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Do Conspicuous Consumption Motives Explain Eco-Friendly Consumption Decisions? Evidence from Social Media Exposure Effects

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Abstract

While past research suggests that conspicuous consumption does not support the goals of sustainable consumer behavior, emerging evidence indicates that it can drive green product choices in online contexts. However, the online mechanisms that support this process remain unclear. This study employs a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling approach to examine how conspicuous consumption motives influence green purchase intentions when consumers are exposed to green content on social media. It hypothesizes that social media exposure, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and social comparison act as antecedents to green conspicuous consumption motives, with perceived quality moderating these relationships. Data was collected from 346 social media users in the U.S., U.K., and Canada. Results indicate that conspicuous consumption motives significantly mediate the relationship between FOMO, social comparison, and green purchase intentions. While perceived quality enhances the effect of social comparison on conspicuous consumption, it does not significantly impact the relationship between FOMO and conspicuous consumption. These findings highlight the role of social media in shaping green purchase decisions and suggest that businesses and policymakers can leverage conspicuous consumption motives to promote sustainable consumer behavior. By positioning green products as both environmentally responsible and status-enhancing, marketers can appeal to consumers' desire for social validation.

Keywords: FOMO; Green Purchase Intentions; Online Consumer Behavior; Proenvironmental Consumer Behaviour; Social Comparison

1. Introduction

According to NielsenIQ and McKinsey & Company (2023), 78% of consumers now prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions. Additionally, they also project the global sustainable products market to reach $150 billion by 2025. This growing consumer preference underscores the urgency to understand the underlying psychological and social dynamics driving sustainable consumption. Latest consumer behavior research suggests that conspicuous consumption motives are increasingly influencing green consumption (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020; Yarimoglu & Binboga, 2019). As concerns about climate change and environmental sustainability escalate, green consumption has shifted from being solely an ethical choice to a status-driven behavior influenced by social validation.

The literature has shown that, because green products are often more expensive compared with non-green products and sometimes underperform in functionality, green consumers communicate their ability to bear extra costs and signal altruism through purchasing such products. Green consumption is, therefore, being used by some consumers to signal wealth and social status (Griskevicius et al., 2010). This phenomenon has been leveraged by brands such as Tesla and Patagonia, which have successfully positioned their products as both sustainable and status-enhancing, illustrating the intersection between conspicuous consumption and green marketing.

Conspicuous consumption motives can, therefore, drive sustainable behavior when it can be clearly shown that the consumer is buying the said product due to its extra cost (Hammad et al., 2019). This is supported by previous studies by Griskevicius et al. (2010), which showed that status motives increased people's intention to purchase green products when shopping in public and when green products cost more than non-green products. Given the increasing prevalence of sustainability-focused marketing, understanding these motivations is critical for policymakers and businesses aiming to foster sustainable consumer habits.

Even though previous research has shown that conspicuous consumption may be counterproductive to sustainable goals (Cervellon et al., 2019; Mi et al., 2018), Griskevicius et al. (2010) argue that more consumers are willing to purchase green due to green conspicuous consumption motives. This suggests that green conspicuous consumption motives can be leveraged as a strategy to increase the sale of green products by making it easy for consumers to show off their green consumption.

Given the growing significance of social media in shaping consumer behavior, it is essential to examine how digital interactions influence green conspicuous consumption. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have amplified sustainability trends, with hashtags like #SustainableLiving and #EcoFriendly garnering millions of views. Research has shown that social media exposure fosters social comparison and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), influencing consumers to adopt sustainable behaviors to align with perceived social norms. While prior research has explored the role of FOMO and social comparison in traditional conspicuous consumption (Dinh & Lee; 2022), their impact on sustainable purchasing decisions in online contexts remains underexplored.

By investigating these factors as key antecedents to green conspicuous consumption motives, this study aims to bridge this gap and provide insights into the psychological mechanisms driving green purchase intentions in an online context. Furthermore, by considering perceived quality as a moderating factor, this research seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of

how conspicuous consumption motives can be leveraged to promote sustainable consumer behavior. The findings will contribute to the discourse on sustainable marketing strategies and consumer psychology, providing actionable insights for both businesses and policymakers in fostering a more eco-conscious marketplace.

2. Literature Review and hypotheses development

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

This study integrates Compensatory Consumption Theory (CCT) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to explain how social media exposure influences green purchase intentions through conspicuous consumption motives. CCT posits that individuals engage in conspicuous consumption to compensate for feelings of inadequacy, exclusion, or low self-esteem, often triggered by social comparison or emotional responses such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). In this context, exposure to green content on social media can evoke FOMO and social comparison, prompting individuals to engage in conspicuous green consumption as a way to restore self-worth and signal social status.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) provides a complementary perspective by suggesting that consumer behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which are shaped by two factors: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In this study, conspicuous consumption motives are seen as shaping a positive attitude toward green products, driven by the desire to signal both environmental consciousness and social standing. Additionally, social comparison creates subjective norms, where consumers perceive social pressure to engage in green consumption as part of their social identity.

2.2 Impact of Social Media Exposure to Green on Social Comparison

As individuals showcase their green consumption on social media, they create reference points for others to compare and evaluate their own behaviors. Previous studies revealed that seeing other people's social media updates could lead to users making upward social comparisons (Burnell et al., 2019). Additionally, both active and passive engagement encourages individuals to participate more in social comparison (Pang, 2020). People use social media to compare themselves to others both consciously and unconsciously (Jang et al., 2016), making social media exposure a precursor to social comparison (Vogel et al., 2015). On the back of this information, we hypothesize that social media exposure to green increases one’s susceptibility for social comparison.

H1: Social Media Exposure to green has a positive impact on Social Comparison

2.3 Impact of Social Media Exposure to green on FOMO

As green conspicuous consumption trends continue to emerge, people are more likely to conspicuously display their green consumption experiences on social media, giving others an idea of what they are missing out on. Taylor (2019) demonstrated that even passive Social Media users may be impacted by FOMO. This corroborates the mere exposure effect by Zajonc (1968), which posits that “Mere repeated exposure of the individual to a stimulus is a sufficient condition for the enhancement of his attitude toward it”. Conclusively, the people who use social media heavily are more vulnerable and have higher chances of experiencing

FOMO. To put it another way, regular social media use increases the likelihood of feeling left out (Buglass et al., 2017).

H2: Social Media Exposure to green has a positive impact on FOMO

2.4 Impact of Social Comparison on FOMO

Recent studies by Dinh & Lee (2022) have observed how social comparison leads to FOMO in the context of online consumer behavior. Social comparison encourages individuals to maintain connections and be aware of what others are up to (Przybylski et al., 2013). In the social media environment, where users frequently compare themselves to others, there is an increase in the fear of missing out (Buglass et al., 2017). For example, Pang (2020) observed that university students' exposure to social media platforms like WeChat enhances FOMO through fostering upward social comparison. In the context of green consumer behaviour online, as people compare themselves to others on social media about their green consumption experiences, they are more likely to feel left out. Based on this, we hypothesise that:

H3: Social Comparison has a positive impact on FOMO

2.5 Impact of FOMO on Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

According to Sivanathan & Pettit (2010), People regain their self-esteem through compensatory consumption when they feel self-threatened and socially alienated. Since dimensions of FOMO include basic needs including self-worth, the need to follow trends, and the fear of being left behind (Kang et al., 2014), obtaining products consumed by their referent group in order to obtain the desired social impression is the one way to satisfy the deficiency of such demands (Seo & Park, 2018). To put it another way, conspicuous consumption can be used to satisfy demands and boost self-esteem (Chaudhuri et al., 2011). We therefore posit that:

H4: Social Comparison has a positive impact on Conspicuous Consumption intentions

2.6 Impact of Social Comparison on Green Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

Consumers are prone to experience inferiority when comparing themselves with those who display better lives (Festinger, 1954). Consumers then try to decrease those feelings and recover the superiority, mostly achieved by consuming and exhibiting material products (Lee & Shrum, 2012). Thus, when customers make upward social comparisons, they try to gain conspicuous products to maintain and enhance their social status (Zheng et al., 2018a).

Another explanation for the relationship between social comparison and conspicuous consumption is the “Keeping up with the Joneses” phenomenon (Christen & Morgan, 2005). In this case, consumers prefer to compare with those they consider better-off who own more possessions. Recognizing the possession gaps between them pushes them to gain and display the same material values as others (Corcoran et al., 2011). Therefore, customers engaging in upward social comparisons are more likely to pay for conspicuous goods (Billiot, 2020). Consequently:

H5: Social Comparison has a positive impact on green conspicuous Consumption intentions

2.7 Impact of Conspicuous consumption intentions on Green Purchase Intentions

Recent consumer behavior literature has suggested that conspicuous reasons are becoming a key factor in driving green consumption (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020; Yarimoglu & Binboga, 2019). In a recent study by Wallace and Buil (2023), conspicuous green behavior was found to be positively associated with intention to engage in prosocial activities. Also, another recent study from Apaolaza et al (2023) found conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing. Based on these evidences, this study proposes that:

H6: Conspicuous Consumption Intentions have a positive impact on green products

2.8 Moderating Role of Perceived Quality on the relationship between Social Comparison and Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

The perceived quality of a product would likely strengthen the impact of social comparison on conspicuous consumption intentions because consumers often compare themselves to higher standards in online environments; and perceived quality help them determine those standards in making better choices (Christen & Morgan, 2005). So when the perceived quality of green products is high, the effect of social comparison on conspicuous consumption intentions is strengthened. Consumers are more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption if they believe the green products they purchase are of high quality, as it allows them to signal both environmental consciousness and high social status (Johnson et al., 2018; Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

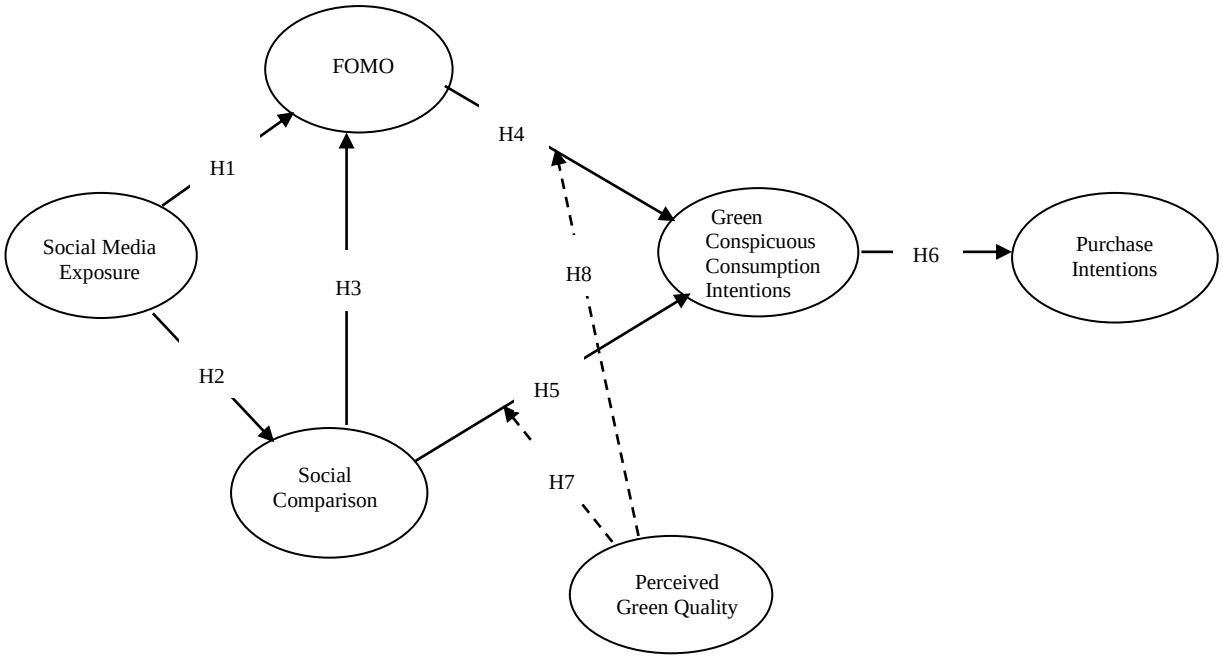
H7: when the perceived quality of green products is high, the effect of social comparison on conspicuous consumption intentions is strengthened.

2.9 Moderating Role of Perceived Quality on the relationship between FOMO and Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

Perceived quality of green products plays a critical role in moderating the relationship between FOMO and conspicuous consumption intentions. When consumers perceive green products as high quality, their FOMO-driven desire to consume these products conspicuously increases, as high quality enhances the products' social value and status signaling (Wang & Liu, 2007; Medeiros et al., 2016).

H8: When perceived quality is high, FOMO-driven desire to consume green products conspicuously increases

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

This study employed a survey research design with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to analyse the proposed model. PLS-SEM was selected for this study because it is well-suited for investigating complex relationships among constructs. Additionally, PLS-SEM is appropriate for research involving complex models that incorporate mediators and moderators (Hair et al., 2019).

3.1 Measurement Items

This study adapted measurement scales from previous studies to measure the constructs. Social media exposure was conceptualized as the repetitive encounter with a stimulus; which in this case is green content. This conceptualization is based on the mere exposure effect by Zajonc (1968). To measure social media exposure, this study modified 3 items from the consumer online brand engagement dimensions consumption stage in a study by Vale & Fernandes (2017). The original items capture a consumer's mere online encounter with messages but were modified to reflect frequency of encounter. This is because frequency is one characteristic of the exposure effect that has been generally agreed on in the literature and being applied in this study. A sample item is "I frequently read content posted by others about green products on social media". Social comparison was measured on the Gibbons and Buunk (1999) scale. The items were adapted to reflect comparison between benefits from a respondent's consumer choices and that of others who consume green products. A sample item is "I often compare my green consumption with others". FOMO was measured using four items from the FOMO scale created by Przybylski et al. (2013). A sample item is "I fear my friends who consume green products have more rewarding experiences than me". For perceived quality, this study adapts four items from from Perceived Green Quality scale by Chen and Chang (2013). A sample item is " Others are enjoying a quality product that is regarded as the best benchmark with respect to environmental concern.". To measure green conspicuous consumption intentions, the study adapted the conspicuous consumption scale from O'Cass & Frost (2002). A sample item is "I want to buy expensive green products

which make me noticed by others". Green purchase intentions were measured by a scale adapted from Chang (2015). A sample item is " I expect to purchase green products/brands in the near future"

3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through questionnaires on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. A total of 350 respondents were engaged and 346 used for further analysis after data cleaning. The population of the study was social media users in USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. Since the focus of the study was social media influences on green purchase decisions, only social media users qualified as participants for this study. The USA, UK and Canada are known to have high awareness regarding environmental issues and sustainability (Chen & Chang, 2013). Males dominated the total sample with 254 respondents (73.4%), while females were 92 (26.6%). The ages of the respondents ranged from 20 to 79, with the dominant age group being 30-39 (60.4%).

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process started by firstly ensuring that the dataset was clean for analysis. This was carried out by checking for outliers and cases where respondents were uncooperative. The reliability and validity of the measurement scales were then confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Data was analysed using Smart PLS software (version 4.1.01).

3.4 Measurement Model

The Validity and reliability of the constructs were assessed through CFA. Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend that indicator reliability is met when all items have factor loadings above 0.5. All items in this study met this criteria, with the lowest being 0.629. For Internal consistency reliability, we used the Composite Reliability (CR) indicator, which according to Nunnally & Bernstein (1994), should be above 0.7. As shown in Table 1, the lowest CR index is 0.797; demonstrating internal consistency reliability for the scales used in the study. We assessed convergent validity using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which, according to Fornell & Larcker (1981), needs to be greater than 0.5. This criterion was also met satisfactorily.

Tab 1. Construct Validity and Reliability

Construct	**Item**	**Factor Loadings**	**CR**	**Cronbach's alpha**	**AVE**
Social Media Exposure	SME1	0.788	0.838	0.838	0.633
	SME2	0.810			
	SME3	0.788			
Social Comparison	SC1	0.627	0.797	0.797	0.571
	SC2	0.838			
	SC3	0.785			
FOMO	FOMO1	0.729	0.803	0.804	0.576
	FOMO2	0.813			
	FOMO3	0.732			
Green Conspicuous Consumption Intentions	GCCI1	0.699	0.846	0.847	0.580
	GCCI2	0.775			
	GCCI3	0.761			
	GCCI4	0.806			
Green Purchase Intentions	GPI1	0.815	0.846	0.847	0.648
	GPI2	0.798			
	GP13	0.801			
Perceived Green Quality	PQ1	0.832	0.897	0.897	0.685
	PQ2	0.867			
	PQ3	0.813			
	PQ4	0.797			

Notes. CR, Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; SME, Social Media Exposure; FOMO, Fear of Missing Out; SC, Social Comparison; ISI, Informational Social Influence; GCCI, Green Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

3.5 Discriminant validity

This study assessed discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The HTMT ratio was introduced by Henseler et al (2015) as a method that asseses discriminant validity by comparing the correlations of indicators across different constructs (heterotrait-heteromethod correlations) with the correlations of indicators within the same construct (monotrait-heteromethod correlations). For discriminant validity to be met, Henseler et al; (2015) recommend an HTMT value below 0.85. This study adopts the HTMT ratio because it has been shown to have higher sensitivity and specificity compared to traditional methods like Fornell-Larcker criterion. Sensitivity and specificity refer to the method's ability to correctly identify type one and type two errors related to discriminant validity (Henseler et al; 2015). The HTMT matrix for this study, as shown in table 2 shows all the HTMT ratio values below 0.85, demonstrating the presence of discriminant validity.

Tab. 2. Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio

	SME	SC	FOMO	GCCI	GPI	PQ
SME						
SC	0.780					
FOMO	0.539	0.659				
GCCI	0.749	0.795	0.804			
GPI	0.827	0.649	0.333	0.634		
PQ	0.787	0.703	0.537	0.764	0.815	

Note: SME, Social Media Exposure; FOMO, Fear of Missing Out; SC, Social Comparison; NSI, Normative Social Influence; ISI, Informational Social Influence; GCCI, Green Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

3.6 Correlations

We tested the correlations between constructs in order to understand the relationships between them. The correlation matrix from Table 3 suggests that all the constructs were satisfactorily correlated among each other in a manner that is conducive for conducting regression analysis.

Tab. 3. Correlation Matrix

	SME	SC	FOMO	GCCI	GPI	PQ
SME	1					
SC	0.785	1				
FOMO	0.540	0.668	1			
GCCI	0.752	0.796	0.803	1		
GPI	0.827	0.651	0.335	0.637	1	
PQ	0.787	0.706	0.539	0.767	0.815	1

Note: SME, Social Media Exposure; FOMO, Fear of Missing Out; SC, Social Comparison; NSI, Normative Social Influence; ISI, Informational Social Influence; GCCI, Green Conspicuous Consumption Intentions

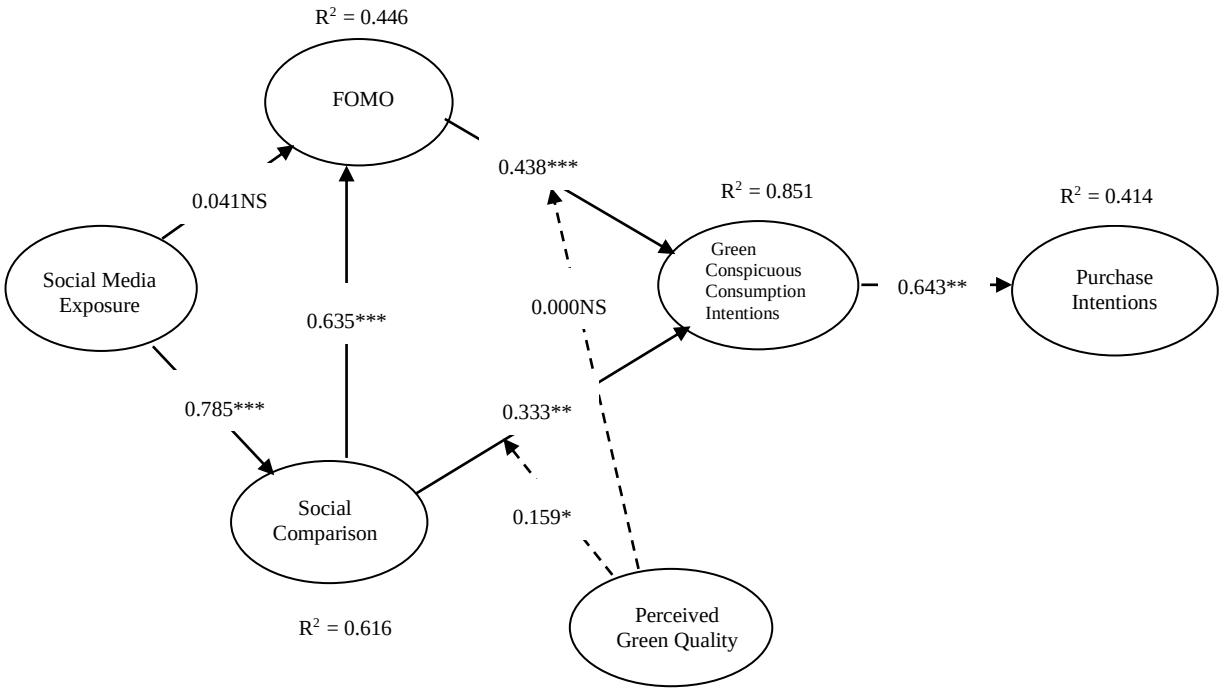
3.7 Model Fit

There are several indices to ascertain how well a model fits the data in structural equation modeling. The variance-based Smart PLS typically provides indices for the estimated model as well as the saturated model. This study adopts the Normed Fit Index (NFI) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) fit indices for this purpose. SRMR is the difference between the model implied correlation matrix and the observed correlation. To determine a good fit, Hu & Bentler (1999) recommend an SRMR value less than 0.08. In this study, while the saturated (0.046) met this criteria, the estimated model recorded a value of 0.096. However, according to Sharma et al (2021), larger models can tolerate slightly higher SRMR values, making it an acceptable fit. For the NFI, Bentler & Bonnet (1980) recommend values above 0.90, but values slightly less are acceptable as well. We recorded an NFI of 0.898 for the saturated model and an estimated model of 0.884, which both demonstrate a good fit.

3.8 Structural Model

In Structural Equation Modelling, the structural model specifies the relationships between the constructs and tests the hypothesized paths. *Figure 2* shows the overall results of the structural model with path coefficients and squared multiple correlations. The path coefficients represent the strength and direction between the latent constructs while the squared multiple correlations show the explanatory power of the constructs; indicating the amount of variance in the dependent variables explained by the independent variables.

Fig. 2. Structural Model



Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

4. Results

From table 4, the results show social media exposure to green had a strong impact on social comparison (β = 0.785, p < 0.001) thus supporting H1, but failed to impact FOMO (β = 0.041, p = 0.739), thus H2 was not supported. H3 was significant at (β = 0.635, p < 0.001), indicating a strong relationship between social comparison and FOMO. The relationship between FOMO and green conspicuous consumption intentions was also supported at (β = 0.438, p < 0.001). H4 is therefore supported. Social comparison also positively impacts green conspicuous consumption intentions at (β = 0.333, p < 0.01), supporting H5. H6 was also supported at (β = 0.643, p < 0.001), indicating that green conspicuous consumption intentions are salient in driving green purchase intentions.

Tab. 4. Hypotheses test results

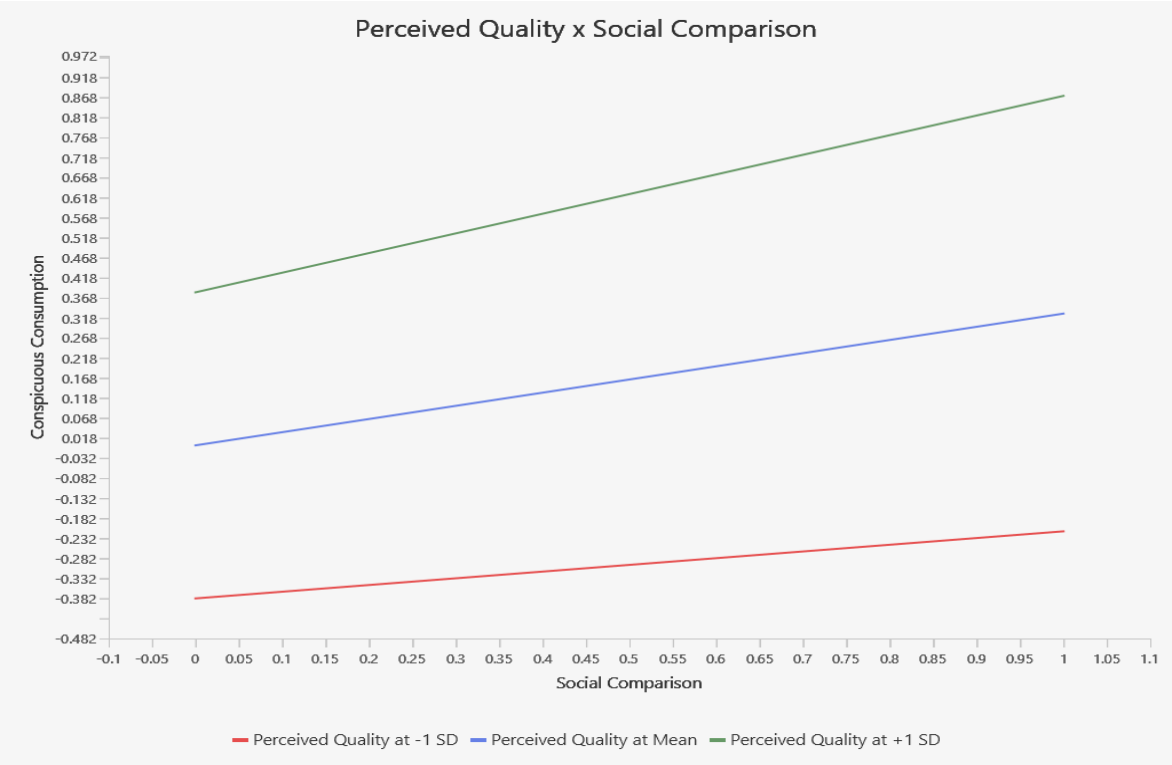
Path	**Path Coefficients β**	***t***	**Results**
H1 Social media exposure → social comparison	0.785***	17.640	supported
H2 Social media exposure → FOMO	0.041 NS	0.334	Not supported
H3 Social comparison → FOMO	0.635***	5.238	Supported
H4 FOMO → green conspicuous consumption intentions	0.438***	4.274	Supported
H5 Social comparison → green conspicuous consumption intentions	0.333**	2.978	Supported
H6 Green conspicuous consumption intentions → green purchase intentions	0.643***	13.149	Supported
H7 Perceived quality × social comparison → green conspicuous consumption intentions	0.159*	2.563	Supported
H8 Perceived quality × FOMO → green conspicuous consumption intentions	0.000 NS	0.001	Not supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; *t, t-values; NS, Not Significant*

4.1 Moderating Effects of Perceived Quality

The results from the moderation analysis shows that perceived quality strengthens the relationship between social comparison and green conspicuous consumption intentions at ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < 0.05$), while the relationship between FOMO and green conspicuous consumption intentions was not significantly affected by perceived quality ($\beta = 0.000$, $p < 0.999$). The simple slope analysis in figure 3 and 4 give a graphical illustration on the moderation effect by explaining their interaction.

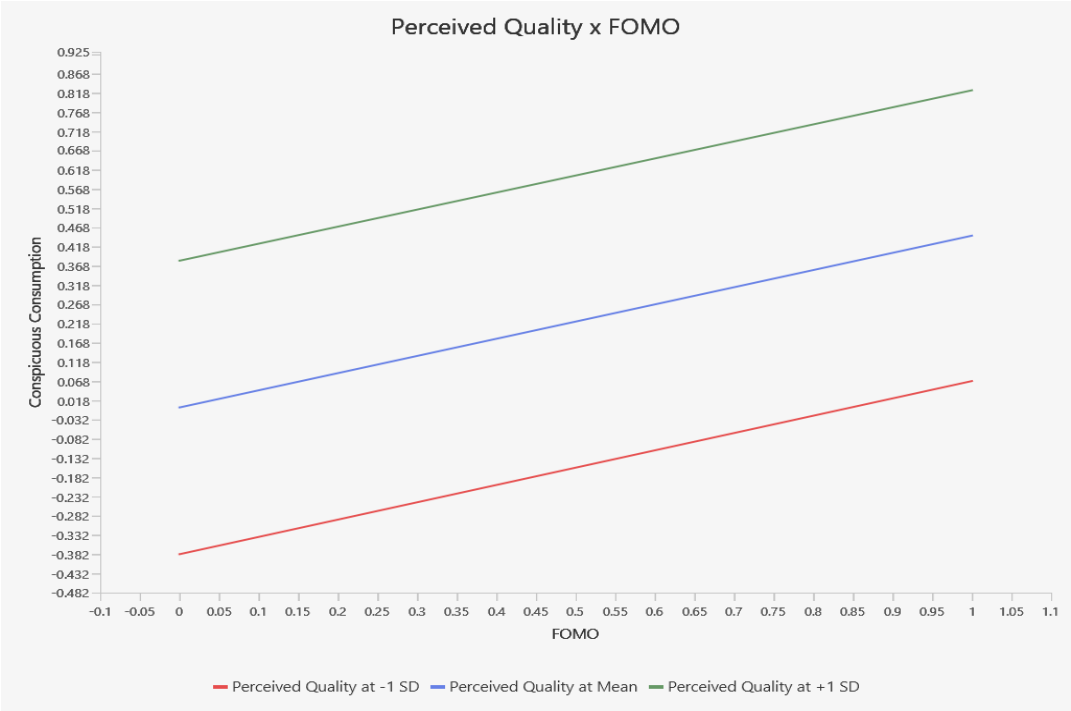
Fig. 3. Simple slope analysis on the interaction between perceived quality and social comparison in predicting conspicuous consumption



The results, as depicted in Figure 2, reveal a significant interaction between perceived quality and social comparison in predicting conspicuous consumption. Specifically, higher levels of perceived quality (+1 SD) strengthen the positive relationship between social comparison and conspicuous consumption, while lower levels of perceived quality (-1 SD) attenuate this relationship.

These findings suggest that perceived quality moderates the influence of social comparison on consumers' conspicuous consumption behavior, with higher quality perceptions leading to a more pronounced effect.

Figure 4. Simple slope analysis on the interaction between perceived quality and FOMO in predicting conspicuous consumption



While the graph suggests that perceived quality might amplify the relationship between FOMO and conspicuous consumption, the statistical analysis demonstrates that this interaction is not significant. Therefore, perceived quality does not meaningfully moderate the effect of FOMO on conspicuous consumption in this model. The increase in conspicuous consumption driven by FOMO occurs irrespective of the level of perceived quality

4.2 Mediating role of Green conspicuous consumption intentions

The results, as seen from table 5, indicate that conspicuous consumption significantly mediates the relationship between FOMO and purchase intentions, with a strong indirect effect ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$). The pathway from social comparison to purchase intentions, mediated by conspicuous consumption, is also significant ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that people who compare themselves with others are more likely to make purchase decisions through conspicuous consumption. Lastly, social media exposure indirectly affects purchase intentions via social comparison and conspicuous consumption ($\beta = 0.168$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring the role of social influence in shaping consumer behaviors.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effects

	Path Coefficients β	***t***	**P values**
FOMO → Conspicuous Consumption → Purchase Intentions	0.282	4.518	0.000
Social Comparison → Conspicuous Consumption → Purchase Intentions	0.214	2.751	0.006
Social Media Exposure → Social Comparison → Conspicuous Consumption → Purchase Intentions	0.168	2.590	0.010

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; *t, t-values*

5. Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of social media exposure on green purchase intentions through the mediating role of conspicuous consumption intentions; and to also ascertain whether perceived quality plays a moderating role. Findings suggest that conspicuous consumption intentions of green products play a very important mediating role in green purchase decisions online. This means that conspicuous consumption intentions drive green purchase intentions of consumers who experience FOMO and, those who indulge in social comparison after they are exposed to green content on social media. These finding align with Billiot (2020) that consumers engaging in upward social comparisons are more likely to pay for conspicuous goods to make up for their feeling of inadequacy, and similarly, the findings align with studies by Sivanathan & Pettit (2010) who found that people engage in conspicuous consumption as compensatory consumption in order to regain their self-esteem when they feel self-threatened and socially alienated through FOMO.

The effect of these relationships then lead to the intentions to purchase green products to make up for any alienation or inadequacy experienced through FOMO or social comparison. Just as in the case of Apaolaza et al (2023) who observed that conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing. Overall, the mediating role of green conspicuous consumption motives on green purchase intentions also explain the attitude – behaviour relationship as posited by Fishbein (1967). Green conspicuous consumption intentions reflect the attitude towards green products, which then drives the behavioural intentions of purchasing green.

The study also shows the role of social media exposure, FOMO and social comparison as antecedents to green conspicuous consumption motives. Generally, FOMO is hardly associated with prosocial behaviour in the extant literature. However, we hypothesized that as sustainable consumption advocacy and conspicuous consumption trends continue to emerge, people are more likely to feel left out of an emerging trend. Results however suggested that the impact of social media exposure on FOMO was insignificant, implying that despite the tendency to feel left out while exposed to social media content, the effect isn't prominent in the context of green content. This could be attributed to the fact that consumers might initially process green content on social media cognitively rather than emotionally. Since cognitive processing involves more conscious and rational thinking, it might reduce the impulsive and emotional responses often associated with the Fear of Missing Out. In a recent study, Chen et al. (2020) found that green brand affect does not impact consumer behavior towards green; suggesting that emotional responses alone are not enough when consumers are making considerations about buying green products.

This study also introduced a new perspective to consumer behaviour towards green products by evaluating the moderating role of perceived quality. The findings suggest that when social comparison is involved, a more cognitive processing is employed, thereby perceptions of quality can strenthen the conception of conspicuous consumption intentions. This supports the position that consumers are more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption if they believe the green products they purchase are of high quality, as it allows them to signal both environmental consciousness and high social status (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020). On the other hand, the heuristic nature of FOMO implies that consumers would be driven by emotions and would hardly consider quality perceptions in the process leading to green conpicuous consumption intentions; hence failing to moderate the relationship.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study suggests that green purchases are not only driven by environmental concerns but also by status and identity signalling, which is in line with compensatory consumption theories. This also expands Fishbein's attitude-behavior framework by highlighting that attitudes toward green products may reflect both pro-environmental beliefs and conspicuous motives.

The study further reveals that consumers process green content on social media cognitively before experiencing emotional reactions like FOMO, challenging traditional views that link FOMO to impulsive behavior. Rational evaluation precedes emotional responses, introducing a cognitive dimension to green content consumption. Additionally, it identifies social comparison as a mediator between social media exposure and FOMO, suggesting that upward comparisons drive feelings of inadequacy, which are compensated for through conspicuous green consumption. This bridges social comparison theory with green consumer behavior, emphasizing that FOMO in green contexts is influenced more by comparative evaluations than direct social media exposure.

Lastly, the study introduces perceived quality as a moderator between social comparison and conspicuous green consumption, showing that product attributes influence status-signaling motives. However, it finds that FOMO-driven consumption is less affected by quality considerations, indicating a divide between cognitive (social comparison) and heuristic (FOMO) processes in driving green purchase intentions.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Marketers and eco-conscious brands such as those into electric vehicles and fashion should highlight the status-signaling value of their products to appeal to consumers' desire for conspicuous consumption. By promoting green products as symbols of both sustainability and social prestige, they can leverage social comparison dynamics to boost purchase intentions. Campaigns should emphasize how buying green products allows consumers to stand out and signal status.

Since consumers engage with green content cognitively, brands should focus on educational and informative marketing. This includes sharing environmental impact statistics,

product quality and durability, and alignment with broader sustainability goals to appeal to rational decision-making and build a stronger connection with green products.

Social media campaigns should integrate social comparison cues by featuring individuals or influencers adopting green lifestyles. Highlighting the gap between sustainable and non-sustainable behaviors can enhance the desirability of green products. Influencers who embody environmental consciousness and social status can effectively drive these comparisons.

Brands should emphasize product quality to influence social comparison-driven green consumption to strengthen trust and appeal to consumers seeking to signal sustainability and sophistication. For FOMO-driven consumers, perceived quality plays a lesser role. Instead, brands should focus on emotional strategies, such as limited-time offers, exclusive green product launches, and showcasing the benefits others are experiencing. These approaches can capitalize on urgency and the social benefits of joining the green trend without relying heavily on quality cues.

Policy interventions such as green tax incentives and eco-labeling could amplify the role of conspicuous sustainability in mainstream consumer culture. Additionally, influencers and social media marketers can craft campaigns emphasizing exclusivity and prestige in eco-friendly product choices

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has several limitations that should be considered. Since the sample was drawn from Amazon MTurk, it may not fully represent the general population, as MTurk users tend to be younger and more tech-savvy (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). Additionally, self-reporting bias may have influenced responses, with participants potentially overstating their green behaviors due to social desirability. Another limitation is the lack of detailed demographic data on respondents' green exposure experiences, such as the type of social media used, the nature of green content, the type of messenger (e.g., close friend, acquaintance, celebrity, or influencer), and the strength of their ties to the messenger. These factors could provide a more nuanced understanding of social media exposure in the context of eco-friendly products. Lastly, this study primarily focused on passive exposure to green content (e.g., viewing posts and comments) rather than active engagement, which may have distinct effects on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Future research should address these limitations by employing diverse sampling methods, such as panel surveys or qualitative interviews, to enhance generalizability. Incorporating behavioral tracking or purchase validation could improve data accuracy. Additionally, studies should explore the role of different social media contexts, including message type, content exposure, and messenger influence, to better understand how these factors shape consumer behavior. Examining active engagement—such as sharing, commenting, and content creation—could provide further insights into how interactive behaviors influence green consumerism.

Experimental designs could also help establish causality by manipulating variables such as message type (emotional vs. informational) and measuring their impact on purchase

intentions. As social media evolves, future studies should consider emerging platforms and features, such as live streaming, virtual reality shopping, and influencer collaborations, to assess their influence on green consumer behavior.

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