

## **Factors Explaining the Purchase Intention of Ecological Products among University Students in Peru**

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### **Abstract**

In response to the negative effects affecting the environment, the population must adopt a culture of healthy consumption. Within this context, the study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior, examining attitudinal factors, perceived purchase control, subjective norms, and moral obligation, as well as their influence on the purchase of organic products. The study aimed to determine which factors of this theory explain the purchase intention of organic products among university students in Peru.

To achieve this objective, the research adopted a quantitative approach and administered a questionnaire to 214 university students from the department of Arequipa. The analysis relied on the multivariate technique of partial least squares structural equation modeling, implemented through the SmartPLS software.

The main findings revealed that the proposed model provided strong empirical support for the postulates of the Theory of Planned Behavior. The results indicate that the four analyzed factors exert a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Finally, the study discusses implications for promoting responsible consumption among young people.

**Keywords:** organic products; purchase intention; culture; sustainability

## Introduction

Air pollution and global warming have generated adverse effects on the population, directly affecting human health (Moslehpour et al., 2023). According to a report by the World Health Organization, environmental factors account for approximately 23% of global deaths (Raheerison, 2020). In response, sustainable development has gained prominence, supported by ecological-oriented trends and the expansion of green international marketing practices among firms (Lee, 2008). In this regard, international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank have promoted environmental protection policies grounded in sustainable development principles.

Achieving quality of life and healthy lifestyles requires adequate nutrition (Jiménez et al., 2008). From this perspective, organic or ecological products deserve particular attention due to their health benefits, their distinctive attributes, and their contribution to environmental protection (Maturós & Ewelina, 2014).

Current public policies increasingly focus on the environmental impact derived from ecosystem degradation caused by firms worldwide. Within this context, raising public awareness regarding the acquisition and consumption of ecological products has become essential. Despite this urgency, evidence reveals a substantial gap between attitudes toward ecological products (67%) and actual purchasing behavior (4%) (Costa et al., 2021).

Given this scenario, environmental education plays a critical role in encouraging national and international policies aimed at environmental protection. Educational institutions and the state represent key agents for promoting change under the frameworks of the green economy and social responsibility (Sánchez, 2014). Public authorities should therefore prioritize the dissemination of environmental education among younger generations, fostering reflective attitudes and concern for future sustainability (Chau, 2010).

Research on green purchase intention has linked this construct to variables such as environmental awareness, ecological knowledge, and altruism, which exert significant effects in the Indonesian context (Sanny et al., 2023). When examining the factors that explain green purchase intention, Palomino and Barcellos (2024) identified personal variables—particularly subjective norms—as significant predictors among Peruvian millennials. Similarly, studies conducted in other national contexts, such as Morocco, have shown that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control function as key determinants of organic purchase intention (Che et al., 2023).

Evidence from North America further supports these findings. Becerra et al. (2023) demonstrated that green product values significantly influence green purchase intention among young adults in the United States and Mexico. Complementing this quantitative evidence, qualitative research in Latin America revealed that both intrinsic factors—such as environmental knowledge, environmental awareness, habits, health considerations, and personal values—and extrinsic factors—such as family influence, social influence, and fear of COVID-19 infection—motivate organic product consumption (Ortiz-Regalado et al., 2024).

In the Peruvian context, Millones-Liza et al. (2025) found that moral obligation emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention for Andean grains among university students ( $\beta = 0.295$ ), followed closely by self-identity ( $\beta = 0.293$ ). These findings suggest that ethical responsibility and self-identification with healthy and traditional products play a central role in shaping sustainable food consumption among young consumers.

Additional empirical evidence confirms the relevance of attitudinal mechanisms. Hoyos-Vallejo, Carrión-Bósquez, and Veas-González (2025) reported that environmental attitudes directly determine organic purchase intention among Peruvian millennials, while functional and social consumption values significantly shape such attitudes. By contrast, emotional, conditional, and epistemic values did not exert a significant influence.

Other extensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior highlight the role of indirect mechanisms. Hoyos-Vallejo et al. (2023) showed that skepticism toward organic products does not directly affect purchase intention among university millennials; instead, skepticism shapes intention indirectly through subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. In that study, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control retained direct and significant effects on organic purchase intention.

Finally, a systematic review synthesizing evidence across multiple contexts identified attitudes, perceived health and environmental benefits, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, product trust, price, and availability as the most consistent predictors of organic food purchase

intention, reinforcing the robustness of these determinants across diverse populations (Leyva-Hernández et al., 2023).

Based on this review of prior studies, the present research aimed to analyze the factors of the Theory of Planned Behavior that explain the intention to purchase ecological products among university students in Peru. The subsequent sections describe the methodology under a quantitative approach, following the classification proposed by Hernández and Mendoza (2018), with an explanatory scope.

This study comprises five sections. The first section introduces the relevance of ecological products within national and international contexts. The second section discusses the factors underpinning the Theory of Planned Behavior and purchase intention. The third section outlines the research methodology. The fourth section presents the results, and the fifth section offers the conclusions.

### **Variables Explaining the Theory of Planned Behavior**

According to Ajzen (1991), the Theory of Planned Behavior includes attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In addition, this study incorporated moral obligation, following prior research by Muller et al. (2021), which identified this construct as a determinant of purchase intention. Previous studies have also applied this model to the context of organic food consumption (Ahmed et al., 2021). Consistent with broader empirical evidence, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control emerge as central determinants of organic purchase intention in diverse populations, supporting the theoretical foundations of the current research (Leyva-Hernández et al., 2023).

#### *Attitude*

Attitude refers to the predisposition through which consumers make favorable or unfavorable decisions in response to a given situation (Cooner, 2020). This construct contributes substantially to predicting purchase intention.

Prior research has demonstrated a direct relationship between attitude and organic product consumption among consumers in Adana (Çabuk, 2014). Attitude also explains green technological product adoption when evaluated from a utilitarian perspective (Halinen et al., 2022).

H1: Attitude toward purchasing green products exerts a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.

### *Subjective Norms*

Subjective norms rely on beliefs that shape behavior through social pressure exerted by the surrounding environment (Chen, 2020). These norms influence both purchase intention and pro-environmental purchasing behavior (He, 2019).

H2: Subjective norms exert a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.

### *Perceived Behavioral Control*

Perceived behavioral control reflects the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as capable of performing or refraining from a given behavior, influenced by internal and external factors (Ajzen, 1991). Internal factors include experience and information, while external factors relate to perceived opportunities and constraints.

Empirical evidence has shown that perceived behavioral control significantly predicts intention to purchase ecological products (Paul et al., 2016).

H3: Perceived behavioral control exerts a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.

### *Moral Obligation*

Moral obligation refers to decision-making in ethical contexts that may generate positive or negative consequences. Prior studies have demonstrated that moral obligation directly influences the intention to purchase ecological products and strengthens the theoretical model of planned behavior (Muller et al., 2021). Evidence from developing countries such as Mexico has further confirmed its significant influence alongside ecological awareness and perceived behavioral control (Muller et al., 2021).

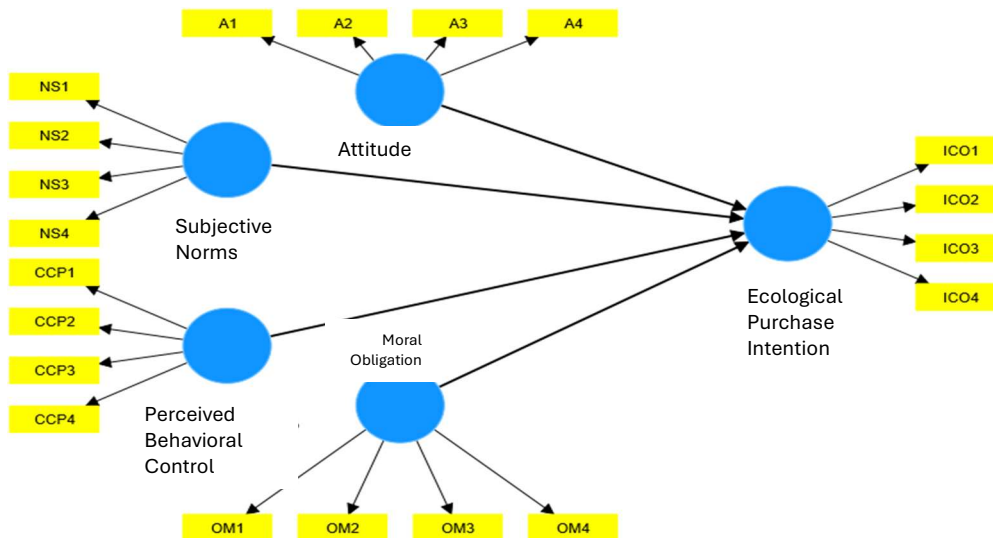
Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Moral obligation exerts a positive effect on ecological purchase intention.

### *Purchase Intention*

Purchase intention represents the likelihood that a consumer will acquire a product or service over time (Cooner, 2020). Previous studies have established that purchase intention influences ecological consumption behavior (Ordoñez et al., 2021). Among the factors exerting a direct influence, attitude and environmental concern stand out, along with a direct effect from subjective norms and perceived purchasing convenience (Bazhan & Shafiei, 2024).

Figure 1.  
Conceptual Hypothetical Model Explaining Ecological Purchase Intention



In PLS-SEM, hypotheses take the form of structural paths linking latent constructs. For the present study, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Attitude exerts a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.
- H2: Subjective norms exert a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.
- H3: Perceived behavioral control exerts a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.
- H4: Moral obligation exerts a positive effect on the intention to purchase ecological products.

## Materials and Methods

This study aligns with the positivist paradigm and adopts a quantitative approach aimed at testing hypotheses derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018).

To validate the proposed hypotheses, the research followed an explanatory design and focused on university students from the province of Arequipa, Peru, during 2023 (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). Participants came from four universities, both public and private, located in the province of Arequipa, all of which took part in the survey related to the research topic.

The sample followed a non-probabilistic convenience strategy and included 214 university students surveyed between November and December 2023. The study incorporated multiple sources of validity to ensure scientific rigor, particularly content validity and construct validity (AERA, 2018). The constructs showed evidence of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, as detailed in Table 2.

The measurement instrument used to assess purchase intention and the factors of the Theory of Planned Behavior followed the scale proposed by Muller et al. (2021).

Data collection took place online through Google Forms, following prior coordination with faculty members from the participating universities in the province of Arequipa. The scale employed a five-point Likert format, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”).

#### *Model Specification*

The relationships among the constructs were estimated using the multivariate technique of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This methodology and statistical technique allows researchers to empirically test theoretical models through the estimation of an external measurement model and an internal structural model (Becker et al., 2023).

In this regard, Hair et al. (2022) explain that the external model represents the measurement model, reporting the relationships between observed indicators and their corresponding latent variables. These authors further note that the internal model, also referred to as the structural model, consists of the relationships or research hypotheses evaluated in the study. Accordingly, assessing the measurement model aims to establish evidence of validity and reliability for the conceptual measures, thereby supporting the inclusion of each latent variable within the structural model.

#### *Evaluation of the Measurement Model (External Model)*

The proposed model comprised five reflective constructs. The reflective measurement model has a long-standing tradition in the social sciences and draws directly on classical test theory. This theoretical perspective suggests that observed measures represent the effects or manifestations of an underlying construct.

To evaluate the measurement model, this study applied the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2022), as outlined below:

**Indicator reliability.** For reflective models, indicators should exhibit high outer loadings. Higher outer loadings indicate a stronger association between an indicator and its corresponding construct. As a general rule, the recommended threshold equals 0.708 or higher (Hair et al., 2022).

Internal consistency reliability. Traditionally, reliability assessment relies on Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). According to Hair et al. (2022), both coefficients range from 0 to 1. Values between 0.60 and 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability in exploratory research, whereas values between 0.70 and 0.90 suggest satisfactory reliability in more advanced research stages.

Convergent validity. Indicators of a reflective construct should converge and share a high proportion of variance. The average variance extracted (AVE) captures this construct communality. Hair et al. (2022) recommend an AVE value of 0.50 or higher, indicating that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators.

Discriminant validity. Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct empirically differs from other constructs within the model, thereby demonstrating its uniqueness. To assess this criterion, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Values below 0.85 provide evidence supporting discriminant validity.

#### *Evaluation of the Structural Model (Internal Model)*

The structural model assessment aims to estimate the coefficients that represent the study's hypotheses. Accordingly, the evaluation followed the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2022), as outlined below:

Collinearity. To assess this assumption, the variance inflation factor (VIF) served as the collinearity measure. VIF values should remain below 5 and preferably below 3.

Magnitude and relevance of structural relationships. Path coefficients range from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , where values closer to  $+1$  indicate strong positive relationships and values closer to  $-1$  indicate strong negative relationships. A coefficient of 0.5 implies that a one–standard deviation increase in the independent construct leads to a 0.5–standard deviation increase in the dependent construct, holding the remaining constructs constant.

In addition, Ibarra (2018) emphasizes that the interpretation of path coefficient importance should rely on theoretical coherence, namely, the consistency of the results with the underlying theory. A strong and statistically significant relationship lacking theoretical justification may signal potential model misspecification. Statistical significance, based on confidence intervals, was assessed using the bootstrapping technique (Streukens y Leroi, 2016); Becker et al. (2023) indicate that, within the social sciences, researchers commonly adopt a 5% significance level as the critical threshold for statistical significance.

Bootstrapping constitutes a nonparametric procedure that evaluates the variability of a parameter by examining the distribution of its estimates through resampling from the available sample data, rather than relying on parametric assumptions to assess parameter precision. To this end, bootstrapping generates a large number of subsamples randomly drawn, with replacement, from the original dataset. Model estimates derived from these subsamples subsequently support standard inferential tests, such as the calculation of confidence intervals or p-values.

### Evaluation of the Model's Explanatory Power.

Becker et al. (2023) argue that a model's explanatory power relates to its ability to fit the available data by quantifying the strength of associations among the model's constructs. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) serves as the most widely used measure for this assessment and ranges from 0 to 1. Higher values indicate stronger explanatory power and, consequently, a greater proportion of variance explained by the set of predictors. Although no universal rule defines acceptable  $R^2$  values, several relative thresholds appear in the literature. Hair et al. (2022) and Ozili (2023) consider an  $R^2$  of at least 0.10 (10%) acceptable, provided that some or most predictor variables achieve statistical significance. SmartPLS software supported all required estimations.

## Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of the university students indicates a predominance of female participants (61%). Most respondents belonged to the young age group (80%). Regarding occupation, 80% reported full-time dedication to their studies. In terms of income, 71% reported monthly earnings below S/ 1,025, while 13% reported income ranging between S/ 1,025 and S/ 1,500.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Students

<b>Demographic Data</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	131	61%
Male	83	39%
<b>Age</b>		
Adolescents (under 18)	24	11%
Young adults (18–29 years)	171	80%
Young adults (over 29)	18	8%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	186	87%
Salaried employee	21	10%
Self-employed	7	3%
<b>Income</b>		
Less than S/ 1,025	151	71%
S/ 1,025–1,500	27	13%
S/ 1,501–2,000	9	4%
S/ 2,000–3,000	10	5%

<b>Demographic Data</b>	<b>Frequency Percentage</b>	
More than S/ 3,000	6	3%
Not reported	11	5%

Note: Authors' own elaboration.

The reflective constructs included in the study provided evidence of internal consistency as well as convergent and discriminant validity. Table 2 shows that the loadings associated with the indicators reflect a satisfactory level of reliability for each construct. In addition, both composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that all reflective constructs achieved adequate internal consistency. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for the five constructs surpassed 0.50, confirming the establishment of convergent validity and indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators.

Table 2. Outer Loadings of the Measurement Model

<b>Indicators A</b>	<b>PBC</b>	<b>PI</b>	<b>SN</b>	<b>MO</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>AVE</b>
A1	0.890				0.927	0.925	0.817
A2	0.907						
A3	0.912						
A4	0.906						
SN1			0.779		0.836	0.824	0.652
SN2			0.835				
SN3			0.800				
SN4			0.815				
PBC1	0.776				0.779	0.767	0.591
PBC2	0.862						
PBC3	0.741						
PBC4	0.685						
PI1		0.780			0.894	0.887	0.749
PI2		0.882					
PI3		0.899					
PI4		0.895					
MO1				0.761	0.788	0.781	0.605
MO2				0.849			
MO3				0.792			
MO4				0.702			

Note: Authors' own elaboration.

According to the findings reported in Table 3, the correlations among the study constructs remain below the 0.85 threshold. Accordingly, the results provide evidence supporting the presence of discriminant validity among the constructs included in the model, indicating that these constructs capture empirically distinct concepts.

Table 3. HTMT Discriminant Validity Evidence

	<b>A</b>	<b>PBC</b>	<b>PI</b>	<b>SN</b>
<b>PBC</b>	0.768			
<b>PI</b>	0.777	0.735		
<b>SN</b>	0.542	0.549	0.575	
<b>MO</b>	0.634	0.644	0.720	0.467

Notes:

A = Attitude; PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control; PI = Purchase Intention; SN = Subjective Norms; MO = Moral Obligation.

Regarding the structural model results, Table 4 shows that all VIF values fall below the threshold of 3, indicating the absence of collinearity among the study constructs. In addition, Table 4 reports the structural model estimates in the path coefficient column, obtained through the bootstrapping technique using 10,000 subsamples to enhance estimation precision and a 5% significance level.

The analysis of the evaluated sample revealed statistically significant evidence supporting all research hypotheses: H1 ( $\beta = 0.320$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), H2 ( $\beta = 0.314$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), H3 ( $\beta = 0.121$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and H4 ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Finally, the explained variance for Purchase Intention reached  $R^2 = 64.3\%$ . According to the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2022) and Ozili (2023), this value exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 10%. Moreover, all established relationships among the variables achieved statistical significance, confirming their contribution to the model's explanatory power.

In summary, the proposed model exhibited robust empirical support and demonstrated adequate performance, with empirical evidence favoring all study hypotheses.

Table 4. Structural Model Results

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>VIF</b>	<b>Path Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Supported</b>
H1: Attitude $\rightarrow$ PI	2.075	0.320	4.796	[0.192 – 0.453]	< 0.001	Yes
H2: Subjective Norms $\rightarrow$ PI	1.372	0.121	2.352	[0.098 – 0.225]	< 0.001	Yes
H3: Perceived Behavioral Control $\rightarrow$ PI	1.889	0.314	5.191	[0.192 – 0.428]	< 0.001	Yes
H4: Moral Obligation $\rightarrow$ PI	1.520	0.230	4.872	[0.139 – 0.324]	< 0.001	Yes

Note: Significance level: \*\*\*0.001; standardized coefficients.

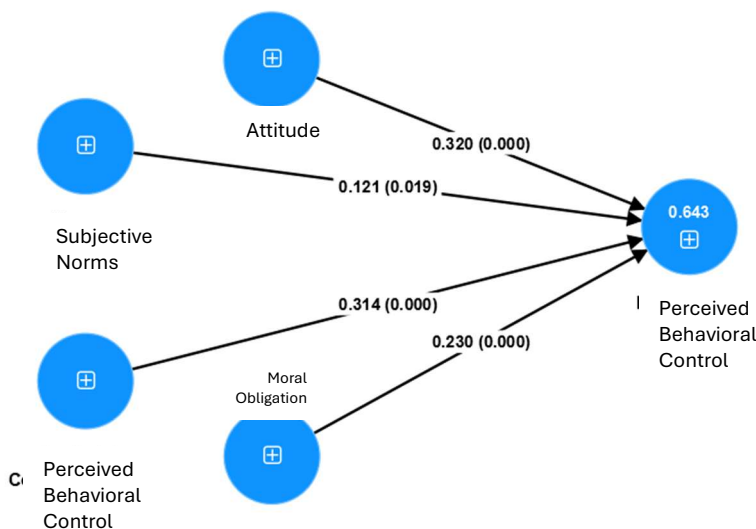
As shown in the table, attitude exhibits the strongest relationship with the intention to purchase ecological products, with a coefficient of 0.32, which reaches statistical significance. Evidence from other countries likewise reports a direct relationship between attitude and organic product consumption (Çabuk, 2014). Similarly, Palomino and Barcellos (2024), in a study focusing on Peruvian millennials, found that attitudes—particularly ecological self-identity—along with subjective norms, exert a significant influence on purchase intention.

By contrast, perceived behavioral control, which reflects internal and external factors shaping purchasing behavior and decision-making, shows a substantial association with purchase intention, with a coefficient of 0.314.

Regarding moral obligation, which captures ethical considerations underlying consumption decisions, the results indicate a positive relationship with purchase intention, reflected in a coefficient of 0.23. This finding aligns with evidence reported in countries such as Mexico, where moral obligation has also demonstrated a significant influence on ecological purchase intention.

Finally, subjective norms display the weakest relationship with purchase intention, with a coefficient of 0.121. This result contrasts with findings reported in Iran, where subjective norms represent the most influential predictor when combined with health awareness and education (Bazahn et al., 2024).

Figure 2. Explanatory Model of the Theory of Planned Behavior for Ecological Purchase Intention



## Conclusions

The findings confirm that the intention to purchase ecological products positively influences ecological purchasing behavior. The explained variance for Purchase Intention reached  $R^2 = 64.3\%$ ; according to the benchmarks proposed by Hair et al. (2022) and Ozili (2023), this value exceeds the minimum threshold of 10%. All relationships specified in the model achieved statistical significance, indicating that the selected variables contribute meaningfully to the model's explanatory power.

Regarding the hypothesis positing a positive effect of attitude toward purchasing green products on purchase intention, the results support this relationship ( $\beta = 0.320$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Prior evidence similarly reports a direct association between attitude and organic product consumption among consumers in Adana (Çabuk, 2014) and identifies attitude as a key explanatory factor for green technological products when assessed from a utilitarian perspective (Halinen et al., 2022). These results underscore the need to promote favorable consumer attitudes to strengthen ecological purchase intention.

The hypothesis proposing a positive effect of subjective norms on purchase intention also received empirical support ( $\beta = 0.314$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Consistent with previous research, subjective or injunctive norms shape purchase intention and pro-environmental purchasing behavior (He, 2019). These findings suggest that initiatives reinforcing social expectations and normative pressures may effectively enhance consumers' ecological purchase intentions.

The hypothesis concerning perceived behavioral control likewise found support ( $\beta = 0.121$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Prior studies indicate that perceived behavioral control significantly predicts ecological purchase intention (Paul et al., 2016). Accordingly, strategies aimed at reducing perceived barriers and enhancing consumers' sense of control over purchasing decisions may further strengthen purchase intention.

Finally, the hypothesis asserting a positive effect of moral obligation on purchase intention also received confirmation ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Evidence from prior research demonstrates that moral obligation directly influences ecological purchase intention and reinforces the theoretical structure of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Muller et al., 2021). Studies conducted in developing countries, such as Mexico, report comparable findings (Muller et al., 2021), highlighting the relevance of ethical considerations in promoting sustainable consumption.

Consistent with the present findings regarding the role of attitudinal factors, recent evidence shows that environmental attitudes directly shape the purchase intentions of Peruvian millennials, and that only specific consumption value dimensions—namely functional and social values—contribute to the formation of such attitudes (Hoyos-Vallejo et al., 2025). In line with our results on the relevance of attitudinal and normative constructs in predicting ecological purchase intention, Hoyos-Vallejo et al. (2023) reported that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control exert significant effects on organic product purchase intention, while skepticism influences intention only indirectly through these constructs.

Moreover, the significant effects of attitude, perceived behavioral control, and moral obligation observed in this study converge with predictors consistently identified in prior research, including perceived health and environmental benefits, social influence, and control beliefs, thereby reinforcing the robustness of these determinants across contexts (Leyva-Hernández et al., 2023).

In conclusion, subjective norms emerge as the most influential element shaping ecological purchase intention. Universities and technical institutes therefore play a critical role in fostering an ecological culture that encourages responsible and healthy consumption among young consumers.

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