliefs (including personal weaknesses, skills, abilities, emotions, etc.) and external control beliefs (including information, opportunities, dependence on others, barriers, etc.). The questionnaire included the following three items: "I don't think green products are much more expensive than ordinary products"; "I think it is not difficult to find stores selling green products"; and "I think it is not difficult to recognize the characteristics of green products when buying them". Respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.85, indicating a good level of reliability.

3.2.4. Sustainability Awareness

Sustainability awareness was measured using scale items adapted from Panda et al. [43]. Sustainability awareness consists of social sustainability awareness and environmental sustainability awareness. This study included the following four items: "I can realize the common meaning and value of the sustainable development of societies"; "I believe that societies need to be constantly updated by the changes in the times and the needs of sustainable human development"; "I think environmentally friendly products should be ethical"; and "I think I should try to cope with environmental change". Respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree) and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83, indicating a good level of reliability.

3.2.5. Green Purchase Intention

Green purchase intention was used to measure respondents' intention to engage in green purchases [58,61]. The survey contained the following three items: "Over the next month, I'll be looking at buying less polluting products"; "Over the next month, I will consider switching to other green product brands"; and "Over the next month, I plan to switch to a green product". Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely), with higher scores indicating greater levels of green purchase intention. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient recorded for this study was 0.86.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analytical strategy was carried out in three stages. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 software. First, following the procedure described by Podsakoff et al. [62], we employed Harman's single-factor test to check for common method bias. Subsequently, descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were performed using SPSS, with means and standard deviations reported. Second, to determine whether each of the latent constructs was well represented by its indicators, the measurement model was first analyzed. In line with Hu and Bentler [63], the fit of the model was considered to be acceptable as the RMSEA and SRMR values were less than 0.08 and the GFI, IFI, and CFI values were above 0.90. Then, using AMOS 22.0, maximum likelihood estimation was used to analyze the structural model. Structural equation modeling was used to test the direct effects of attitude toward green purchasing, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on green purchasing intention. Third, the moderating effect of sustainability awareness on the direct path and the first half of the mediating path was tested using the PROCESS macro for SPSS [64].

4. Results

4.1. Common-Method Bias Test

As the data were derived from self-reported instruments, it was important to check for common methodological biases; Harman's single-factor test was employed for this purpose. Of the nine factors extracted, the first explained 22.16% of the total variance—well below the recommended threshold of 40%. These investigations confirmed no serious common method bias.

4.2. Descriptive and Correlation Analyses

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics including Spearman's correlations, means, and SDs. Attitudes toward green purchases were positively correlated with the university students' sustainability awareness ($r = 0.602$, $p < 0.01$) and green purchase intention ($r = 0.506$, $p < 0.001$). Subjective norms were positively correlated with the university students' sustainability awareness ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.01$) and green purchase intention ($r = 0.556$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived behavioral control was positively correlated with the university students' sustainability awareness ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.01$) and green purchase intention ($r = 0.517$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, sustainability awareness was positively correlated with the university students' green purchase intention ($r = 0.360$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Measures	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. ATGPs	4.29	0.661	1.000				
2. SNs	4.26	0.624	0.787 **	1.000			
3. PBC	3.31	0.908	0.288 ***	0.358 **	1.000		
4. SA	4.29	0.559	0.602 **	0.628 **	0.238 **	1.000	
5. GPI	3.83	0.864	0.506 **	0.556 **	0.517 **	0.360 **	1.000

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. ATGPs, attitudes toward green purchases; SNs, subjective norms; PBC, perceived behavioral control; SA, sustainability awareness; GPI, green purchase intention.

4.3. Structural Model

AMOS 22.0 was used for the structural equation modeling (SEM) of the hypothetical model. We ran a series of path analyses with the results ($X^2/df = 2.11$, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.061, SRMR = 0.049) demonstrating the model fitted the data well. Next to be tested were the direct effects of the variables of attitudes toward green purchases, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on green purchase intention. As Figure 2 shows, attitudes toward green purchases had a significant positive effect on the university students' green purchase intention (β = 0.171, $p < 0.01$); subjective norms had a significant positive effect on the university students' green purchase intention (β = 0.291, $p < 0.001$); and perceived behavioral control also had a significant positive effect on the university students' green purchase intention (β = 0.364, $p < 0.001$). And perceived behavioral control has the greatest influence on purchase intention. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were supported.

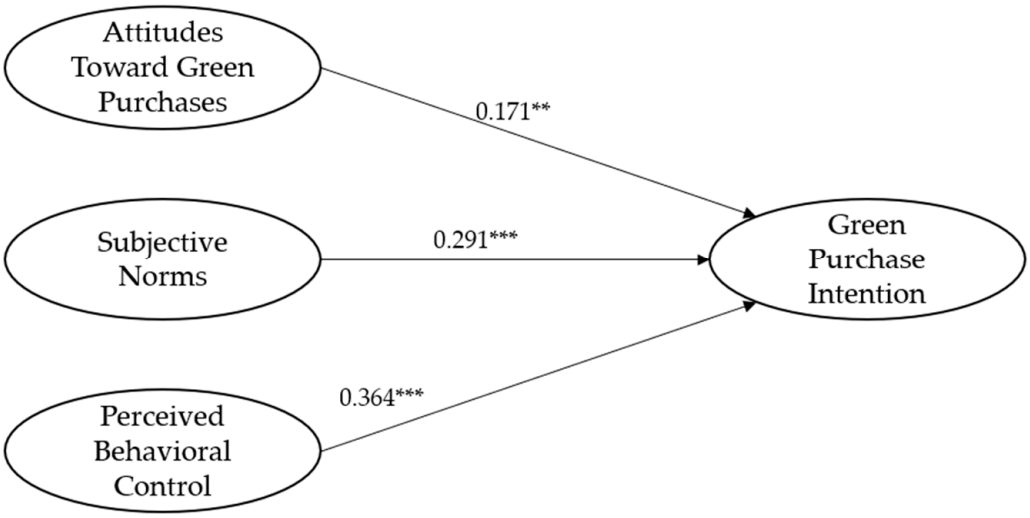

Figure 2. Path analyses model. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4. Moderated Effect Analysis

To test the moderated model, the moderation test was conducted using the SPSS PROCESS macro (see Table 3). As the table shows, the product (interaction term) of attitudes toward green purchases and sustainability awareness significantly and positively affected green purchase intention (β = 0.218, t = 4.984, $p < 0.001$), as did the product (interaction term) of subjective norms and sustainability awareness on green purchase intention (β = 0.235, t = 5.622, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that sustainability awareness significantly and positively moderated the direct effect of attitudes toward green purchases on green purchase intention and the predictive effect of subjective norms on green purchase intention. As shown in Figure 3, compared with low sustainability awareness, attitudes toward green purchases have a greater impact on green purchase intention under high sustainability awareness. And compared with low sustainability awareness, subjective norms have a greater impact on green purchase intention under conditions of high sus-

tainability awareness (see Figure 4). Moreover, the product (interaction term) of perceived behavioral control and sustainability awareness significantly and negatively affected green purchase intention (β = −0.086, t = −2.054, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that sustainability awareness weakened the positive impact of perceived behavioral control on green purchase intention. As shown in Figure 5, compared with high sustainability awareness, perceived behavioral control has a greater impact on green purchase intention under low sustainability awareness. In summary, Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were supported.

Table 3. Testing the moderating effect.

Predictors	R^2	F	β	t
Model 1	0.52	59.926 ***		
ATGPs			0.488	9.411 ***
SA			0.138	2.637 ***
ATGPs × SA			0.218	4.984 ***
Model 2	0.48	77.317 ***		
SNs			0.568	11.205 ***
SA			0.080	1.554 ***
SNs × SA			0.235	5.622 ***
Model 3	0.50	69.392 ***		
PBC			0.475	11.278 ***
SA			0.264	6.334 ***
PBC × SA			−0.086	−2.054 **

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. ATGP, attitudes toward green purchases; SNs, subjective norms; PBC, perceived behavioral control; SA, sustainability awareness.

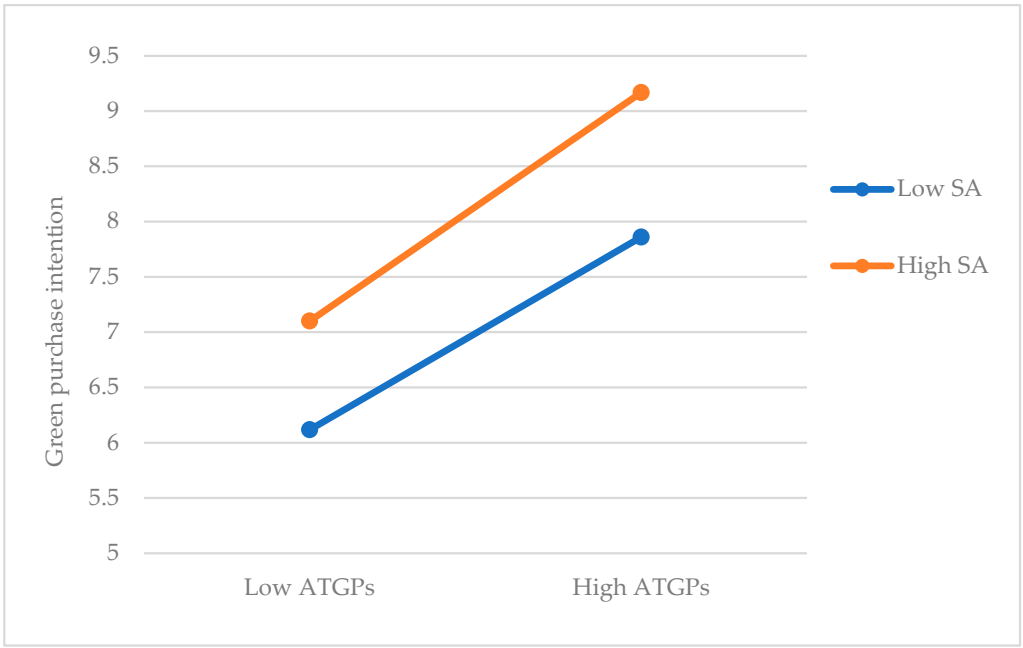

Figure 3. The moderating effect of sustainability awareness on attitudes toward green purchases and green purchase intention. Note: ATGPs, attitudes toward green purchases; SA, sustainability awareness.

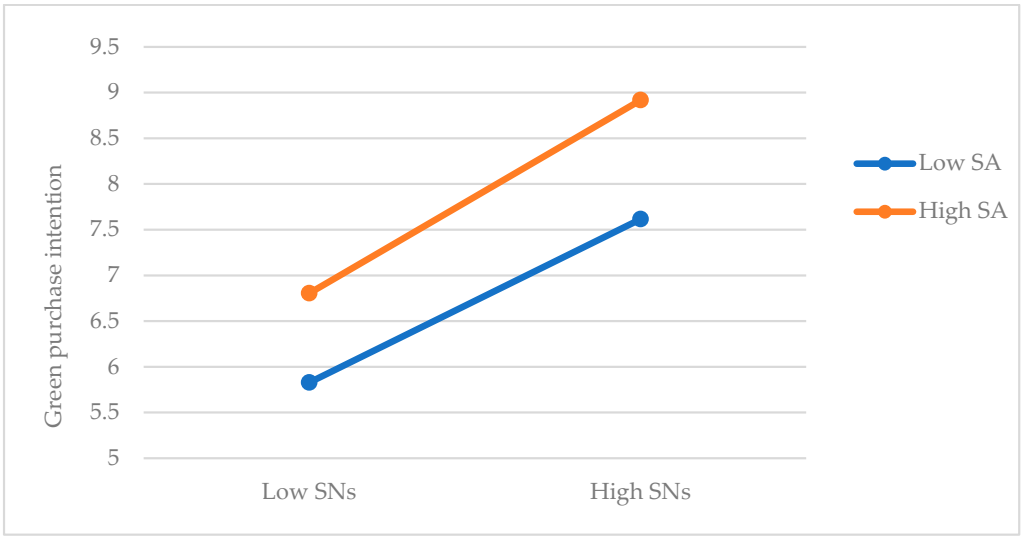

Figure 4. The moderating effect of sustainability awareness on subjective norms and green purchase intention. Note: SNs, subjective norms; SA, sustainability awareness.

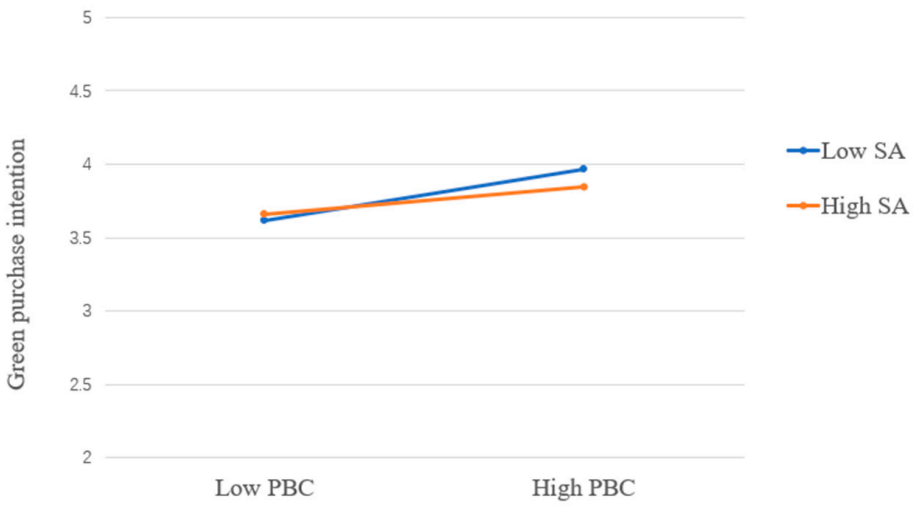

Figure 5. The moderating effect of sustainability awareness on perceived behavioral control and green purchase intention. Note: PBC, perceived behavioral control; SA, sustainability awareness.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to use the framework of planned behavior theory to understand the influence mechanism regarding the green purchase intention of Chinese university students. The results support the application of planned behavior theory to explain the green consumption of university students and deepened understanding of green purchase intention.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study reveals that attitudes toward green purchases, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have a significant positive impact on green purchase intention among university students, which is consistent with many previous studies [65–67]. Kim et al.'s [68] study on green personal care products showed that behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly affect individuals' purchase behavioral intentions. Maloney et al.'s [69] study on organic clothing found that attitudes and subjective norms have a direct effect on consumers' purchase intentions, while perceived behavioral control and costly perception were found to indirectly affect consumers'

purchase intentions through attitudes. However, the degrees of influence vary. Perceived behavioral control has the greatest influence on purchase intention, followed by subjective norms, and attitudes toward green purchases are the weakest, which shows that green purchase intention among university students is most influenced by their judgment on the availability of green products. Si et al. [70] pointed out that perceived behavioral control is one of the most important determinants of users' sustainable use intentions and behavior, which may be because green consumption is an environmental protection behavior with altruistic characteristics, which usually requires individuals to have higher self-control ability. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how to improve university students' ability to perceive and control green products to promote their green consumption.

This study confirms that sustainable development awareness moderates the influence of green purchasing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on green purchasing intention. Previous studies have shown that consumers' awareness of ecological products is one of the decisive factors in green purchase intention [71]. Abeyseeker et al. [72] pointed out that environmental awareness can help improve green purchase intention. The results of this study indicate that the awareness of sustainable development significantly and positively adjusts the direct impact of green purchasing attitude and subjective norms on green purchasing intention, and university students with higher awareness of sustainable development are more likely to have positive purchasing attitude and subjective norms, thus promoting their green consumption. Therefore, we suggest that the government can further expand the publicity regarding green environmental protection behavior and form a green social consumption atmosphere, which will help to have a positive impact on attitudes toward green purchases and subjective norms among university students in a subtle way. In contrast, sustainability awareness weakens the positive influence between perceived behavioral control and green purchase intention, which means that university students with higher sustainability awareness have greater obstacles to green consumption perception, and their perceived behavioral control ability is weaker, so it is difficult to promote their green consumption. Sustainability awareness is an ethical environmental value; we additionally used it as a strengthening booster for this model. These results are in line with previous research [73]. The possible reasons are that the more sustainability awareness that university students have, the more they can be aware of this resistance to purchasing, including factors such as price. There is still a certain gap between the price of green products in the market and the consumption ability of university students, and it is still difficult for people to buy green products. Therefore, we suggest that enterprises should make efforts to increase the market share of green products and reduce the purchase cost of consumers as much as possible according to the actual situation.

Based on the theory of planned behavior, this study explores the influence mechanism between sustainability awareness and green purchase intention among university students in China, enriching the related research on green consumption. Previous studies on green consumption have expressed different views from different angles. Many scholars pay attention to the relationship between environmental concern and green consumption and find that consumers' environmental concern and awareness have positive effects on green purchase intention and behavior [74–76]. Minbashrazgah et al. [77] show that the intention to buy green products is significantly positively influenced by perceived environmental responsibility, but most prior studies only discuss its impact on green consumption from the perspective of the ecological environment, which is not the same as sustainability awareness. Sustainability awareness as a moderator variable has not been fully discussed in the relevant research on green purchase intention. This study confirms that sustainability awareness moderates the relationship between attitudes toward green purchases, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and green purchase intention, which makes some contributions to the relevant research fields. And the model proposed in this study may be generalizable to similar research domains.

5.2. Managerial Implications

This study also has certain practical significance for policy design. First, government departments can integrate environmental education into the education system and use channels such as the news and social media to communicate a range of environmental issues [78]. Government officials can make documentaries that let consumers face up to real environmental problems. At the same time, the government can formulate relevant policies to encourage schools to promote sustainable practices and set up incentives to encourage schools and students to carry out environmental protection activities, such as building renewable energy facilities on campus and promoting waste sorting, to form a positive atmosphere. Second, schools can also take a series of measures to improve students' awareness of sustainable development, to further enhance the role of sustainable development awareness in promoting green purchases. In terms of the curriculum, schools can integrate the concepts of sustainable development and green consumption into their educational curriculum [79], so that students can understand the importance, principles, and impacts of sustainable development, cultivate environmental protection concepts, stimulate their understanding of sustainable life, and promote the concepts so they truly achieve green consumption in their daily life. At the same time, it is necessary to enhance university students' sense of environmental responsibility and perceived effectiveness through green consumption education and to assist university students in comprehending the adverse effects of their actions on the environment and the positive outcomes that can be achieved by modifying their behavior [80], to improve university students' awareness of sustainable development and change their daily living habits. In terms of campus activities, schools can hold activities related to green environmental protection and sustainable development, such as second-hand sales and green environmental entrepreneurship competitions. Similar activities can provide students with more opportunities to participate in practice and increase their interest in green consumption. In terms of publicity, the concepts of and methods for green consumption are widely publicized by using bulletin boards, school newspapers, social media, and other channels on campus, providing information on environmental protection and sustainable development, and deepening students' awareness of this aspect. Finally, our research results also provide a new perspective for enterprises to formulate green marketing strategies. When promoting green products, enterprises should pay more attention to the actual situation of consumers, increase product publicity, and price their products reasonably, stimulating willingness to consume green products. Enterprises need to strengthen their environmental self-identity, embrace the concept of green development, and provide greener products to customers [81].

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study explores the influence mechanism of green consumption willingness within the framework of the theory of planned behavior, but it still has certain limitations and there is room for continued improvement. First, in terms of the data sample, the sample size of this study is relatively small. Therefore, future studies should increase the sample size and collect data from different cities in China. Second, in terms of the content of the study, we only examined the moderating effect of sustainability awareness, but there are other possible mediators and moderating mechanisms, such as personality, mass media, collectivism, and materialism, so we will further consider the effects of these factors on green consumption intentions in future studies. Third, this study examined green purchase intentions in general and did not consider specific types of products or behaviors. Further research is needed to examine more specific green purchasing behaviors considering various products. Lastly, the study only focused on Chinese university students, but the applicability of these findings to university students in other countries still needs to be examined. In future studies, samples of university students from different countries could be collected to explore whether sustainability awareness still has a moderating effect on green consumption behavioral tendencies.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the predictive factors for the green purchase intention of university students in mainland China. This study expands the theory of planned behavior by confirming that the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of university students affect their intentions to make environmentally friendly purchases, and that sustainability awareness moderates this process. This study suggests that nurturing sustainability awareness can enhance positive attitudes and subjective norms toward green purchasing, which in turn increases green purchase intention among university students.

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