THE INFLUENCE OF PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION AND CONSUMER LIFESTYLE ON CHINESE MIDDLE-CLASS INTENTIONS TO PURCHASE THAI WILD COFFEE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED VALUE AND THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Abstract: This study takes product differentiation and consumer lifestyle as independent variables, purchase intention as a dependent variable, perceived value as an intermediary variable, and environmental awareness as a moderating variable. A core conceptual framework is established through demographic variables such as age and education. This study proposes the following hypotheses: product differentiation has a positive and significant impact on the willingness of Chinese middle-class consumers to buy Thai wild coffee; consumer lifestyle has a positive and significant impact on the willingness of Chinese middle-class consumers to buy Thai wild coffee; perceived value mediates the relationship between product differentiation and purchase intention; perceived value mediates the relationship between consumer lifestyle and purchase intention; environmental awareness moderates the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention, that is, when environmental awareness is high, the impact of perceived value on purchase intention is stronger. This paper takes Chinese middle-class consumers as an example, with a total of 420 questionnaires distributed and 405 valid questionnaires returned.

This study found that: 1. Product differentiation has a positive and significant impact on the willingness of Chinese middle-class consumers to buy Thai wild coffee; 2. Consumer lifestyle has a positive and significant impact on the willingness of Chinese middle-class consumers to buy Thai wild coffee; 3. Perceived value partially mediates the relationship between product differentiation and

purchase intention; 4. Perceived value partially mediates the relationship between consumer lifestyle and purchase intention; 5. Environmental awareness moderates the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention, and environmental awareness has a negative rather than a positive impact on the relationship. This study aims to investigate the factors that influence the intention of Chinese middle-class consumers to purchase Thai wild coffee. By exploring the multifaceted influences of these relationships in depth, it provides practical insights for companies, marketers and policymakers in the specialty coffee industry.

Keywords: Product Differentiation, Consumer Lifestyle, Purchase Intention, Perceived Value, Environmental Awareness

Introduction

The global coffee market has witnessed a substantial transformation in recent years, with increasing consumer demand for high-quality, ethically sourced, and environmentally sustainable coffee. Boutique coffee, distinguished by its unique flavors, traceable origins, and artisanal production methods, has garnered a growing following among consumers who prioritize quality and ethical considerations in their purchasing decisions (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among middle-class consumers in emerging markets, such as China, where lifestyle changes and rising disposable incomes contribute to an expanding interest in premium coffee experiences (Hoang, 2023).

This study aims to examine the effects of product differentiation and consumer lifestyle on the purchase intention of Thai wild coffee among middle-class Chinese consumers, with perceived value serving as a mediating factor and environmental awareness as a moderating variable. Specifically, the research investigates how the unique attributes of Thai wild coffee—including rarity, organic certification, and a compelling origin story—influence consumer decision-making. Additionally, it assesses the role of lifestyle congruence, including preferences for health, luxury, and sustainability, in shaping purchase intentions.

The concept of perceived value is central to this study, as it mediates the relationship between consumer preferences and actual purchasing behavior. Prior research has demonstrated that perceived value, encompassing functional, emotional, and symbolic benefits, significantly influences consumer decision-making in the premium product category (Deng, Liu, & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, environmental awareness has emerged as an important determinant of consumer behavior, particularly among younger, socially conscious demographics. This study seeks to determine whether sustainability considerations strengthen or weaken the link between perceived value and purchase intention (Robichaud & Yu, 2022).

China's coffee market has grown exponentially, transitioning from a traditionally tea-

dominated culture to an increasing appreciation of high-quality coffee experiences (Zhang & Zhao, 2022). Middle-class consumers in urban centers such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have exhibited a strong preference for ethically sourced and artisanal coffee products. Thai wild coffee, known for its biodiversity, organic farming methods, and robust flavor profile, presents a promising opportunity in this rapidly growing market. However, limited consumer awareness and intense competition from established boutique coffee brands pose significant challenges to its market penetration.

In Thailand, wild coffee production has gained international recognition due to its sustainable farming practices and unique sensory attributes (Siprajim, 2019). As environmental consciousness rises globally, there is an increasing preference for coffee products that emphasize traceability, eco-friendly processing techniques, and fair-trade principles (Kim, Kim, & Jo, 2023). By exploring the interplay between product differentiation and perceived value, this study seeks to provide empirical insights into how Thai wild coffee can appeal to environmentally aware middle-class Chinese consumers.

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in two key consumer behavior frameworks: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and the Value-based Adoption Model (VAM) (Deng et al., 2022). TPB posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence purchasing intentions, making it a relevant model for understanding the impact of consumer lifestyle and perceived value on purchase decisions. Meanwhile, VAM emphasizes that consumers assess products based on the perceived benefits relative to costs, aligning with this study's focus on perceived value as a mediating variable.

This research holds significance in three key areas: theoretical contribution, practical application, and social impact.

From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the existing body of knowledge on specialty coffee consumer behavior in emerging markets. Prior research has primarily focused on Western consumers, while limited studies have examined boutique coffee consumption among Chinese middle-class consumers. By incorporating TPB and VAM, this study provides a comprehensive analytical framework that examines the influence of product differentiation and lifestyle on perceived value and purchase intention. Moreover, the introduction of environmental awareness as a moderating variable reflects the growing importance of sustainability in consumer decision-making.

Practically, this study provides valuable insights for businesses, particularly Thai wild coffee producers and boutique coffee brands looking to expand into the Chinese market. Understanding the role of product differentiation—such as organic certification, unique origin stories, and rarity—enables coffee brands to craft effective marketing strategies that highlight these unique selling points. The research also aids in consumer segmentation by identifying distinct lifestyle-based purchasing patterns among Chinese middle-class consumers, including health-conscious, luxury-oriented, and environmentally aware groups. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of perceived value

in influencing purchase decisions, thereby guiding pricing and branding strategies.

Beyond commercial applications, the study also has significant social and policy implications. By demonstrating consumer demand for sustainably sourced Thai wild coffee, the findings encourage Thai coffee producers to adopt environmentally friendly farming practices, enhancing their competitiveness in international markets (Yeh, 2024). The study also contributes to consumer education efforts, promoting awareness of ethical coffee sourcing and environmental sustainability. Moreover, policymakers can leverage these insights to formulate regulations and incentives that foster eco-labeling, sustainable sourcing, and fair-trade partnerships between China and Thailand, ultimately supporting a more ethical and transparent global coffee supply chain.

This research contributes to academic theory, business strategy, and sustainable trade policy. Theoretically, it advances consumer behavior models by applying TPB and VAM to China's boutique coffee industry. While prior studies have explored aspects of product differentiation and sustainability in Western markets, this study provides empirical evidence specific to the Chinese specialty coffee sector. By including environmental awareness as a moderating factor, it also contributes to the broader field of sustainable consumer behavior.

From a business perspective, this research offers practical guidance for Thai wild coffee producers and boutique coffee brands. It highlights key product attributes—such as organic certification, biodiversity, and artisanal craftsmanship—that can be leveraged to attract Chinese consumers. The study also underscores the importance of consumer segmentation and perceived value in shaping purchasing behavior.

On a broader scale, the study supports sustainable trade policies by demonstrating the demand for ethically sourced coffee. It encourages Thai coffee farmers to adopt sustainable practices and provides policy recommendations for enhancing transparency in the global coffee supply chain.

Research Objectives

This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence the purchase intention of Thai wild coffee among middle-class Chinese consumers, specifically examining product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, perceived value, and environmental awareness. The objectives of this research provide a structured approach to exploring the key determinants of consumer behavior in the boutique coffee market, particularly in an emerging economy like China. By addressing these objectives, this study aims to contribute to both academic literature and practical marketing strategies.

Objective 1: To explore the effect of product differentiation on the willingness of Chinese middle-class consumers to purchase Thai wild coffee.

The first objective of this study is to examine how product differentiation affects the purchase intention of Thai wild coffee among Chinese middle-class consumers. Product differentiation refers to the strategic process by which businesses distinguish their offerings from competitors through unique

attributes such as quality, branding, and sustainability (Porter, 1985). In the boutique coffee sector, differentiation can take multiple forms, including organic certification, direct-trade sourcing, specialty processing methods, and the rarity of coffee beans. Thai wild coffee, known for its biodiversity, organic farming methods, and distinct flavor profile, is positioned as a premium product that can appeal to discerning coffee consumers.

Given the highly competitive nature of the global coffee industry, understanding whether product differentiation enhances purchase intention is crucial for market expansion strategies. The study seeks to analyze whether attributes such as certified organic status, environmentally friendly production, and ethical sourcing are significant enough to influence consumer preferences. For instance, boutique coffee consumers often look for products that tell a compelling brand story—one that connects them with the origins of the coffee and the artisans behind its production. The branding of Thai wild coffee as an eco-friendly, artisanal product with a rare and exotic appeal could play a crucial role in consumer decision-making.

Moreover, differentiation in taste and sensory experience is a major driver in the specialty coffee market. The study will investigate whether unique flavor attributes, influenced by Thai wild coffee's terroir and traditional processing methods, create a competitive advantage in the eyes of middle-class Chinese consumers. Additionally, as boutique coffee culture expands in China, consumers are increasingly aware of direct trade and ethical sourcing practices, which could further enhance their perception of differentiated coffee products. The findings from this objective will help Thai coffee producers understand which unique product attributes resonate most with Chinese consumers and how to leverage these attributes in marketing strategies.

Objective 2: To explore the influence of consumer lifestyle on the willingness of middle-class Chinese consumers to purchase Thai wild coffee.

The second objective of this research is to explore the influence of consumer lifestyle on the purchase intention of Thai wild coffee. Lifestyle is a critical factor in shaping consumer choices, particularly for premium products, as it reflects individual values, interests, and purchasing habits (Huang, Dang, & Li, 2022). The boutique coffee sector is particularly sensitive to lifestyle differences, with certain consumer segments prioritizing health consciousness, luxury experiences, and environmental sustainability when making purchasing decisions.

The study aims to examine how different lifestyle groups respond to Thai wild coffee based on their values and preferences. For example, health-conscious consumers may be drawn to the coffee's organic certification, lack of chemical additives, and perceived health benefits, while luxury-oriented consumers might be attracted to its exclusivity, premium pricing, and artisanal craftsmanship. Meanwhile, sustainability-focused consumers may be more likely to favor Thai wild coffee if it is marketed as ethically sourced, environmentally responsible, and aligned with fair-trade principles.

Moreover, lifestyle congruence plays a critical role in determining brand loyalty and long-term

engagement. Consumers tend to gravitate toward products that align with their self-image and lifestyle aspirations. As boutique coffee culture grows in urban China, it is essential to understand whether middle-class consumers view Thai wild coffee as a prestigious, socially responsible, or health-enhancing product. Additionally, the influence of social trends, such as Instagrammable coffee culture and the rising café experience movement, may further impact purchasing behavior. The insights gathered from this objective will enable marketers and coffee producers to create targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with distinct consumer segments.

Objective 3: To assess the mediating role of perceived value between product differentiation, consumer lifestyle and purchase intention.

The third objective of this research is to analyze the mediating role of perceived value in the relationship between product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, and purchase intention. Perceived value is a key psychological factor in consumer decision-making, as it represents the trade-off between the benefits and costs of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). This study examines whether Thai wild coffee's unique characteristics enhance its perceived value, thereby influencing purchase intention.

Perceived value is composed of functional, emotional, and symbolic dimensions. Functional value refers to the practical benefits of a product, such as quality, taste, and health attributes. Thai wild coffee's high-quality beans, organic production, and unique taste profile could contribute to its functional value, making it more appealing to consumers. Emotional value, on the other hand, involves the feelings and psychological benefits associated with consuming a product. Boutique coffee brands often cultivate strong emotional connections through branding, storytelling, and exclusive experiences, which may enhance the perceived value of Thai wild coffee. Lastly, symbolic value relates to the social status and identity associated with a product. If Thai wild coffee is positioned as a luxury or ethically superior brand, it could attract status-conscious consumers who view their purchasing choices as an extension of their identity.

By assessing the mediating role of perceived value, this study seeks to determine how Thai wild coffee's attributes influence consumer willingness to pay premium prices. Understanding this relationship is crucial for coffee producers, as it provides insights into how branding, pricing, and marketing efforts should be structured to maximize perceived value and increase consumer demand.

Objective 4: To assess the moderating role of environmental awareness in the relationship between perceived value and willingness to buy.

The fourth objective of this study is to assess whether environmental awareness moderates the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. With growing concerns about climate change, deforestation, and sustainable agriculture, modern consumers are placing increasing importance on environmental responsibility in their purchasing decisions (Peattie, 2010). This study explores whether environmentally conscious consumers are more likely to purchase Thai wild coffee due to its sustainability credentials.

Many boutique coffee consumers now expect brands to demonstrate a commitment to ethical sourcing, carbon neutrality, and biodiversity conservation. If Thai wild coffee is marketed as an eco-friendly product that supports sustainable farming practices, it may attract environmentally conscious consumers who prioritize sustainability over price. This objective investigates whether consumers with high environmental awareness perceive greater value in eco-certified coffee products and whether they are willing to pay premium prices for sustainable options.

Moreover, this study seeks to understand whether green certifications, fair-trade labels, and eco-friendly branding enhance consumer trust and influence purchase intention. As Chinese consumers become increasingly aware of ethical and environmental concerns in the global coffee industry, their attitudes towards sustainability may significantly impact purchasing behavior. If environmental awareness is found to be a significant moderator, it will provide valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders on the importance of promoting sustainability in the coffee supply chain.

The four research objectives outlined in this study provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the purchasing behavior of middle-class Chinese consumers in relation to Thai wild coffee. The study explores how product differentiation and consumer lifestyle influence purchase intention, examines the role of perceived value as a mediator, and assesses whether environmental awareness strengthens or weakens this relationship. By addressing these objectives, this research aims to offer valuable insights for boutique coffee brands, Thai coffee producers, and policymakers, helping them develop effective marketing strategies, sustainable business practices, and eco-friendly trade policies.

The findings from this study will contribute to the academic understanding of specialty coffee consumer behavior while offering practical recommendations for businesses looking to expand into the premium Chinese coffee market. By investigating the interplay between product attributes, consumer preferences, and sustainability concerns, this research highlights the growing demand for high-quality, ethical, and environmentally responsible coffee options in one of the world's fastest-growing coffee markets.

Literature Review

The literature review provides an in-depth analysis of existing research on boutique coffee consumption, with a focus on product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, perceived value, purchase intention, and environmental awareness. This review establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding how these factors influence consumer behavior and identifies research gaps, particularly in relation to the potential of Thai wild coffee in the Chinese boutique coffee market.

The global coffee industry has undergone a significant transformation, with an increasing consumer preference for high-quality, ethically sourced, and sustainable coffee products. The rise of third-wave coffee culture, which prioritizes artisanal brewing techniques, direct trade, and specialty coffee beans, has influenced consumer expectations, especially in urban and developed markets (Sabio

& Spers, 2020). In China, coffee consumption is growing exponentially, shifting from a traditionally tea-drinking culture to a premium coffee experience. This shift is driven by urbanization, increased disposable income, exposure to Western coffee culture, and evolving lifestyle preferences (Jang, Kim, & Lee, 2015). Middle-class Chinese consumers are becoming more health-conscious, status-driven, and environmentally aware, leading to a growing demand for specialty coffee brands that emphasize organic certification, sustainability, and traceability (Liu, Chen, & Chen, 2019).

Product differentiation is an important strategy for enterprises to differentiate their products from other homogeneous products, gain consumer preference, and thus enhance their competitiveness (Zhang Zhandong, 2002). In the 1930s, scholars conducted research on product differentiation based on studies of cutthroat competition. Based on a literature review of product differentiation, we found that the definitions of the main content and purpose of the concept of product differentiation by different scholars at home and abroad have basically converged (Jiang Chuanhai et al., 2006; Zhang Jingzhong, 2007; Sheng Wenjun et al., 2011; Andaluz et al., 2015; Guo Fuhong et al., 2016; Hoefele, 2016). Enterprises develop differentiated products with the aim of occupying a broader market and obtaining more economic benefits. Based on this, and taking into account the views of various scholars, this article believes that product differentiation is a way for companies in the same industry or industry to differentiate their products from homogeneous products on the market by improving product quality and performance in order to gain consumer preference, increase market share, and gain a competitive advantage. Product differentiation strategy refers to the fact that the company's products and services are different from those of other competitors within the industry in terms of function, appearance, quality, selling price, etc., and that the product can meet the needs of potential consumers in the market. The implementation of a product differentiation strategy can help a company enhance its core competitiveness and is conducive to promoting the realization of the company's ultimate goals.

At present, foreign scholars have conducted a lot of research on product differentiation, and it has become a mature research system. The earliest research on product differentiation in foreign countries originated in the 1930s, when scholars discussed issues related to monopolistic competition. In the 1970s, the development of the Baumol theory promoted academic research on product differentiation, and the issue of product differentiation strategies became a hot topic of academic discussion. Michael Porter, the leader of this research, believes that implementing a product differentiation strategy can help a company gain a competitive advantage over its competitors, differentiate itself from its competitors in the same industry, and obtain a product premium when the cost of achieving differentiation is less than the revenue generated by differentiation, thus promoting the long-term development of the company. Scholars in China have continuously enriched and developed their research on product differentiation, but the research started relatively late. Research on product differentiation for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) only appeared in 1995, and the earliest origin of this research can be traced back to the book "Development and Innovation of Small

and Medium-sized Enterprises" edited by Lin Hanchuan and Wei Zhongqi. Yu Guoxin explored the problems and obstacles faced by SMEs in Zhejiang Province in implementing product differentiation through empirical research methods, and provided relevant opinions and suggestions. Chen Xiaohong (2012) believes that market positioning is the key to the survival and development of an enterprise. Enterprises should reasonably position their market position based on their own core resources and core competitiveness, especially in developing differentiated products, and attract and match suitable consumer groups based on the characteristics of their products to expand the market and promote the sustainable development of the enterprise.

Product differentiation plays a crucial role in the boutique coffee market, enabling brands to develop a unique competitive advantage through distinctive attributes such as origin, sustainability, exclusivity, and branding (Hassan & Craft, 2020). Research identifies several key differentiation strategies in the boutique coffee industry. Geographical indications (GI) have become a critical factor in consumer perceptions of quality and authenticity. Consumers tend to associate certain coffee-growing regions with superior quality, as seen in the success of Ethiopian and Colombian coffee brands, which have leveraged GI certification to strengthen their market position (Gomes et al., 2019). Direct trade and ethical sourcing also serve as key differentiators, as consumers increasingly seek transparent supply chains and fair compensation for farmers (Pilbeam, Alvarez, & Wilson, 2021). Research further highlights the importance of organic and fair-trade certification, as studies suggest that certified organic coffee is perceived as healthier, more natural, and environmentally friendly, while fair trade labels appeal to consumers who prioritize ethical sourcing (Bailey et al., 2020). Brand storytelling also plays a crucial role in differentiating boutique coffee brands, as companies that effectively communicate their origins, artisanal craftsmanship, and sustainability efforts tend to develop stronger emotional connections with consumers (Harwood & Garry, 2020). Lastly, sustainable packaging and eco-friendly branding have gained significance as environmentally conscious consumers seek brands that align with their sustainability values (Schifferstein et al., 2021).

Academic circles have also actively and extensively explored the definition of the concept of lifestyle. Wang Yalin and others focus on the answer to the question of "how people live" and emphasize the subjective and objective unity of lifestyle. They point out that lifestyle is a stable form and behavioral characteristic of all life activities that are guided by certain values and meet the needs of self-survival and development of individuals, groups or all members of society under the constraints of certain social objective conditions. Wang Weiguang emphasized that the subject of life is the subject in a certain social relationship, and from the perspective of the way the subject of life uses material and spiritual resources, he pointed out that "lifestyle is the sum of human life activities that have been historically formed under certain social and historical conditions. It shows under what conditions people form what kinds of relationships and in what forms they use the means of life. It reflects the content, characteristics and forms of people's social life activities." Fan Guohua, after analyzing the inadequacy

of the two views that attribute lifestyle solely to consumption patterns and equate production methods with lifestyle, and starting from the basic forms of human activity, "material" and "spiritual," points out that the so-called lifestyle is the overall characteristics of people's daily material and spiritual lives that are linked to a certain mode of production and other social and natural conditions. It mainly refers to the behavioral patterns of people's daily lives. Wu Zengji believes that the concept of lifestyle should be understood from the perspective of how people actually live, that is, from the perspective of the life activities of the subject. He points out that lifestyle is "the sum of all the characteristics of the life activities of all classes, ethnic groups, social groups, and individuals." Scholars' interpretation of the concept of lifestyle is of great reference significance for the definition of lifestyle in this thesis.

Consumer lifestyle is a key determinant of boutique coffee consumption. The emergence of third-wave coffee culture has reshaped the way consumers engage with coffee, with greater demand for single-origin, artisanal, and ethically sourced coffee (Ponte, Gibbon, & Vestergaard, 2019). Lifestyle segmentation has become a useful approach for understanding consumer preferences in specialty coffee markets. Research highlights several lifestyle-driven motivations, including health-conscious consumption, luxury-seeking behavior, and environmental sustainability (Bailey et al., 2020). Health-conscious consumers are more inclined toward organic, pesticide-free, and low-acid coffee, whereas luxury-oriented consumers associate boutique coffee brands with prestige and exclusivity (Fang et al., 2022). In China, boutique coffee has become a status symbol, with affluent consumers favoring limited-edition, rare, and high-end coffee varieties. Moreover, digital engagement and e-commerce platforms have reshaped coffee marketing strategies, with brands utilizing social media, influencer marketing, and direct-to-consumer models to enhance brand engagement and purchase intention (Hicks, 2022). Given China's growing e-commerce ecosystem, boutique coffee brands must prioritize online engagement to reach their target audience effectively.

The concept of purchase intention can be traced back to 1975, when it was first proposed by Fishbein. It describes the potential likelihood of a consumer purchasing a particular product or service. Further research and development has led to a richer understanding of purchase intention among international scholars. Zeithaml (1988) defines purchase intention as the degree of likelihood that a consumer will perform a purchasing behavior. Dodds (1991) also believes that purchase intention is the magnitude of a customer's probability of buying [58]. Domestic scholars have also defined purchase intention in a similar way. Han Rui and Tian Zhilong (2005) believe that purchase intention involves consumers' assessment of the likelihood or subjective probability of purchasing a product. Li Lele (2010) regards purchase intention as a measure of consumers' likelihood of purchasing a particular good or service, reflecting their subjective preferences and serving as an important indicator for predicting consumer behavior. Xia Xiaoyan (2015) elaborated on the willingness of rural residents to purchase tourism in her research, arguing that it refers to the likelihood of rural residents purchasing tourism products or services, that is, their willingness to travel to a specific location. Zhang Qiang (2021)

believes that rural tourism products cover all tangible and intangible goods and services consumed by tourists in rural destinations, which include not only specific items but also various services provided in rural tourism experiences, as well as the actual and emotional experiences of tourists.

Purchase intention is strongly influenced by product attributes, brand trust, and marketing strategies. Studies highlight that boutique coffee consumers are highly influenced by sustainability, ethical sourcing, and high-quality differentiation (Kim, Kim, & Jo, 2023). Brand trust and transparency are particularly crucial, as consumers exhibit stronger purchase intentions toward brands that provide traceability, direct trade relationships, and fair trade commitments (Harwood & Garry, 2020). Marketing strategies also play a significant role in shaping consumer decisions, with brands leveraging storytelling, influencer collaborations, and experiential marketing to drive consumer engagement (Zhang & Balabanis, 2020). Given the increasing reliance on digital platforms, boutique coffee brands must focus on social media engagement, personalized digital experiences, and content marketing to enhance consumer trust and loyalty.

In the 1980s, foreign scholars proposed the concept of customer perceived value, believing that an effective way for companies to enhance their competitiveness is to provide customers with a good perceived value experience. Zeithaml (1988) defines customer perceived value as the trade-off between the cost and actual perceived benefits of a product or service to the buyer. It is an overall evaluation of the product or service, and the higher the perceived value for this purchase behavior, the more obvious the difference between the degree of benefit and consumption. Woodruff (1997) defines customer perceived value as the help or hindrance to the effectiveness of using a product, and also as an overall evaluation of the product's functions and effects. On this basis, Chinese scholars have begun to conduct relevant research on customer perceived value. Dong Dahai et al. (1999) define customer perceived value as the overall evaluation of the benefits gained and the costs paid by customers during the purchase and use of a product or service. Meng Qingliang et al. (2005) believe that the perceived value of a product or service by a customer is an evaluation made by the customer after comparing the total benefits gained with the total costs paid. A review of the research on the impact of consumer perceived value shows that it focuses mainly on the two perspectives of "purchase intention" and "consumer loyalty". First, regarding research on "purchase intention", most scholars agree that consumer perceived value affects purchase intention.

Perceived value plays a mediating role in the relationship between product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, and purchase intention. Perceived value refers to an individual's evaluation of a product's benefits relative to its cost (Zeithaml, 1988). It consists of functional, emotional, and symbolic dimensions. Functional value pertains to quality, reliability, and price fairness, which are important factors for specialty coffee consumers who prioritize sensory attributes such as aroma, flavor complexity, and aftertaste (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). Emotional value arises from the psychological attachment and sensory experience associated with a product or brand, as brands that successfully evoke

emotions through storytelling and authenticity tend to enhance consumer loyalty (Robichaud & Yu, 2022). Symbolic value, on the other hand, represents status, exclusivity, and identity, making boutique coffee an aspirational product among status-conscious consumers (Lombardi, Rana, & Scrucca, 2020). Research consistently demonstrates that higher perceived value leads to stronger purchase intentions, making it a crucial factor in boutique coffee marketing.

The concept of environmental awareness emerged in the 1960s. It is a comprehensive concept that reflects the many new issues that have arisen in the relationship between humans and the environment. It has five levels: knowledge, attitude, perception, evaluation and behavior. Today, the concept of environmental awareness has gradually been widely accepted by the entire international community. It not only requires regulating individual lifestyles, but also the daily lives and economic activities of the community and even the entire society. Xu Gaoling (1997) proposed that environmental awareness is a kind of psychological awareness of people's attitude towards environmental issues. It is the sum of perceptual, theoretical, ideological, ethical, moral, emotional and other conceptual forms and conscious elements of the relationship between production, life and other activities and nature. Liu Jianguo (2007) believes that environmental awareness refers to the sum of people's understanding of the environment itself, the interrelationship between humans and the environment, and environmental protection. It mainly includes two levels: the rational understanding of the environment, such as ideas, opinions, and theories, and the perceptual understanding of the environment, such as psychology, emotions, and attitudes. As can be seen from the above definitions, environmental awareness is a reflection of individual values and beliefs, and it can affect an individual's judgment of norms. The general public in China has always attached great importance to environmental awareness, and scholars have also conducted a lot of research on this. Yan Guodong (2010) found through a survey of the level of environmental awareness among the Chinese public that the overall level of environmental awareness among the Chinese public is on the rise and will reach a relatively high and stable level in 2019.

Environmental awareness has emerged as a key moderator in the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention, particularly among sustainability-driven consumers (Peattie, 2010). Research suggests that green certification, carbon-neutral production, and sustainable packaging significantly influence consumer decision-making (Schifferstein et al., 2021). Eco-labeling and third-party certification provide external validation of a product's sustainability claims, helping consumers differentiate between genuinely eco-friendly brands and those engaged in greenwashing (Jang, Kim, & Lee, 2015). Additionally, consumers increasingly demand brands to adopt ethical sourcing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, ensuring fair wages for farmers and biodiversity conservation (Wilson & Moraes, 2021). Given the growing environmental consciousness among consumers, boutique coffee brands must integrate sustainability into their marketing and branding strategies.

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the growing demand for high-quality, sustainably

sourced boutique coffee, particularly among middle-class Chinese consumers who prioritize product differentiation, high quality, and ethical production. Given the competitive nature of the boutique coffee market, Thai wild coffee brands must strategically position themselves by emphasizing sustainability, exclusivity, and premium sensory experiences. By aligning with consumer expectations for quality, authenticity, and environmental responsibility, Thai wild coffee has the potential to establish a strong presence in the Chinese boutique coffee industry.

Methodology

This study is a quantitative explanatory research that aims to understand the causal relationships between product differentiation, consumer lifestyles, perceived value, purchase intention, and environmental awareness. The research adopts an inductive approach, starting with hypotheses derived from existing theories such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the value-based adoption model (Deng et al., 2022). Quantitative methods are used to systematically collect and analyze data, so that the relationships between variables can be rigorously tested.

The study uses a structured design to ensure the reliability and generalizability of the research results, which is crucial for understanding consumer behavior in the specialty coffee segment. Surveys are a common tool in consumer behavior research and were used to collect data from middle-class Chinese consumers in urban areas where specialty coffee consumption is on the rise. This approach was particularly effective in capturing product differentiation, lifestyle congruence and sustainability considerations, which are at the heart of the research objectives.

The study focuses on urban areas in China, particularly major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. These cities are centers of coffee consumption and are characterized by a growing middle class population with an increasing preference for high-quality and sustainable products. The target population includes Chinese middle-class consumers aged 25-45, a group with increasing purchasing power and a greater preference for products that align with their lifestyle and sustainability values. This group is also more inclined to purchase specialty products such as Thai wild coffee.

A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure that the sample is representative of different age groups, income levels and coffee consumption habits. A minimum sample size of 400 respondents will be used, calculated using the Cochran formula to ensure sufficient statistical power for the analysis.

The target population of this study is middle-class Chinese consumers, so the sample size is unknown and the population proportion is unknown.

$$n=\frac{Z^2}{4e^2}$$

$$n=\frac{(1.96)^2}{4\ (0.05)^2}=384.16$$

Therefore, the minimum acceptable sample size is 384.

Based on stratified sampling techniques, this study finally determined to distribute 420 questionnaires.

The study used a structured questionnaire to measure the relationship between product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, perceived value, environmental awareness and purchase intention. The questionnaire is divided into five parts, each part involves a key variable, and a five-point Likert scale is used (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

1. Product differentiation: The questions aim to measure perceptions of the unique attributes of Thai wild coffee, including rarity, origin, organic certification, and flavor characteristics. The product differentiation scale was developed with reference to the Discua Cruz and Centeno Caffarena (2020) scale.

2. Consumer lifestyle: This section aims to understand the consistency with lifestyle values (such as health, luxury and sustainability). The consumer lifestyle scale is mainly based on the scale used in the Riandi (2024) study.

3. Perceived value: The questions assess the functional, emotional and symbolic aspects of perceived value. The perceived value scale used in this study is mainly based on the perceived value scales developed by Corso and Benassi (2019) and others, and has been revised accordingly.

4. Environmental awareness: measures the importance attached to sustainability in purchasing decisions. The environmental awareness scale used in this study is mainly based on the environmental awareness scale developed by Opoku et al. (2024) and revised accordingly.

5. Purchase intention: the question assesses the likelihood of purchasing Thai wild coffee. The purchase intention scale used in this study is mainly based on the scale used in Nazmabadi and Motameni's (2024) study and revised accordingly.

Before collecting data, a small-scale test with 50 participants was conducted to refine the questionnaire and improve reliability.

To increase the accuracy of the research results and the generalizability of the conclusions, this study surveyed Chinese middle-class consumers aged 25-45 living in urban areas such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed and 405 valid questionnaires were returned.

This study used a variety of statistical analysis methods to systematically explore the relationship between product differentiation, consumer lifestyles, perceived value, environmental awareness and purchase intention. Descriptive analysis, analysis of variance, correlation analysis, regression analysis and moderation analysis were mainly used to ensure the scientific and rigorous nature of the research results.

First, descriptive statistics were used to describe the respondents based on demographic variables such as age, income and coffee consumption habits. The main variables such as product

differentiation, consumer lifestyle, perceived value, environmental awareness and purchase intention were aggregated using indicators such as mean, standard deviation and response frequency.

Analysis of variance, also known as "analysis of variance" or the F test, was proposed by statistician R.A. Fisher and is mainly used to test whether there is a significant difference in the means of two or more samples. Since research data fluctuate due to a variety of factors, these fluctuations can be attributed to uncontrollable random factors and controllable experimental factors. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) assesses the contribution of different sources of variation to total variation, identifies which controllable variables have a significant impact on the dependent variable, and thus provides a basis for subsequent analysis.

Second, correlation analysis is used to explore whether there is a statistically significant dependence between variables and to measure the direction and strength of this relationship. In this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to calculate the correlation between different variables, thus providing preliminary evidence for whether the hypothesized relationship holds.

Regression analysis is used to determine the quantitative dependence between two or more variables, and can be further divided into univariate linear regression and multivariate regression analysis. If the model only includes one independent variable and it is linearly related to the dependent variable, it is called univariate linear regression; if it includes two or more independent variables, it is called multiple linear regression. In this study, a multiple regression model was constructed to explore the direct impact of product differentiation and consumer lifestyles on purchase intention. The output indicators of regression analysis include the beta coefficient (β), significance level (p-value), and the coefficient of determination (R^2), which are used to measure the strength of the influence between variables, statistical significance, and the explanatory power of the model, respectively.

In addition, a mediation analysis was used to examine the influence of environmental awareness on the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. Specifically, the analysis assessed whether environmental awareness enhanced or weakened the influence of perceived value on purchase intention, i.e., the mediating effect of environmental awareness was tested.

The data analysis methods chosen for this study allow for a systematic and detailed exploration of the relationships between product differentiation, consumer lifestyles, perceived value, environmental awareness and purchase intention. By integrating descriptive statistics, regression analysis, mediation analysis and moderation analysis, we can gain a nuanced understanding of the direct and indirect effects within the conceptual framework.

Results

This study surveyed 405 respondents, examining their age, education level, annual income, coffee consumption habits, and purchasing behavior regarding Thai wild coffee.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.763[a]	.582	.581	7.14791

a. Predictors: (Constant), Product differentiation

Table 2: ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28664.903	1	28664.903	561.039	.000[b]
	Residual	20590.297	403	51.093		
	Total	49255.200	404			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Product differentiation

Table 3: Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.858	1.854		2.621	.009
	Product Differentiation	.775	.033	.763	23.686	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

1. Age Distribution

Among the respondents, individuals aged 25–30 years comprised 9.4% (n = 38) of the total sample, while those aged 31–35 years constituted the largest age group at 39.8% (n = 161), bringing the cumulative percentage to 49.1%. Respondents aged 36–40 years accounted for 33.1% (n = 134), increasing the cumulative percentage to 82.2%, whereas those aged 41–45 years represented 17.8% (n = 72), reaching a cumulative percentage of 100.0%.

2. Educational Background

The educational qualifications of respondents indicate that 37.5% (n = 152) held an associate degree, while 37.0% (n = 150) had attained a bachelor's degree, cumulatively representing 74.6% of the sample. Furthermore, 16.8% (n = 68) possessed a master's degree, bringing the cumulative percentage to 91.4%, while 8.6% (n = 35) held a doctoral degree or higher, completing the educational distribution.

3. Annual Income Levels

In terms of income distribution, 25.2% (n = 102) of respondents reported an annual income of ¥100,000–¥200,000, while 31.1% (n = 126) earned between ¥210,000–¥300,000, cumulatively

representing 56.3% of the sample. Additionally, 29.6% (n = 120) reported an income range of ¥310,000–¥400,000, increasing the cumulative percentage to 85.9%, while 14.1% (n = 57) had an annual income exceeding ¥400,000.

4. Coffee Consumption Behavior

Regarding coffee consumption frequency, 2.7% (n = 11) of respondents never drank coffee, whereas 15.6% (n = 63) consumed coffee occasionally, raising the cumulative percentage to 18.3%. The largest proportion of respondents, 51.1% (n = 207), frequently drank coffee, bringing the cumulative percentage to 69.4%, while 30.6% (n = 124) reported a habitual coffee consumption pattern.

5. Purchasing Behavior of Thai Wild Coffee

In terms of Thai wild coffee purchases, 46.9% (n = 190) of respondents had previously purchased Thai wild coffee, whereas 53.1% (n = 215) had never purchased it.

This demographic and behavioral analysis provides valuable insights into the age, education, income, and coffee consumption patterns of respondents, offering a foundational understanding of the factors influencing consumer engagement with Thai wild coffee.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.798[a]	.637	.636	6.65920

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer Lifestyle

Table 5: ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31384.209	1	31384.209	707.730	.000[b]
	Residual	17870.991	403	44.345		
	Total	49255.200	404			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer Lifestyle

Table 6: Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.896	1.652		2.963	.003
	Consumer Lifestyle	.853	.032	.798	26.603	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

The regression analysis demonstrates a strong and statistically significant relationship between product differentiation and purchase intention. The model exhibits a high explanatory power, with an R value of 0.763 and an R² value of 0.582, indicating that 58.2% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by product differentiation. The adjusted R² value of 0.581 confirms the model's robustness, while the standard error of the estimate (7.14791) reflects the average prediction error. ANOVA results (F = 561.039, Sig. = 0.000) further validate the model's significance, with product differentiation explaining a substantial portion of the variance in purchase intention. Regression coefficients reveal that product differentiation has a strong positive impact (B = 0.775, Beta = 0.763, t = 23.686, Sig. = 0.000), suggesting that a one-unit increase in product differentiation leads to a 0.775-unit increase in purchase intention. The constant term (B = 4.858, t = 2.621, Sig. = 0.009) indicates baseline purchase intention even in the absence of product differentiation. Overall, the findings highlight product differentiation as a critical factor influencing consumer purchase decisions, with implications for strategies aimed at enhancing product distinctiveness to drive consumer interest.

Table 7: Intermediary Analysis

Variable	Perceived Value (Mediator)	Purchase Intention (Outcome)	Total Effect
Model	Mediation Model	Outcome Model	Total Effect Model
R	0.6009	0.8453	0.7629
R-sq	0.3611	0.7146	0.582
MSE	78.2177	34.9687	51.0925
F	227.7224	503.2757	561.0388
p-value	0	0	0
Product Differentiation Coeff	0.611	0.497	0.7751
Product Differentiation p-Value	0	0	0
Perceived Value Coeff		0.4552	
Perceived Value p-value		0	
Total Effect			0.7751
Direct Effect			0.497
Indirect Effect		0.2782	

The regression analysis highlights a strong and statistically significant relationship between consumer lifestyle and purchase intention. The model demonstrates high explanatory power, with an R value of 0.798 and an R² value of 0.637, indicating that 63.7% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by consumer lifestyle. The adjusted R² value of 0.636 confirms the model's robustness, while the standard error of the estimate (6.65920) reflects a moderate level of prediction error. ANOVA results (F = 707.730, Sig. = 0.000) further validate the model's significance, with consumer lifestyle explaining a substantial portion of the variance in purchase intention. Regression coefficients reveal that consumer lifestyle has a strong positive impact (B = 0.853, Beta = 0.798, t = 26.603, Sig. = 0.000), suggesting

that a one-unit increase in consumer lifestyle leads to a 0.853-unit increase in purchase intention. The constant term (B = 4.896, t = 2.963, Sig. = 0.003) indicates baseline purchase intention even without considering lifestyle factors. Overall, the findings underscore consumer lifestyle as a critical predictor of purchase intention, with implications for understanding and targeting consumer behavior based on lifestyle characteristics.

Table 8: Intermediary Analysis

Model	Perceived Value (M)	Purchase Intention (Y)	Total Effect Model
R	0.3715	0.9355	0.7982
R-squared	0.138	0.8752	0.6372
F-statistic	64.53	1409.43	707.73
p-value	0	0	0
Consumer Lifestyle Coeff.	0.3971	0.644	0.8525
Perceived Value Coeff.		0.5251	
Standardized Consumer Lifestyle	0.3715	0.603	0.7982
Standardized Perceived Value		0.5255	
Indirect Effect (Perceived Value)		0.2085	
Boot LLCI		0.1477	
Boot ULCI		0.2658	
Direct Effect		0.644	
Direct Boot LLCI		0.6042	
Direct Boot ULCI		0.6839	
Total Effect		0.8525	

This study employs mediation analysis to explore the mechanisms through which product differentiation influences purchase intention, with perceived value acting as a mediator. The findings reveal that product differentiation not only directly affects purchase intention but also indirectly influences it through perceived value, indicating a partial mediation effect.

Product Differentiation and Perceived Value: Product differentiation significantly enhances perceived value (B = 0.6110, p < 0.001), explaining 36.11% of its variance. Higher differentiation leads consumers to perceive greater value, such as improved quality, uniqueness, or brand image.

Perceived Value and Purchase Intention: Perceived value significantly boosts purchase intention (B = 0.4552, p < 0.001), with a moderate-to-strong influence. Together, product differentiation and perceived value explain 71.46% of the variance in purchase intention, highlighting their combined importance in consumer decision-making.

Direct Effect of Product Differentiation: Even after controlling for perceived value, product

differentiation retains a significant direct effect on purchase intention (B = 0.4970, p < 0.001), suggesting additional factors like unique features, brand loyalty, or market scarcity drive purchase decisions independently.

Mediation Analysis: The total effect of product differentiation on purchase intention is B = 0.7751 (p < 0.001), with 35.9% mediated by perceived value and 64.1% through direct pathways. This indicates that while perceived value is a significant mediator, other unexplored factors may also play a role.

Consumer Lifestyle and Purchase Intention: Consumer lifestyle significantly impacts purchase intention both directly (B = 0.6440, p < 0.001) and indirectly through perceived value (B = 0.3971, p < 0.001). Lifestyle accounts for 75.5% of the total effect, with only 24.5% mediated by perceived value, underscoring its dominant direct influence.

In summary, both product differentiation and consumer lifestyle significantly shape purchase intention, with perceived value acting as a partial mediator. These findings suggest that businesses should focus on enhancing product differentiation and aligning marketing strategies with consumer lifestyles to effectively drive purchase decisions.

Table 9: Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	47.953	.364		131.860	.000
	Z Perceived Value	.749	.033	.749	22.728	.000
2	(Constant)	47.954	.364		131.862	.000
	Z Perceived Value	.416	.332	.417	1.252	.211
	Z Environmental Awareness	.336	.334	.335	1.006	.315
3	(Constant)	49.153	.472		104.143	.000
	Z Perceived Value	.454	.327	.455	1.390	.165
	Z Environmental Awareness	.288	.329	.287	.876	.381
	Interaction terms X and Mo	-.010	.003	-.127	-3.890	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

This study employs regression analysis to investigate the influence of perceived value, environmental awareness, and their interaction on consumer purchase intention. The analysis is conducted through three sequential models to explore the underlying mechanisms. In the first model, perceived value is found to have a significant and positive impact on purchase intention, with a regression coefficient of 0.749 (p < 0.001). This indicates that consumers are more likely to purchase

products they perceive as having higher value, such as better quality or utility.

In the second model, environmental awareness is introduced as an additional variable. Interestingly, the effect of perceived value on purchase intention becomes insignificant (B = 0.416, p = 0.211), and environmental awareness itself does not show a significant influence (B = 0.336, p = 0.315). This suggests that while environmental awareness may play a role in consumer decision-making, it does not independently or strongly predict purchase intention when considered alongside perceived value.

The third model introduces an interaction term between perceived value and environmental awareness to test for a moderating effect. The results reveal a significant interaction (B = -0.010, p < 0.001), indicating that environmental awareness negatively moderates the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. Specifically, for consumers with higher environmental awareness, the positive effect of perceived value on purchase intention is weakened. This implies that environmentally conscious consumers prioritize factors such as sustainability, ethical production, and social responsibility over traditional measures of perceived value when making purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, while perceived value initially drives purchase intention, its influence is moderated by environmental awareness. For environmentally conscious consumers, the emphasis shifts from perceived value to environmental and ethical considerations. These findings underscore the importance for businesses to integrate sustainability and ethical practices into their marketing strategies to effectively appeal to this growing segment of consumers.

Discussion

This study examines the factors influencing Chinese middle-class consumers' purchase intentions toward Thai wild coffee, focusing on product differentiation and consumer lifestyle as key determinants, with perceived value as a mediator and environmental awareness as a moderator. The findings provide significant theoretical and managerial insights into consumer behavior, particularly in the specialty coffee industry, where product differentiation, lifestyle alignment, and sustainability considerations play crucial roles in shaping purchase decisions.

1. Theoretical Implications of Product Differentiation on Purchase Intention

The results confirm that product differentiation significantly impacts purchase intention, reinforcing the importance of unique attributes, quality perceptions, and brand identity in consumer decision-making. This aligns with prior research indicating that consumers favor products with uniqueness, high quality, and authenticity (Kim, Kim, & Jo, 2023). In the specialty coffee sector, differentiation strategies based on origin, organic certification, and sustainability have been shown to enhance consumer engagement and willingness to pay a premium (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). Thai wild coffee, as a niche product with unique terroir characteristics, leverages storytelling, eco-certifications, and branding to differentiate itself. However, differentiation extends beyond tangible attributes; symbolic aspects such as exclusivity and cultural heritage also enhance brand appeal and

emotional connections (Hassan & Craft, 2020). This study enriches the literature on product differentiation, highlighting the need for coffee brands to craft compelling narratives, utilize sustainability certifications, and effectively communicate product scarcity to boost perceived value and purchase intention.

2. The Role of Consumer Lifestyle in Purchase Intention

The positive relationship between consumer lifestyle and purchase intention underscores the growing influence of lifestyle choices on specialty product consumption. The findings support the view that modern consumers, particularly in urban China, make purchase decisions based on identity, values, and social status (Lombardi, Rana, & Scrucca, 2020). Coffee consumption has evolved from a functional activity to a lifestyle statement, reflecting broader trends in premiumization, health consciousness, and sustainability (Verma & Verma, 2022). The third-wave coffee movement, emphasizing artisanal brewing, direct trade, and specialty beans, further solidifies this shift, positioning high-quality coffee as a symbol of sophistication and conscious consumption (Peattie, 2010). The results suggest that Chinese middle-class consumers, especially those aged 25–45, are heavily influenced by lifestyle factors when purchasing specialty coffee. These findings align with prior research on experience-driven consumption, indicating that consumers favor products aligning with their social identity and aspirational lifestyles (Ponte, Gibbon, & Vestergaard, 2019). Thai wild coffee brands should strategically cater to emerging lifestyle preferences, including health consciousness, ethical sourcing, and premium indulgence, to attract loyal, high-value consumer segments prioritizing meaningful consumption experiences over price sensitivity.

3. The Mediating Role of Perceived Value

The study confirms that perceived value mediates the relationship between product differentiation, consumer lifestyle, and purchase intention, highlighting its multifaceted role in shaping consumer choices. This aligns with the Value-Based Adoption Model (VAM), which posits that consumers evaluate products through functional, emotional, and symbolic value (Deng, Liu, & Wang, 2022).

Functional Value as a Driver of Purchase Behavior: Functional value, including quality perceptions, price fairness, and reliability, plays a critical role in influencing consumer satisfaction and decision-making (Samoggia & Busi, 2023). The findings indicate that Thai wild coffee consumers assess functional value through factors such as taste, freshness, and ethical sourcing, supporting prior research showing that functional attributes strongly influence the adoption of new specialty coffee brands (Schifferstein et al., 2021).

Emotional and Symbolic Value in Specialty Coffee Consumption: Beyond functionality, the results emphasize the importance of emotional and symbolic value in enhancing brand loyalty and purchase intention. Consumers perceive Thai wild coffee not just as a beverage but as an experience evoking sensory pleasure, identity affirmation, and ethical fulfillment (Hicks, 2022). The study

highlights that luxury coffee consumption is often linked to emotional attachment and self-expression, further solidifying the connection between perceived value and consumer commitment (Martindale, 2021). By leveraging emotional and symbolic value through premium branding, sustainability messaging, and exclusive offerings, Thai wild coffee brands can cultivate loyal consumer segments prioritizing experience-driven consumption.

4. The Moderating Role of Environmental Awareness

A notable and unexpected finding is the negative moderating effect of environmental awareness on the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. Contrary to the initial hypothesis that higher environmental awareness would strengthen this relationship, the results suggest that environmentally conscious consumers are more selective and critical when evaluating premium products.

Environmental Awareness and Ethical Consumer Skepticism: This finding aligns with prior research indicating that highly environmentally conscious consumers often demand greater transparency in brands' sustainability commitments (Lundqvist, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2019). For these consumers, perceived value depends not only on product quality or uniqueness but also on the authenticity of sustainability claims (Schouteten et al., 2019). This suggests that brands emphasizing luxury or premium positioning without robust sustainability credentials may face skepticism from environmentally conscious buyers.

Strategic Implications for Thai Wild Coffee Brands: This finding has significant implications for Thai wild coffee producers and marketers. To appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, brands must prioritize sustainability-driven messaging over mere premium differentiation. Strategies include ensuring transparency in sustainability commitments, providing detailed reporting on fair trade, carbon neutrality, and ethical sourcing; obtaining globally recognized eco-certifications such as USDA Organic, Rainforest Alliance, and CarbonNeutral®; and engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, such as environmental conservation or community-driven sustainability projects. By adopting these strategies, Thai wild coffee brands can enhance their appeal among environmentally conscious consumers while maintaining differentiation in the premium coffee market.

Conclusions

This study explores the impact of product differentiation and consumer lifestyles on the purchase intention of Thai wild coffee, with perceived value as the mediating factor and environmental awareness as the moderating variable. The study tested five hypotheses, four of which were supported, but the results of the fifth hypothesis were contrary to expectations.

1. Product differentiation's impact on purchase intention: Hypothesis 1 posits that product differentiation has a positive impact on purchase intention. The results of the study support this hypothesis. Differentiating factors such as unique origin, high quality, organic certification and

sustainability claims significantly increased consumers' purchase intention.

2. Consumer lifestyle's impact on purchase intention: Hypothesis 2 posits that consumer lifestyle has a positive impact on purchase intention. Consumers who value health, sustainability and high-quality experiences are more likely to purchase Thai wild coffee.

3. The mediating effect of perceived value: Hypothesis 3 states that perceived value mediates the relationship between product differentiation and purchase intention, and the results support this hypothesis. Product differentiation indirectly increases purchase intention by increasing perceived value.

4. The mediating effect of perceived value: Hypothesis 4 states that perceived value also mediates the relationship between consumer lifestyle and purchase intention, and the results also support this hypothesis. Lifestyle consistency indirectly increases purchase intention by increasing perceived value.

5. The moderating effect of environmental awareness: Hypothesis 5 suggested that environmental awareness would positively moderate the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. However, the results showed the opposite, indicating that environmental awareness negatively moderated the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. This may be because environmentally conscious consumers pay more attention to the ethical and environmental credentials of a brand rather than just perceived value.

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