

Promoting sustainable consumption in Hong Kong: a study on secondary school students' perceptions and experiences of a youth education program

Submitted by

KWAN Hiu Tung

Supervisor: Dr. YING Ji

Submitted to The Education University of Hong Kong
for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Executive Management
in **April 2025**

Declaration

I, ***Kwan Hiu Tung***, declare that this research report / project report represents my own work under the supervision of ***Dr. YING Ji***, and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

1.		<input type="checkbox"/> I declare I did not use generative AI in my report (end of declaration) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I declare I used generative AI in my report (Go to Q2)	
2.	[Please state the ways and tools you used generative AI in your report: (You can choose more than one option)]		
		Usages	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Translation	Tools _____
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grammar checking	_____
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Data searching	_ ChatGPT _____
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Paraphrasing	_ Copilot _____
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Generating ideas	_____
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please state _____	_____

[Reminder: Please keep your draft(s) in case your supervisor asks you to explain the AI percentage in your report.]

Signature: _____

Kwan Hiu Tung
April 23, 2025

Table of Contents

Declaration	1
Table of Contents	2
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
1.1 Research Background	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1 Sustainable consumption	6
2.2 Current situation	6
2.3 The role of youth education in promoting sustainable consumption	7
2.4 Green consumption behavior among young consumers	8
2.5 Research gaps	9
Chapter 3: Research Objectives	10
Chapter 4: Research Design	11
4.1 Methodology	11
4.2 Participants and Sampling	11
4.3 Data collection	11
4.4 Data Analysis	12
Chapter 5: Findings	13
5.1 Increased Environmental Awareness	13
5.2 Behavioral Changes	14
5.3 Challenges in Practicing Green Consumption	16
5.4 Student Perspectives for Improvement	17

Chapter 6: Discussion	19
Chapter 7: Significance and implications	22
7.1 Significance of the research	22
7.2 Implications for Policy and Executive Management	23
Chapter 8: Limitations	26
Chapter 9: Conclusion	27
Bibliography	28
Appendices	30
Appendix A: <i>Interview Questions</i>	30

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, the global society has regarded sustainable consumption as an urgent issue as people's unsustainable consumption patterns have caused great environmental challenges (Trudel, 2018). As a bustling city known for its fast-paced lifestyle, Hong Kong is facing significant environmental challenges due to high levels of consumption and waste generation (Consumer Council, 2021). In this context, it is urgent to actively promote and practice sustainable consumption among Hong Kong people, particularly among young people who make up a large part of Hong Kong's population and will be the main force of consumption in the coming years.

Witek and Kuźniar (2020) suggest that education can play a key role in promoting sustainable behaviors and attitudes among young consumers. It was also observed that implementing youth education programs raises young consumers' awareness of sustainable development issues, allows them to make informed purchasing decisions, and provides them with more opportunities to practice sustainable consumption (Ma et al., 2023). Thus, arguably, by incorporating sustainability education into school curricula and student extracurricular activities, young consumers can gain a better understanding of the impact of sustainable consumption decisions on Hong Kong's environment, society, and even the economy, promoting sustainable behavior and shaping a sustainable attitude.

One of these extracurricular activities is *The Smart Consumption Academy*, which is a Secondary School Educational Program, jointly organized by the Consumer Council and the Education Bureau (Consumer Council, n.d.). This program is designed to foster positive consumption values and empower students to become “smart” consumers. The participants in this program are secondary school students, typically aged 12 to 18. It is implemented through a series of activities to promote essential consumption information to students in a diversified and fun approach. It includes three competitions, which are “My Unique Project Study,” “My Witty Online Quiz,” and “My Fun IG Post Creation.” The program is scheduled to run over the course of one academic year, with three competitions held in different stages.

However, so far, no study has been conducted to explore the effectiveness of such youth education programs in promoting sustainable consumption among young consumers in Hong Kong's context of local cultural, social, and economic dynamics. Based on semi-

structured interviews with ten secondary school students, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of youth education in promoting green consumption behavior among Hong Kong's young consumers. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do secondary school students perceive the effectiveness of the youth education program in promoting sustainable consumption practices?
2. What specific changes in consumption behavior have secondary school students experienced as a result of participating in the youth education program?
3. What challenges do secondary school students face in adopting sustainable consumption practices, and how does the youth education program address these challenges?

Findings will shed light on the impact of these educational measures on promoting sustainable consumption and provide important insights into the design and implementation of youth education strategies in Hong Kong. The findings will help policymakers and educators better understand how youth education may be utilized to influence Hong Kong young consumers' consumption behaviors and facilitate their sustainable consumption behaviors. Finally, this research will contribute to foster a sustainable consumer culture in Hong Kong and around the world, allowing young consumers to actively implement and advocate for environmentally friendly choices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumption refers to the use of goods and services in a way that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Consumer Council, 2021). It involves making choices that minimize environmental impacts, promote social equity, and support current and long-term economic prosperity (Liu et al., 2017).

According to Liu et al. (2017), the primary principles for implementing sustainable consumption are the following: First, sustainable consumption aims to maximize resource utilization by reducing waste, conserving energy, and minimizing natural resource consumption. Second, when practicing sustainable consumption, we will prioritize environmental protection and select products and services with the lowest negative impact on the ecosystem, biodiversity, and climate. Third, sustainable consumption encourages a circular economy, while product design prioritizes durability, repairability, and recyclability to reduce waste and promote resource reuse. Fourth, sustainable consumption can encompass lifestyle choices such as transportation, food consumption, housing decisions, and overall consumption patterns that minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable development. Fifth, sustainable consumption requires consumers' awareness and education of the environmental and social impacts of products and services, so that individuals can make wise choices that are consistent with sustainable development goals.

2.2 Current situation

As the global population continues to grow, humans' excessive consumption has resulted in resource depletion, pollution, and climate change (Steer, 2014). According to the Consumer Council (2021), sustainable consumption has been a hotly debated topic in many countries over the last decade. International organizations, governments, environmental organizations, academia, and consumer groups have all looked for effective ways to promote sustainable consumption. Although the Hong Kong government has developed sustainable development strategies and policies, our implementation of sustainable consumption lags behind the global trend.

Hong Kong is a high-consuming city. It has Asia's second highest seafood consumption per capita and is a major water consumer (Consumer Council, 2021). Despite limited

local manufacturing and agricultural activities, the Hong Kong government continues to provide a large number of imported products to the public (Consumer Council, 2021). These life conveniences tend to drive more consumption choices, causing Hong Kong residents to prefer an excessive consumption culture over a culture of sustainable choices (Consumer Council, 2021). On the other hand, the Hong Kong Consumer Council is actively promoting sustainable consumption. A recent 5-year longitudinal study revealed a slight increase in the Sustainable Consumption Index (SCI) (Consumer Council, 2021). The study included consumer surveys, focus groups, and desk research in 13 different jurisdictions. According to this study (Consumer Council, 2021), although consumers are concerned about and aware of the environmental impact of their consumption habits, they have not made the necessary behavioral changes. From this perspective, despite policy agenda for sustainable consumption and public awareness, transforming Hong Kong into a city that promotes sustainable development still necessitates vigorous promotion and cooperation from citizens, the government, and businesses.

2.3 The role of youth education in promoting sustainable consumption

Youth education is found to be a pathway to promote sustainable consumption. First, youth education can provide students with the knowledge they need to understand the importance of sustainable consumption practices (Sterling & Schumacher Society, 2001). For example, teaching students about the impact of human activities on the environment, the importance of environmental protection, and the concept of sustainable development can all help students improve their environmental knowledge. Second, youth education can help young students understand environmental issues like climate change, resource depletion, and pollution (Ma et al., 2023). Understanding the serious consequences of their unsustainable consumption patterns may lead to a greater willingness to adopt consumption behaviors that reduce environmental damage. Third, youth education can help students develop attitudes that prioritize environmental protection and sustainable development (Ma et al., 2023). For example, the course emphasizes the value of environmental management and the importance of sustainable living, allowing young Hong Kong consumers to form an early attitude toward sustainable development. Fourth, youth education encourages students to put their environmental knowledge and attitudes into action (Ma et al., 2023). For example, reducing waste, conserving energy, and selecting sustainable products in everyday life will enable young people to make informed purchasing decisions, promoting sustainable consumption behaviors. Finally, youth education not only influences the current behavior of Hong Kong's young consumers but also prepares them and future

generations to be responsible global citizens (Sterling & Schumacher Society, 2001). By providing young people with essential sustainable knowledge and skills, we can ensure that they incorporate sustainable consumption practices into their daily lives from an early age (Ma et al., 2023; Sterling & Schumacher Society, 2001). From this perspective, youth education programs, such as *The Smart Consumption Academy*, would play an important role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of Hong Kong's young consumers toward sustainable development.

2.4 Green consumption behavior among young consumers

Young consumers are viewed as a promising market for environmentally friendly consumption habits (Ziesemer, Hüttel, & Balderjahn, 2021). As a result, businesses and policymakers who advocate sustainable practices place a high value on understanding the factors that influence young consumers' green consumption behavior (Ziesemer, Hüttel, & Balderjahn, 2021). The green consumption behavior of millennials, in particular, is a source of growing concern in the marketing and sustainable development fields (Taufique & Islam, 2021).

The research shows that factors such as perceived consumer effectiveness, subjective norms, and environmental attitudes play an important role in shaping young consumers' green consumption behavior (Taufique & Islam, 2021). Consumer perceived effectiveness is especially important for green consumption behavior among young urban consumers in South Asia (Taufique & Islam, 2021).

Another study found that among Gen Z consumers, brand familiarity, green awareness, and long-term regulatory concerns all influence their attitudes, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products (Ewe & Tjiptono, 2023). First, familiarity with environmentally friendly brands will influence young consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions toward green products. In addition, young consumers' environmental awareness and concern will influence their willingness to engage in sustainable consumption practices. Furthermore, promotional focus influences young consumers' willingness to pay higher prices for environmentally friendly products. Understanding the factors mentioned above can help businesses adjust their strategies to attract young consumers and encourage them to engage in sustainable consumption behaviors (Ewe & Tjiptono, 2023).

It is worth mentioning that according to Taufique & Islam (2021), research has shown that when young consumers perceive their actions as meaningful and impactful, they are more likely to embrace environmentally friendly behaviors. The study conducted

among young urban consumers in Bangladesh found that perceived consumer effectiveness significantly drives green consumer behavior, indicating that when youth feel empowered to make a difference, they are more likely to take proactive steps toward sustainable consumption. Therefore, it is important to build students' confidence and emphasize their potential impact on the environment through youth education programs. It can effectively raise their awareness and take action toward green consumption.

2.5 Research gaps

Literature review demonstrates the role of youth education in promoting sustainable consumption and highlights the importance of youth education in promoting sustainable consumption. However, there is little research conducted to examine the effectiveness of existing youth education programs in Hong Kong and how youth education programs shape young consumers' green consumption awareness and behaviors in Hong Kong. Specifically, this study identifies the following research gaps to address:

2.5.1 Inadequate understanding of how youth education programs shape students' green consumption awareness in Hong Kong

2.5.2 Inadequate understanding of how youth education programs shape students' green consumption behaviors in Hong Kong

Chapter 3: Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the role of youth education in promoting green consumption among young consumers in Hong Kong. The following four research objectives will be explored to support the core research goal:

1. To examine secondary school students' perceptions of a youth education program in promoting green consumption among young consumers in Hong Kong
2. To explore secondary school students' experiences developing green consumption behavior through the youth education program
3. To identify possibilities and challenges in developing green consumption behavior among secondary school students through the youth education program
4. To propose feasible suggestions on youth education strategies to promote sustainable consumption in Hong Kong

Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1 Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. This approach provides an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions, experiences, awareness and behaviors related to green consumption. The interview questions were structured into six sections, including Background Questions, Experience of the Competition, Influence, Challenge, Envisioning the Future and Program Improvement. A total of 20 questions are included. The interviews ranged from a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of 65 minutes.

4.2 Participants and Sampling

This study invited secondary school students who participated in *The Smart Consumption Academy* to participate in the study through a purposive sampling (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). A total of eight schools were contacted, and three schools agreed to participate.

4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with ten secondary school students, aged between 15 and 16, who participated in the youth education program. After obtaining approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of The Education University of Hong Kong, formal invitation letters were sent to the school principal to ask for permission in December 2024. Three representative teachers from different secondary schools responded positively. Subsequently, consent forms were distributed to the participants and their parents or guardians. The interviews were conducted over three separate visits to the respective schools. These visits occurred between January and early March 2025, during which a total of 10 students were interviewed. From 30 to 65 minutes of interviews were conducted with participants in youth education programs, aiming to explore participants' experiences and perspectives to adopt sustainable consumption practices. With participant consent, interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The interview transcripts will be subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to sustainable consumption.

4.4 Data Analysis

The organized interview transcript was subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to sustainable consumption. This process involves coding the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a coherent analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A total of four key themes are identified to provide insights into the students' perceptions and experiences of the youth education program.

Chapter 5: Findings

This part outlines the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted with secondary school students who took part in *The Smart Consumption Academy*. The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four main themes that give a summary of the students' perceptions and experiences, including Increased Environmental Awareness, Behavioral Changes, Challenges in Practicing Green Consumption and Student Perspectives for Improvement. Each theme is discussed in detail in the subsequent sections and provides a complete picture of the impact of the youth education program on promoting sustainable consumption among students in Hong Kong.

5.1 Increased Environmental Awareness

After participating in *The Smart Consumption Academy*, students' environmental awareness significantly improved. Many participants stated that the competition experience not only enhanced their understanding of the importance of environmental protection but also influenced their daily consumption behaviors.

The competition made students realize the urgency of environmental issues. Lin shared, "Although using plastic bottles and utensils is really convenient, these things actually cause significant harm to the environment." This reflects her re-evaluation of everyday consumer products. During the competition and through their investigations, they found that many consumers only focus on price when purchasing beverages, neglecting environmental factors. Sze added, "Most consumers only look at the price when buying drinks," which made them realize the need to change such consumption habits and pay attention to the environmental friendliness of products.

The students learned a lot about environmental protection through the competition. For examples, they discovered that recycling facilities for beverage cartons in Hong Kong are very limited, and many citizens do not understand the recycling process. Wong mentioned, "After completing the competition, we gained more knowledge about waste sorting and recycling." This shows that the competition provided a learning platform for students to acquire more knowledge, which deeply influenced their habits.

The students' consumption attitudes also changed. Leung said, "I have become more environmentally conscious than before the competition. For example, I now recycle old clothes more often and choose products with less plastic packaging when shopping."

This change indicates that the competition encourages students to pay more attention to environmental sustainability. Also, they want to take action to make a difference.

In terms of practical actions, students made positive changes in their daily lives. Tsang shared, "Now whenever I go out, I bring my own water bottle and try to avoid buying plastic bottles or cartons from convenience stores in order to reduce waste." This action reflects their deep understanding and practice of environmental principles after the competition. Chu also said, "Before that, I rarely paid attention to eco-friendly products on the market. After the competition, because we discovered that there are materials more environmentally friendly than cartons, I now not only look at the price, but also consider whether the products are eco-friendly."

The competition also influenced students' family behaviors. Luk mentioned, "My family has improved a bit. We now do waste sorting together. We try to avoid ordering too many dishes when eating out." This shows that they brought the knowledge gained from the competition back to their families, striving to influence those around them to take environmental actions.

Looking to the future, most of the students expressed their commitment to sustainable consumption. Chen said, "I hope to keep my promise, continue to practice waste sorting and recycling, and encourage more people around me to do the same." Such aspirations demonstrate their long-term commitment to environmental actions and their desire to influence others through their own actions.

By participating in this environmental competition, students not only enhanced their awareness of environmental issues, but also made positive changes in their consumption behaviors and family lives. Their experiences demonstrate that this competition is able to raise the students' environmental awareness and consequently, their preparedness to take positive action towards sustainable development. It helps foster broader environmental consciousness in society. As Leung said, "I believe my future consumption habits will increasingly focus on environmental protection, such as choosing products made from sustainable materials." This is an important step in driving society toward sustainable development.

5.2 Behavioral Changes

Following their participation in the "Smart Consumption Academy" competition, students experienced great changes in their behaviors about consumption, and finally integrating environmental principles into their daily lives. Through this competition,

they gained insight into environmental protection and took concrete steps to change their consumption habits.

Many students began paying closer attention to the environmental friendliness of the products they purchased. Tsang stated after the competition, "I rarely paid attention to eco-friendly products on the market before, but now, because of this competition, I consider whether the product I buy is environmentally friendly." This change shows that the competition made students realize that consumption choice is not just personal preference. It has implications for environmental sustainability. Additionally, Luk mentioned, "I now actively choose products with minimal packaging or those made from eco-friendly materials to reduce environmental harm." Such examples indicate that students have started to prioritize the environmental attributes of products in their daily shopping.

Students also demonstrated greater environmental awareness in their beverage choices. Sze shared, "I now prefer purchasing drinks in paper packaging rather than plastic bottles, especially after learning about the challenges of recycling cartons." This behavioral change proves that the competition helps students understand the complexity of environmental issues, as well as strengthen their decision to make more responsible choices in their daily lives.

Apart from opting for environmentally friendly products, students tried to minimize the usage of single-use plastics. "Now when I go out, I try not to purchase any drinks that come in single-use plastic water bottles, as I bring my own reusable water bottle." This attitude demonstrates the effort they put into reducing waste. This behavior is a clear indication of sustainable consumption principles which students have internalized.

The learning process during the competition also inspired students to promote environmental principles. Wong expressed, "I hope to influence my friends and let them know that environmental protection is not just a slogan but the accumulation of every small action." This shows that they truly want to make changes in their personal consumption, and hope to influence those people around them, thus creating a broader network of environmental action.

Overall, the changes in students' consumption behaviors after the competition were positive. They began to evaluate their consumption choices against more environmentally friendly standards, wanting to reduce their negative impact on the environment. As Leung put it, "This competition made me realize that every choice can affect the environment. Therefore, I hope to be more environmentally conscious,

whether in shopping or daily life." It supposes that participants integrate the knowledge acquired during this competition into action. With a change in perspective towards consumption, students are able to create a positive shift in attitude towards eco-friendly choices. It helps them form environmentally responsible purchase decisions and that is why students shift to more eco-friendly daily habits.

5.3 Challenges in Practicing Green Consumption

In the process of practicing green consumption, students and their family members faced numerous challenges. Personal habits and awareness led to these challenges. Social, cultural and economic factors are also covered.

Many students found that changing consumption habits requires time and patience. Leung mentioned this point, stating, "It's hard to suddenly change habits." For those accustomed to certain shopping routines, they will feel uncomfortable about the changes. For example, using reusable bags instead of single-use plastic bags became a new habit that required great effort to adopt.

Economic factors are a significant barrier to green consumption. Chen noted, "While working on this project, we found that eco-friendly products are relatively expensive." This reflects a common reality. Many consumers, including students' families, tend to prioritize prices when choosing products. In many cases, the cost of eco-friendly products is higher, making it difficult for some families to afford them and reducing their willingness to choose sustainable options.

Another major challenge is the lack of environmental awareness among family members. Wong shared, "My family thinks it's hard to change their habits and lacks the motivation to do so." Faced with resistance from family members, students often feel powerless. Their efforts to encourage collective action are frequently blocked. In such cases, students often take on the additional responsibility of promoting and educating their families, which can be a burden to them.

Access to information on green consumption is another challenge. Lin points out, "My family doesn't understand environmental protection and really doesn't know where to start." While students receive some environmental education at school, the knowledge level and awareness of their family members may remain very low, leading to a misunderstanding of green consumption. This leaves students feeling difficulties, often spending time to explain such relevant knowledge.

In the process of practicing sustainable consumption, many students face external interference. Sze shared, "Most consumers only look at the price when buying drinks and don't really understand the environmental impact of these products." When friends and peers are not actively engaged, students may feel isolated in their consumption choices, which can affect their determination.

As students, they doubt whether their actions can truly make a difference to the environment. Chu mentioned, "I used to have very little awareness of environmental protection and didn't think my actions could help." This mindset may undermine students' motivation to promote environmental causes. When individuals feel their efforts are insignificant, they often gradually give up on taking action.

The process of practicing green consumption is fraught with challenges. From personal habits to family culture and economic conditions, these factors influence the actions of students and their families in adopting environmentally friendly consumption practices.

5.4 Student Perspectives for Improvement

To better promote sustainable behaviors among participants, students propose a series of suggestions for improving the competition, primarily focused on improving participants' practical opportunities and strengthening community awareness.

Students unanimously agreed that the competition should include evaluation criteria to encourage more concrete actions. Chen stated, "I think the competition could have a scoring guideline, perhaps assessing whether participants would follow up on the issues discussed and make corresponding changes about sustainability." This indicates that students hope the competition goes beyond theory and places greater emphasis on actions and their impact.

Leung suggests that the competition should incorporate long-term follow-up to foster lasting environmental behaviors. He said, "We think the competition could increase opportunities for students to engage in environmental protection, participants are encouraged to record their daily eco-friendly actions. If a group of students can achieve sustainable behavior, they will be rewarded." This suggestion would help students establish environmental habits in their daily lives and create a continuous learning process.

Numerous students expressed the need to schedule post-competition activities aimed at fostering regular inter-participant learning. Lin recommended, "In my opinion, the Consumer Council could set up post-competition activities on a regular basis for the

participants to continue sharing and learning from each other.” This would deepen the bonds among the students and allow for further sharing of concepts, which in turn would enhance the environmental consciousness of the community.

Chen also suggests that competition winners could take on a role in guiding and advocating for environmental behaviors. He said, "If the winners have good suggestions and useful methods, the Consumer Council could promote the competition more widely." This would help ensure that the students' achievements extend beyond the competition, creating a broader social impact.

Certainly, students' improvement suggestions go beyond the competition. They attempt to elevate social awareness on an environmental level. It is their wish to expand these activities into everyday life so that more people will adopt sustainable consumption habits. "I wish all of us could change people's behaviors toward reducing the use of plastics and lowering waste," Chu stated. This demonstrates how students intend to use their civic responsibility actively by trying to change other people's perceptions and actions related to environmental protection.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In analyzing students' understanding of sustainable consumption and behavioral changes after participating in the competition, this study reveals some findings that differ from existing literature while also echoing previous research results in certain aspects.

Firstly, youth education plays a key role in promoting sustainable consumption, as highlighted in both the literature review and our findings. The literature review emphasizes that youth education can significantly enhance students' understanding of environmental issues such as climate change, resource depletion and pollution (Sterling & Schumacher Society, 2001; Ma et al., 2023). Our findings resonate with this, showing that educational programs focusing on these topics can improve environmental knowledge among young people. For instance, students exploring the impact of human activities on the environment through program helps them grasp the importance of sustainable consumption practices.

Secondly, according to this study, students' awareness of environmental issues increased dramatically during the competition. Chen mentioned, "During the competition, we discover that FOOD PANDA company provides a machine to recycle takeaway boxes, which I didn't know before doing the project." This finding is consistent with past research, which shows that participating in environmental activities often enhances people's awareness of environmental issues, thereby promoting behavioral changes (Muhonen, Timonen, & Väänänen, 2024). However, this study particularly emphasizes the reflections gained from exploring specific business practices, which have not been fully explored in previous literature.

Thirdly, the literature review emphasizes that education can encourage students to adopt sustainable consumption behaviors, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and choosing sustainable products (Ma et al., 2023). Our findings support this as the specific statements about behavioral changes from students in this study resonate with existing research. Leung mentioned that he became "more focused on environmental protection, for example, I now recycle old clothes more often." Showing that practical experience within educational programs can motivate students to make sustainable choices in their daily lives. This also aligns with McKenzie-Mohr's (2013) theory of behavior change, which highlights the importance of practical experience for individual environmental behaviors. However, unlike previous studies, this research finds that those students emphasized an increased sense of responsibility towards environmental

protection after participating in the competition and expressed a desire to become advocates, a phenomenon less directly stated in past research.

When exploring the impact on students' daily consumption behaviors, some novel insights are found. The literature typically emphasizes how economic factors, such as price and brand, influence environmental behaviors (Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, & Oskamp, 1997). However, this study found that after experiencing competition and related topics, students placed greater importance on the environmental attributes of products. Tsang said, "I now not only pay attention to the price but also consider whether the products are environmentally friendly." This indicates that environmental friendliness has become a key factor in their purchasing decisions, rather than merely continuing to choose economically cheap options.

Additionally, the literature review and our findings both emphasize the importance of building students' confidence in their ability to make a difference (Taufique & Islam, 2021). When students perceive their actions as meaningful and impactful, they are more likely to embrace environmentally friendly behaviors. Our findings resonate with this as this study finds that students gain a new understanding of their influence on the surrounding environment. Sze stated, "After participating in this competition, I became more aware of Hong Kong's environmental issues and realized that our behavior significantly impacts the environment." Showing that the significance of individual contributions to sustainability can effectively raise awareness and promote green consumption. The specific suggestions and emphasis on community awareness from students indicate their potential to consciously drive community change in environmental behaviors.

Conversely, these results also seem to reveal some contradictions with previous studies. Past research has indicated that consumers' concern for the environment is often constrained by socio-cultural backgrounds, while the behavioral changes of students in this study demonstrate that the impact of the competition can cleverly transcend these limitations even in the short term (Wray-Lake, Flanagan, & Osgood, 2009). Their learning outcomes reflect the effectiveness of educational interventions, a point often overlooked in traditional environmental behavior research.

To conclude, the results of this study reinforce the views in existing literature on how participating in environmental activities can enhance awareness and change behaviors. Moreover, some findings such as reflection on business practices and the possible involvement of students as advocates for the community are also noted which were not deeply explored. These new findings encourage further exploration of how education

and competition can be used as tools to promote sustainable consumption behaviors, thereby launching broader environmental awareness campaigns. Future research should further investigate how these behavioral changes among participants can continuously influence their attitudes and behaviors towards the environment in their daily lives and understand their long-term impact on the community.

Chapter 7: Significance and implications

7.1 Significance of the research

This study primarily explored the impact of participating in environmental activities on individual consumption habits and environmental awareness, reflecting students' understanding and actions regarding environmental issues through their participation in the competition. The findings indicate that participating in environmental programs enhances students' awareness of environmental issues and also helps promote the practice of green consumption. These findings provide significant contributions to existing literature and offer new insights for future research directions.

Firstly, this study confirms the effectiveness of participatory learning in environmental education. Existing literature has pointed out that practical activities can effectively enhance individuals' environmental awareness and behaviors (Hines et al., 1987; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). However, this study further specifies this viewpoint and emphasizes the key role of teamwork and social interaction in promoting individual environmental behaviors. Participants, through discussions and exchanges in different social environments, can more effectively stimulate attention to environmental issues and promote changes in personal and family behaviors. This finding provides evidence for the design of environmental education, suggesting that educators can organize more interactive and participatory activities to improve environmental awareness.

Secondly, this study reveals the relationship between the formation and practice of green consumption concepts. Participants gradually understood the concept of green consumption during the competition and took specific actions, such as reducing the use of plastic bottles and choosing more eco-friendly products. This result is consistent with previous research, showing that acquiring information and knowledge can effectively translate into behavioral changes (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). However, unlike previous studies, this research emphasizes how consensus formed in group discussions can effectively promote the transformation of green consumption concepts. This provides a richer perspective for future research, suggesting that scholars can further explore how social interactions influence environmental consumption behaviors.

Thirdly, this study also points out the role of government and businesses in influencing green consumption behaviors. Participants generally believe that the government and businesses should take greater responsibility in promoting environmental protection, which echoes existing literature on policy interventions and market mechanisms (Daily

& Huang, 2001; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Enhancing policy support and market incentives can effectively promote consumer participation. The study provides important references for future policy making, suggesting that the government should pay more attention to public participation and recognition in the process of implementing environmental policies, creating an atmosphere of collective participation.

Finally, the insights from this study add provide a lot more for future research work, for instance, additional investigation can be done on the phenomenon of participatory activities on changing environmental information and actions in other socio-cultural settings. For instance, how does the region affect the change among students that participate in environmental competitions, which also enriches the understanding of culture. In addition, family's role in environmental actions can be addressed by examining how parents and children influence each other's adoption of environmentally friendly consumption practices through communication and actions. Along with that, the application of modern technologies such as advancing the already existing social media messages focused on the environment on how to further raise public environmental sensitization in a digital context also becomes an important area of concern for future research.

To sum up, the findings of this study add to the body of literature in the domains of environmental education and green consumption while also offering practical advice on fostering sustainable development and environmental initiatives. By broadening the concept of participatory learning and group interactions as factors influencing behavioral environmental actions, future research is able to design methods that effectively enhance public awareness and action on the environment, thus serving policy formulation and social implementation.

7.2 Implications for Policy and Executive Management

The environmental knowledge and consumption behavior impacts learned by participants through the competition can provide valuable insights for policymakers and school administrators to promote sustainable development and enhance students' environmental awareness.

Firstly, the research shows a significant increase in students' understanding and support of environmental behaviors, suggesting that environmental education should be strengthened in educational policies. Educational institutions can integrate environmental education into the curriculum, designing appropriate content for

different grade levels that covers topics such as environmental issues, sustainable development and waste sorting. This helps students understand relevant knowledge from an early age. For example, regular environmental-themed lectures can be organized, inviting professionals to share the latest environmental technologies and information on sustainable materials, thereby enhancing students' practical application skills.

Secondly, the concept of "reducing waste at the source" mentioned in the research can become an important part of school environmental policies. Schools should promote waste sorting and recycling actions, set up sorting recycling bins, and educate students on waste sorting. This can reduce the generation of waste on campus. It also can help students develop good environmental habits through practical actions. Schools can encourage classes or students to participate in waste sorting competitions, increasing their sense of participation and ability to learn independently.

According to the research findings, families also have a significant impact on students' environmental behaviors. Therefore, schools should consider cooperating with families to jointly promote sustainable consumption education. For example, a family environmental ambassador program can be launched, encouraging students to bring the knowledge they have learned back home and involve parents in environmental behaviors, so that the whole family can collectively change consumption habits. Schools can provide resources and guidance to help families implement these changes, increasing overall community environmental awareness.

Moreover, promoting students' practical participation in environmental issues is an important way to enhance their environmental awareness. The research mentions that students who participated in the competition recognized changes in their consumption behaviors, indicating that through practical activities, students can better understand the impact of their behaviors on the environment. Schools can organize similar practical activities or community service projects, leading students to participate in community clean-up activities, environmental restoration plans, etc., thereby enhancing students' sense of mission.

At the policy level, the educational department should consider incorporating environmental education into the school evaluation system, urging schools to achieve certain goals in environmental work. When formulating educational policies, funding should be considered, such as subsidies for purchasing eco-friendly materials and promoting related projects, to reduce the economic burden on schools and families, encouraging more families to choose eco-friendly products. Additionally, the

government should strengthen the promotion of environmental resources, helping students and parents better understand the existence and importance of sustainable products.

Finally, through the analysis of research findings, it is clear that schools are important places for cultivating future environmental awareness. Policymakers should value students' learning experiences, utilize the innovative thinking stimulated by competitions, design practical courses and plans, and combine community forces to jointly promote the spread of environmental awareness. This approach not only enhances students' environmental behaviors but also fosters sustainable consumption habits throughout society, paving the way for the long-term goal of green consumption.

Chapter 8: Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the qualitative nature of the research, involving a small number of participants, may limit the generalizability of the findings. While the in-depth interviews provided rich and detailed insights into the students' perceptions and experiences, the small sample size means that the results may not be representative of the broader population of secondary school students in Hong Kong.

To address this limitation, future research could adopt a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By incorporating a larger sample size and utilizing survey questionnaires alongside interviews, researchers could obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the youth education program. This approach would be enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings and providing deeper insights into the effectiveness of the program in promoting sustainable consumption.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This study, through analyzing participants' experiences and feedback in an environmental competition, reveals the importance and effective strategies for promoting sustainable consumption education in Hong Kong. The research shows that enhancing environmental awareness results in changing consumption behaviors, especially among the younger generation. Participants generally reported significant changes in their consumption habits since participating in the competition, focusing more on eco-friendly products and reducing the use of single-use plastic items such as plastic bottles and cartons. This behavioral change influences their personal consumption choices, also has a positive demonstration effect on their families and communities.

Several key insights can be summarized from the study to further promote sustainable consumption education in Hong Kong. Firstly, educational institutions can stimulate students' environmental awareness by organizing practical activities such as environmental competitions and community service. These practical activities not only improve their understanding of sustainable development but also enhance their ability to apply environmental concepts in daily life. Secondly, the study emphasizes the critical role of families in sustainable consumption education. When family members participate in environmental activities together, the consumption habits and attitudes within the family gradually form a positive cycle, encouraging the whole family to shift towards sustainable consumption.

Moreover, the study points out the responsibilities and roles of the government and businesses in promoting sustainable consumption. Participants mentioned that the government should provide more support, such as subsidies for eco-friendly products, promoting the use of sustainable materials, and increasing consumer choices. This indicates that improving government policies and market environments is fundamental to achieving sustainable consumption. Therefore, policymakers should integrate sustainable development into municipal decisions and public promotions, creating an atmosphere that encourages eco-friendly consumption.

To conclude, the value of this study lies in providing practical foundations and theoretical support to help Hong Kong take significant steps in sustainable consumption education. By getting individuals and families involved, along with the support from community and government, we can create an eco-friendlier consumption environment to contribute to sustainability together.

Bibliography

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Consumer Council. (n.d.). *Secondary school education programme*. Consumer Council. Retrieved April 2, 2025, from <https://www.consumer.org.hk/tc/consumer-education/secondary-school-education-programme>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (Third edition.). SAGE.
- Daily, B.F. and Huang, S. (2001), "Achieving sustainability through attention to human resource factors in environmental management", *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol. 21 No. 12, pp. 1539-1552. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01443570110410892>
- Embracing Sustainable Consumption for a Happy Life A Tracking Study on Consumer Behaviour. (2021, June). In https://www.consumer.org.hk/f/initiative_detail/308815/Embracing_Sustainable_Consumption_for_a_Happy_Life__A_Tracking_Study_on_Consumer_Behaviour.pdf. Consumer Council.
- Ewe, S. Y., & Tjiptono, F. (2023). Green behavior among Gen Z consumers in an emerging market: eco-friendly versus non-eco-friendly products. *Young Consumers*, 24(2), 234–252. <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-06-2022-1533>
- Hines, J. M., Hungerford, H. R., & Tomera, A. N. (1987). Analysis and Synthesis of Research on Responsible Environmental Behavior: A Meta-Analysis. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 18(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.1987.9943482>
- Kollmuss, A., & Agyeman, J. (2002). Mind the Gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior? *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 239–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620220145401>
- Liu, Y., Qu, Y., Lei, Z., & Jia, H. (2017). Understanding the Evolution of Sustainable Consumption Research. *Sustainable Development (Bradford, West Yorkshire, England)*, 25(5), 414–430. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1671>
- Ma, L., Shahbaz, P., Haq, S. ul, & Boz, I. (2023). Exploring the Moderating Role of Environmental Education in Promoting a Clean Environment. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*, 15(10), 8127-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15108127>
- Mainieri, T., Barnett, E. G., Valdero, T. R., Unipan, J. B., & Oskamp, S. (1997). Green Buying: The Influence of Environmental Concern on Consumer Behavior. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 137(2), 189–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224549709595430>
- McKenzie-Mohr, D. (2011). *Fostering sustainable behavior: An introduction to community-based social marketing*. New society publishers.
- Muhonen, T., Timonen, L., & Väänänen, K. (2024). Fostering Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education: A Case Study on Sustainability Competences in

Research, Development and Innovation (RDI). *Sustainability*, 16(24), 11134-.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su162411134>

- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach. The Guilford Press.
- Steer, A. (2014). *Resource Depletion, Climate Change, and Economic Growth*. In M. A. Lyles & M. Easterby-Smith (Eds.), *Towards a Better Global Economy: Policy Implications for Citizens Worldwide in the 21st Century* (pp. 381-426). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198723455.003.0006>
- Sterling, S. R., & Schumacher Society. (2001). *Sustainable education : re-visioning learning and change*. Green Books for the Schumacher Society.
- Taufique, K. M. R., & Islam, S. (2021). Green marketing in emerging Asia: antecedents of green consumer behavior among younger millennials. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 15(4), 541–558. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JABS-03-2020-0094>
- Trudel, R. (2018). Sustainable consumer behavior. *Consumer Psychology Review*, 2(1), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1002/arcp.1045>
- Vermeir, I., & Verbeke, W. (2006). Sustainable food consumption: Exploring the consumer “attitude - Behavioral intention” gap. *Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics*, 19(2), 169–194. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-005-5485-3>
- Witek, L., & Kuźniar, W. (2020). Green Purchase Behavior: The Effectiveness of Sociodemographic Variables for Explaining Green Purchases in Emerging Market. *Sustainability*, 13(1), 209. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010209>
- Wray-Lake, L., Flanagan, C. A., & Osgood, D. W. (2009). Examining Trends in Adolescent Environmental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Across Three Decades. *Environment and Behavior*, 42(1), 61-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916509335163> (Original work published 2010)
- Zepeda, L., & Deal, D. (2009). Organic and local food consumer behaviour: Alphabet Theory. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 33(6), 697–705. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2009.00814.x>
- Ziesemer, F., Hüttel, A., & Balderjahn, I. (2021). Young People as Drivers or Inhibitors of the Sustainability Movement: The Case of Anti-Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 44(3), 427–453. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-021-09489-x>

Appendices

Appendix A:

Background questions

1. A) What is your full name?
B) How old are you?
C) What is your gender?
D) What year are you currently in at school?
E) How many family members do you have?
F) Who are they?
2. How do you see the environmental issues we are facing nowadays?
3. How do you think your behavior would impact environmental issues?
4. Do you know what is green consumption?
5. A) How often do you go shopping?
B) What do you usually buy?
C) What things do you buy because you need them?
D) How much do you spend on these things per month?
E) What things do you buy because you want them?
F) How much do you spend on these things per month?
(Need-based vs desire-based)

Experience of the competition

6. Can you tell me about your experiences participating in *The Smart Consumption Academy* competition? (how often, when, with whom, who organize/teachers, school representative team/individual)?
7. How did you first hear about this competition?

8. A) Why did you participate?

B) What personal values or beliefs drive your interest in green consumption?

Influence

9. In what ways do you think your participation in this competition has influenced your understanding of environmental issues?

10. In what ways do you think your participation in this competition has influenced your understanding of the impact of our consumption behaviors on the environment?

11. In what ways do you think your participation in this competition has influenced your consumption behavior?

12. Can you share any specific examples of how the program has inspired you to practice greener consumption?

13. A) Have you made any changes in your and your family members' spending habits or daily routines after participating in this competition?

B) If so, can you describe them?

14. How did your spending behaviour change after you participated in the competition?

15. Have you influenced your family members' consumption behaviour?

Challenge

16. Do you think it is difficult for you to change your and your family members' spending on your consumption behavior?

17. Why do you think it is difficult for you and family members to spend less?

Envisioning the future

18. How do you envision your consumption habits evolving in the future, considering what you've learned from this program?

19. What role do you see yourself playing in promoting sustainability within your community or peer group?

Improving for Program

20. Are there any aspects of the competition that you believe could be improved to better promote sustainable behaviors among participants?