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DIGITAL BEHAVIOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL PURCHASING PREFERENCES ACROSS GENERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between users' digital behavior and environmentally oriented purchasing preferences, focusing on environmentally conscious consumers across different generations. The research analyzes how the intensity of online activities, digital literacy, and trust in the digital environment influence sustainable purchasing decisions. The empirical research was conducted as a quantitative cross-sectional study using an online questionnaire survey in 2024. The final sample consisted of 485 respondents aged 18 to 79. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, chi-square tests, and logistic regression models. The results reveal significant generational differences in digital behavior and eco-oriented purchasing preferences. Younger users show higher levels of online activity, greater digital self-confidence, and are more inclined to actively seek out eco-friendly products. Digital literacy and comfort with online banking significantly increase the likelihood of eco-friendly purchasing behavior, as well as the willingness to pay a higher price for sustainable products. Trust in the digital environment has been identified as a partial mediator between digital literacy and environmentally responsible behavior. Women and younger age cohorts show higher levels of environmental engagement. The findings highlight the important role of digitalization in shaping sustainable consumer behavior and point to the need to strengthen digital competencies as a tool to promote environmentally responsible behavior.

KEYWORDS: digital technologies, ecological purchasing behaviour, ecological user, generational cohorts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current dynamic and, in many respects, unstable period, society faces a growing number of environmental and social challenges that fundamentally contribute to shaping consumer behaviour. Excessive wear and tear on natural resources, climate change and the consequences of globalisation are disrupting the balance between economic growth and sustainable development (Li, 2020). In parallel with rapid technological development and digitalisation, new models of consumer behaviour are emerging, characterised by continuous access to information, products and marketing stimuli in the digital environment. These changes are reflected not only in the purchasing process itself, but also in the way consumers evaluate products and make purchasing decisions (Testa et al., 2021; Štofejová, 2023). We can conclude that this gives rise to new patterns of consumer behaviour, in which several dimensions intersect, in particular economic rationality with the values of social responsibility and environmental sustainability (Bergianti, 2025; Mirbabaie et al., 2022). The digital environment plays a key role in this whole process, as it has become not only a space for commercial transactions, but also a platform for shaping the values and attitudes of users. Various online activities, such as searching for information, following brands, interacting on social networks, and evaluating products, directly influence the level of environmental awareness and preference for sustainable products (Megha, 2024; Latief, 2024). The digital environment is one of the key elements influencing the link between the online behaviour of eco-users and their environmental purchasing decisions.

2. THE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS CONSUMER IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Increased emphasis on environmental protection and the gradual transformation of consumer culture are leading to increased interest in more sustainable forms of consumption. When making purchasing decisions, environmentally conscious consumers consider not only economic factors, but also the environmental and ethical consequences of their decisions, reflecting values of sustainability, health and social responsibility (Megha, 2024). Environmentally oriented consumer behaviour is a complex set of different motivations and determinants that directly influence individuals' decisions when purchasing products and services that support the principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility. This phenomenon arises from a combination of various social conditions, personal beliefs and attitudes, and external influences such as cultural norms, marketing communication, and the availability of eco-friendly products (Bergianti, 2025).

Eco-oriented users reflect the current impact of motivational and barrier factors in their purchasing decisions. The primary motivational determinants include environmental awareness and value orientation of consumers (Dangelico, 2021; Li, 2020), the influence of social communities and influencers reinforcing ecological identity (Gonzalez-Padron, 2021), and the availability of information on sustainable products through digital platforms (Mirbabaie et al., 2022).

Conversely, barrier factors include mistrust of environmental claims and the phenomenon of greenwashing, as well as information overload (Chomová, 2024), the higher price of eco-friendly products (Musová, Musa & Matiová, 2021) and low digital literacy among users (Šebo, Gondová & Badidová, 2025). The above classification shows that environmentally-oriented users move between two extremes in their consumer decisions – on the one hand, they are motivated by the desire to act in accordance with environmental values, but on the other hand, they face various obstacles that can limit their environmental behaviour.

First, it is necessary to define the term "environmentally conscious consumer". Several studies agree that this type of consumer is described by most authors as an individual whose purchasing behaviour goes beyond traditional economic decisions and takes into account a broader social and environmental context. Author Dangelico (2021) states that such consumers take into account the consequences of their consumption on the environment, society and future generations. Their decisions are based on the fundamental principles of sustainability and ethical responsibility. Witek and Kuźniar (2020) offer an empirical-demographic perspective on the issue and emphasise that the behaviour of eco-conscious consumers is largely influenced by socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education and income). According to their findings, we can conclude that these variables significantly influence the likelihood that a consumer will prefer eco-friendly products. Author Štofejová (2023) adds a digital dimension to this perspective on consumer behaviour, stating that environmentally conscious users utilise the digital environment as a tool for informed decision-making. Through online reviews, social networks and digital communication channels, they obtain information about products, evaluate them and share their experiences with the company or its products and services. Based on the above, it can be concluded that digitalisation greatly influences not only the way purchasing decisions are

made, but also the very essence of environmentally conscious behaviour, which is becoming more interconnected, participatory and community-oriented. In the online space, there is growing interest in sustainable and ethically oriented products, recyclable materials, local production and transparent brands. Eco-users share their experiences through various digital platforms, evaluate them and recommend them further, whether in relation to the company itself or its products and services.

Today's digital consumers represent a new generation of users who are less impulsive and less price-sensitive in their purchasing behaviour, more conscious and, to a large extent, more thoughtful in their decision-making, expecting brands to act in the areas of environmental protection and social issues. To a large extent, they put pressure on companies to adopt pro-environmental measures and implement green innovations, etc. Today's digital consumers represent a new generation of users who, thanks to digitalisation, have significantly greater information and communication power than in the past. Their behaviour is characterised by hyperconnectivity – constant access to information, rapid response times and a high degree of mobility (Chomová, 2024). Their influence stems from four interconnected sources of power: growing demand for information, availability of data via the internet, the influence of social networks, and the collective action of digital communities (Chomová, 2024). For eco-users, digital media represent a space in which they are influenced by several aspects and which significantly affects their attitudes and decisions, as they are constantly exposed to content that shapes their perception of brands and at the same time have the opportunity to actively influence their reputation through feedback, evaluations and shared experiences (Murár, Piatrov 2022). The formation of attitudes, environmental awareness and consumer behaviour is influenced by websites, social media, mobile applications and various environmentally-oriented campaigns, the effectiveness of which depends on the degree of authenticity, consistency and transparency of communication. By communicating their environmental activities, companies promote greater trust among users and encourage their participation in various sustainable initiatives (Marin, Ruiz, & Rubio, 2020; Gonzalez-Padron, 2021). We can conclude that eco-digital consumers are not just passive recipients of offers, but also active agents shaping demand and market direction in the digital environment. The integration of environmental values into the digital environment leads to the formation of an interesting type of consumer who is able to respond effectively to sustainability-oriented stimuli and principles and transform them into specific patterns of environmentally responsible behaviour. The effective use of digital communication channels and platforms such as social networks, websites and influencer marketing greatly promotes the communication of ethically manufactured products, responsible production processes and various initiatives with a social impact.

The PwC Voice of the Consumer Survey 2024 report states that up to 85% of consumers directly feel the effects of climate change, which largely shapes their purchasing behaviour. The study also presents other findings that point to the fact that consumers are willing to pay an average of 9.7% more for products that are sustainable or ethically sourced. The findings show that digitalisation is a significant milestone that is changing the way people shop, with up to 46% of respondents making a purchase directly through social media, more than double the figure for 2019 (PwC, 2024). In Slovakia, research on the issue also confirms growing consumer interest in environmentally friendly behaviour, but the surveys conducted are less focused on the impact of digitalisation and the subsequent effective use of digital tools. Authors Šebo, Gondová and Badidová (2025) found that 57% of respondents are willing to pay an average of 8% more for eco-friendly products, with digital channels playing a secondary role in providing information. In another survey conducted by Musová, Musa and Matiová (2021), we can see that only 35% of respondents regularly buy eco-friendly products online, with education, income and environmental awareness significantly influencing their decisions. Sixty per cent of respondents are interested in the origin and environmental footprint of a product when making a purchase. The study points to the potential of digital platforms, but also highlights their low usage among Slovak consumers. Surveys show that although eco-conscious consumers in Slovakia have a positive attitude towards sustainability, their actual behaviour is largely limited by a lack of information and low engagement in digital forms of environmentally responsible shopping.

Domestic and international research shows that digitalisation is significantly changing the way eco-consumers approach eco-friendly consumption. The findings of the PwC Voice of the Consumer Survey 2024 confirm growing sensitivity to climate change and indicate that the digital environment is becoming the main place for sustainable purchasing decisions. Slovak studies (Šebo, Gondová & Badidová, 2025; Musová, Musa & Matiová, 2021) point to the fact that although consumers declare their willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products and are interested in their origin, the use of digital channels remains limited and often secondary. This points to a gap

between environmental awareness and the actual behaviour of consumers in the digital environment. Our survey addresses this gap between awareness and the actual behaviour of eco-users, highlighting the determinants of digital behaviour and sustainable purchasing decisions. The model illustrates the interaction between motivational and barrier factors influencing sustainable purchasing behaviour. Digital literacy and digital behaviour act as mediating mechanisms that shape whether environmental values are transformed into actual purchasing decisions.

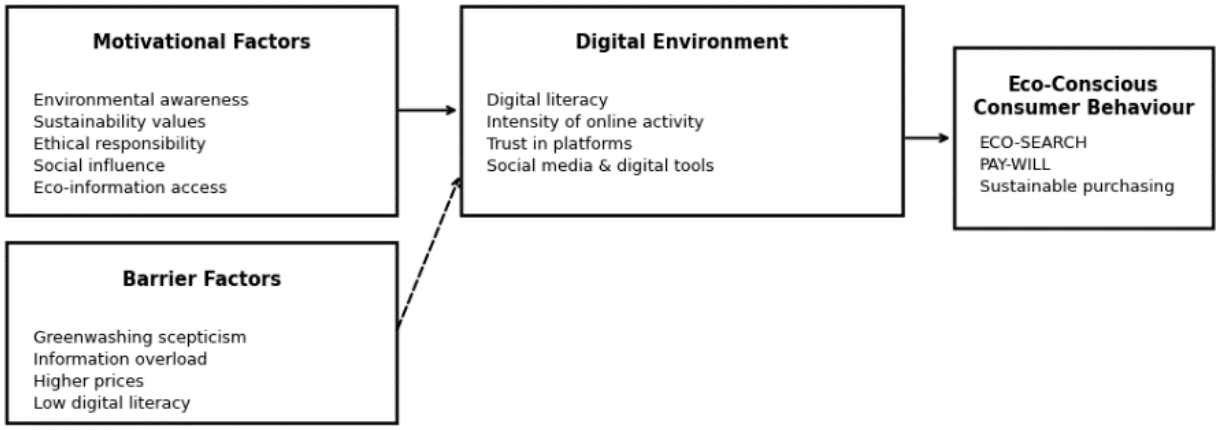

Figure 1: Conceptual model of environmentally conscious consumer behaviour in the digital environment

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted as a quantitative cross-sectional study using an online questionnaire survey, the aim of which was to analyse the digital behaviour of users and its relationship to the intensity of online activities and environmental purchasing preferences. Data collection took place in 2024 using an online form distributed via social networks. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The total number of respondents analysed was N = 485, of which 69.7% were women and 30.3% were men, with the predominant age cohorts (18 to 79 years) represented. The sample selection was non-probability, with the inclusion criteria being a minimum age of 18 and access to the internet. The questionnaire was structured into several sections and focused on demographic variables, digital behaviour and literacy, cybersecurity habits, comfort with online banking, and environmentally oriented purchasing preferences. The items were formulated in Slovak and underwent pilot content validation with experts in marketing and sustainable consumption before the survey was launched. The questions were mostly closed-ended, with the option of selecting one or more answers. As part of the data processing, the answers were cleaned of duplicates, normalised and then coded for statistical analysis. SPSS 29 statistical software was used for data processing. First, a descriptive analysis was performed, including frequencies, percentages and average values. To verify the relationships between categorical variables, χ^2 independence tests were applied, supplemented by Cramér's V as a measure of effect size. Logistic regression models were used to examine predictors of environmental behaviour, specifically binary logistic regression to estimate the probability of actively seeking out eco-friendly products and ordinal logistic regression to analyse factors influencing willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products. The models included variables representing the intensity of online activities, level of digital literacy, security habits, comfort with online banking, importance of sustainability, gender and age. Where necessary, exploratory mediation was also used to assess the indirect effects of digital literacy through comfort with digital transactions. All tests were evaluated at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and supplemented with 95% confidence intervals and effect sizes (Odds Ratio, Cramér's V, pseudo-R^2). The research analysed variables capturing demographic, digital and environmental aspects of respondents' behaviour. The basic demographic variables included gender and age, which were categorised into four age cohorts (18–28, 29–44, 45–60 and 61–79 years). The area of digital behaviour was operationalised through several indicators, such as frequency of internet use, number of digital devices used (smartphone, tablet, laptop, desktop computer) and intensity of social media use (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, X and Snapchat). Other variables included digital self-confidence in working with technology and completion of formal training in digital literacy, which reflected the level of digital competence of users. Variables related to online behaviour were also monitored, specifically the intensity of online activities (such as searching for information, online shopping, education, gaming and

content streaming), the frequency of software updates, and the level of compliance with security measures, which included the use of strong passwords, two-factor authentication, antivirus tools, and avoiding suspicious links. The variable of comfort in using online banking was also measured separately, as an indicator of trust in digital transactions. The analysis also included the use of digital productivity tools (word processors, spreadsheets, presentation software, project applications) and confidence in assessing the credibility of information found online, which complemented the respondents' digital literacy profile. Environmentally oriented variables focused on examining sustainable attitudes and consumer habits. The importance of sustainability in purchasing decisions was assessed, as well as the active search for eco-friendly products, which was one of the main dependent variables. Other indicators included the number of eco-friendly products used (reusable bottles, eco-friendly cleaning products, sustainable clothing, organic food, solar panels), subjective difficulties in finding them, and willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products, which served as the second key dependent variable. Additional indicators included perceived aspects of eco-friendly products (health benefits, reduced environmental impact, local sourcing of materials, and ethical production conditions), satisfaction with the availability of eco-friendly products on the market, and the likelihood of recommending them to friends or family. All variables were then coded according to their measurement level (nominal, ordinal or interval) and prepared for statistical processing in SPSS, with composite indices for digital security and intensity of online activities also being created.

Based on the theoretical starting points, the following research questions and hypotheses emerged:

RQ1: What are the main characteristics of users' digital behaviour in relation to the intensity of their online activities, level of digital literacy and security habits?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the level of digital literacy and trust in the online environment, specifically in the area of online banking and the assessment of information credibility?

RQ3: How does digital behaviour (intensity of online activities, digital literacy, and comfort with technology) influence environmental purchasing preferences and willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products?

RQ4: Do eco-friendly purchasing preferences differ between generational cohorts of users in the digital environment?

RQ5: To what extent does the digital environment mediate the relationship between digital literacy and users' eco-friendly behaviour?

H1: A higher level of digital literacy is positively associated with more frequent use of digital technologies and greater intensity of online activities.

H2: Users with higher self-confidence in working with technologies and formal training in digital literacy show greater confidence in online banking and more frequently comply with security measures.

H3: More intensive digital behaviour and a positive attitude towards technology increase the likelihood of actively searching for eco-friendly products (ECO-SEARCH).

H4: Digital literacy and comfort with online banking positively influence willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products (PAY-WILL).

H5: Generational cohorts differ statistically significantly in terms of environmental purchasing preferences and eco-friendly behaviour.

H6: The effect of digital literacy on eco-friendly purchasing behaviour is indirect and mediated by trust in the digital environment and online transactions.

4. RESULTS

The aim of the analytical part was to identify relationships between users' digital behaviour, their online activity and environmental purchasing preferences. Given the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon under study, a combination of descriptive, correlation and regression analyses was used. This made it possible to obtain a more comprehensive view of the relationship between the level of digital literacy, trust in the online environment and environmentally oriented purchasing behaviour. The sample consisted of 485 respondents from different age cohorts. Women accounted for 69.7% and men for 30.3%. The most numerous group was aged 29–44 (41.8%), followed by the 18–28 age group (33.2%). The average number of digital devices used was 3.6 (SD = 1.2), which indicates a high level of technological equipment. Most respondents (87%) use a smartphone daily, 68% use a laptop or notebook, and 42% use a tablet. The intensity of online activities was high – 78% of respondents search for information daily, 65% regularly use online shopping, and more than half (54%) educate themselves through digital platforms. Social networks are the dominant channel of interaction – 91% of users are active on Facebook or Instagram, while 27% also use professional networks such as LinkedIn. Table 1 summarises the basic indicators of digital behaviour by age group.

Table 1: Average Values of Selected Indicators of Digital Behaviour By Age Cohort

Generational cohort	Number of devices (M)	Intensity of online activities (M)	Digital self-confidence (1–5)	Comfort with online banking (1–5)
18–28	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.2
29–44 years	3.8	4.4	4.1	4.5
45–60 years	3.2	3.7	3.5	4.1
61–79 years	2.6	3.1	3.0	3.2

The table shows that younger age groups use more devices and engage in more intensive online activities, which supports hypothesis H1 about the positive relationship between digital literacy and the use of digital technologies. Although older cohorts have lower digital confidence, an interesting finding is the relatively high comfort with online banking even among the 45-60 age group, which indicates a gradual narrowing of the generational digital divide. An analysis of the relationship between formal training in digital literacy, confidence in working with technology, and trust in the online environment showed statistically significant correlations. Users who had completed training in digital literacy scored higher in security habits ($M = 4.3$; $p < 0.001$) and used two-factor authentication and software updates more frequently. The correlation matrix (Table 2) confirmed mild to moderately strong positive relationships between digital self-confidence, training and trust in the digital environment.

Table 2: Correlations between Indicators of Digital Literacy and Trust in the Online Environment (Spearman's P)

Variables	Digital self-confidence	Training	Trust in online banking	Compliance with security principles
Digital confidence	1.00	0.41	0.38	0.29
Training	0.41	1.00	0.36	0.33***
Trust in online banking	0.38	0.36	1.00	0.27
Security principles	0.29	0.33	0.27	1.00

***p < 0.001; *p < 0.01

The results support hypothesis H2, according to which digital self-confidence and formal education in digital literacy increase users' trust in the online environment. The data also suggest that digital competences are not only technical in nature, but also have a psychological dimension – they increase the feeling of control, thereby reducing the perceived risk in online transactions. Logistic regression models were used to test hypotheses H3 and H4, which assessed the probability of actively searching for eco-friendly products (ECO-SEARCH) and the willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products (PAY-WILL). The models included the following predictors: intensity of online activities, digital literacy, comfort with technology, training, age and gender.

Table 3: Logistic Regression – Predictors Of Actively Seeking Out Eco-Friendly Products

Variable	B (β)	S.E.	Wald	p	OR
Intensity of online activities	0.47	0.12	15.24	< 0.001	1.60
Digital literacy (index)	0.31	0.10	9.48	0.002	1.36
Comfort with technology	0.24	0.11	4.68	0.031	1.27
Age (negative coefficient)	-0.29	0.09	10.27	0.001	0.75
Gender (female = 1)	0.22	0.08	6.13	0.014	1.25

Pseudo-$R^2 = 0.23$; $N = 485$

The model confirmed that higher intensity of online activities and digital literacy significantly increase the likelihood of environmentally oriented behaviour. Younger users and women are more likely to seek out environmentally friendly products, which is consistent with international studies on environmentally oriented consumer behaviour. Hypothesis H3 was therefore confirmed. In the second model, willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products was analysed as the dependent variable.

Table 4: Ordinal Logistic Regression – Factors Influencing Willingness to Pay Extra For Eco-Friendly Products

Variable	B (β)	S.E.	p	OR
Digital literacy	0.34	0.11	0.002	1.40
Comfort with online banking	0.45	0.13	< 0.001	1.57
Importance of sustainability	0.51	0.09	< 0.001	1.67
Gender (female = 1)	0.28	0.10	0.008	1.32
Age	-0.22	0.08	0.005	0.80

Pseudo-$R^2 = 0.26$; $N = 485$

The results confirm hypothesis H4, namely that digital literacy and trust in online transactions significantly increase respondents' willingness to financially support green alternatives. The strongest predictor was the perceived importance of sustainability, suggesting that environmental values remain a key factor in the decision-making process. The chi-square test showed statistically significant differences between age cohorts in the level of eco-friendly behaviour ($\chi^2(3) = 22.84$; $p < 0.001$). The youngest generation (18–28 years) showed the highest rate of actively seeking out eco-friendly products (71%), while the oldest group (61–79 years) showed only 38%. Hypothesis H5 on generational differences was confirmed. Exploratory mediation showed that the relationship between digital literacy and eco-friendly behaviour is partly mediated by trust in the online environment and comfort with digital transactions. The higher level of eco-friendly engagement among younger cohorts is consistent with recent European studies highlighting stronger sustainability values and digital activism among younger consumers. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.19$; $p = 0.021$), supporting hypothesis H6. Users who feel safe in the online environment are more likely to exhibit pro-environmental behaviour.

5. Discussion And Conclusion

The research findings show that digital behaviour has a significant impact on shaping users' environmental attitudes and purchasing preferences. Digital literacy has proven to be a multidimensional variable, encompassing not only technical skills but also critical evaluation of information, trust in the digital environment, and the ability to use online tools effectively. This combination of competencies increases consumers' willingness to experiment with eco-friendly products and engage in sustainable consumption. The results confirmed that intensive digital behaviour increases the likelihood of eco-friendly decision-making. Younger respondents and women showed higher environmental engagement, confirming the theory of value orientation. Comfort with online banking and trust in the digital environment proved to be mediating factors. Users who feel digitally competent and secure are more willing to take risks in new areas, such as buying eco-friendly products online. Generational differences revealed a shift towards digital sustainability: younger cohorts associate environmental values with technological identity, while older generations approach digitalisation pragmatically, with an emphasis on functionality and security. This difference suggests that environmental communication should be tailored to different age groups: for younger people through interactive media, and for older people through understandable and trustworthy information channels. From a practical point of view, the study points to a growing need to develop digital competences as a tool for environmental policy and marketing. Strengthening digital literacy can contribute to more effective dissemination of environmental information, reducing misinformation about sustainability and motivating consumers to make more responsible product choices. The limitations of the research include the non-probability sample selection and the dominant representation of women, which may affect the generalisability of the results. While non-probability sampling was used, the findings provide valuable insights into the relationships between digital behaviour and environmentally oriented consumption, although their generalisability may be limited. In the future, it would be appropriate to extend the model to include variables such as income, education and environmental awareness, which can significantly influence the relationship between digitalisation and sustainability. Future research could examine potential cross-country differences in digital and environmental behaviour patterns. Improving digital literacy programs may accelerate sustainable consumption transitions, particularly among older consumers. In conclusion, digital literacy and online behaviour are significant predictors of consumers' environmental preferences. Digitalisation is thus not only a technological phenomenon, but also a cultural and value framework in which new patterns of responsible consumer behaviour are formed.

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