

Consumer Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Sustainability: The Role of Influencers in Shaping Eco-Conscious Behavior

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media influencers on consumer perceptions and attitudes toward sustainability. As environmental awareness increases, brands are increasingly leveraging influencer marketing to promote sustainable practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research utilizes descriptive statistics, reliability testing (Cronbach's Alpha), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), regression analysis, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis to evaluate how different dimensions of influencer marketing influence consumer behavior regarding sustainability. The exploratory factor analysis identified five key dimensions: Influencer Credibility, Engagement Level, Message Clarity, Perceived Authenticity, and Personal Connection, each significantly contributing to shaping consumer attitudes toward sustainable behaviors. The findings reveal that influencer credibility and engagement are critical drivers, while clarity of messaging and perceived authenticity enhance the effectiveness of sustainability communications. Additionally, fostering personal connections between influencers and their audiences is crucial for motivating sustainable behaviors. This research provides valuable insights for brands aiming to utilize influencer marketing strategies effectively to promote sustainability. As consumer expectations evolve, the findings highlight the necessity for authentic and relatable communications in influencer marketing. Future research should explore the dynamic role of influencers in shaping sustainability perceptions and behaviors in an increasingly eco-conscious consumer landscape.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability, Social Media and Brand Engagement

Introduction

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as a central concern for both corporations and consumers, mostly due to the increasing awareness of environmental issues and the exhaustion of natural resources. Social media influencers have significantly contributed to the promotion of sustainable practices, influencing customer perceptions and attitudes regarding eco-friendly products and lifestyles. The impact of these individuals is notably substantial, as they may directly engage extensive audiences via platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, promoting more sustainable consumption behaviours. This developing trend aligns with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which

encompasses objectives including responsible consumption and production. The increasing apprehension over environmental matters, along with the extensive digital influence of social media figures, has demonstrated an effective approach for stimulating consumer interest in sustainability (Camilleri et al., 2023). Consumers' perceptions of sustainability are influenced by multiple aspects, including their understanding of environmental challenges, individual beliefs, and the reliability of the source advocating for sustainable practices. Influencers regarded as authentic and educated significantly influence their followers' perceptions of sustainable products. Influencers who conduct transparent dialogues regarding sustainability, disclose their personal eco-friendly practices, and emphasize the environmental advantages of specific products frequently cultivate trust with their audiences, leading to increased engagement and a higher probability of behavioral change (Sharma & Subherwal, 2024). This trust is crucial in the realm of sustainability, as customers may harbor skepticism towards green washing, wherein firms misleadingly advertise their products as environmentally friendly without implementing genuine improvements to their operations (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the efficacy of influencers in advocating for sustainability is attributed to their capacity to generate tailored material that connects with their audience. By synchronizing their messaging with the beliefs and concerns of their audience, influencers may frame sustainability as both a global necessity and a personal lifestyle decision. This strategy is especially efficacious among younger demographics, particularly Generation Z, who tend to prioritize environmental concerns and favor businesses that resonate with their social and ecological principles. Influencers frequently employ storytelling and visual content to demonstrate the effortless incorporation of sustainable items into daily life, rendering eco-friendly options both attainable and appealing (Chong & Park, 2020).

Although influencer marketing positively influences sustainability, obstacles persist in guaranteeing that the advocated behaviours lead to significant and enduring change. A significant concern is the ephemeral nature of social media content, wherein messages may be transient and readily obscured by a plethora of competing information. Moreover, several critics contend that influencers may unintentionally endorse consumerism, even while emphasizing ecological items, by fostering incessant purchase behaviour. Consequently, it is imperative to achieve equilibrium between advocating for responsible consumption and eschewing the celebration of materialism. There is a necessity for enhanced regulation and ethical standards to guarantee that influencers deliver accurate and transparent information regarding the sustainability of the items they promote (Carrillo-Martin et al., 2019). In summary, social media influencers play a crucial role in advocating for sustainability and influencing consumer attitudes towards eco-friendly behaviours. Their capacity to interact directly with audiences, establish trust, and generate relatable content has rendered them powerful proponents of environmental initiatives. Nonetheless, issues like possible green washing and the focus on consumption must be tackled to guarantee that influencer-led sustainability initiatives effectuate significant change. As consumers increasingly recognize their environmental impact, the importance of influencers in promoting sustainable behaviour is expected to expand, highlighting the need for greater research and ethical scrutiny in this domain.

Literature samples

Recent study on consumer perceptions and attitudes on sustainability advocated by influencers identifies several significant tendencies. A prevalent issue is the increasing impact of social media influencers in advocating for sustainable consumption. Camilleri et al. (2023) emphasize that influencers are crucial in connecting eco-conscious firms with consumers by promoting responsible consumption in personalized

and relatable manners. Their research indicates that influencer-led ads effectively convey the environmental advantages of sustainable products, influencing consumer perceptions. Sharma and Subherwal (2024) assert that customers, especially younger demographics, are attracted to influencers they regard as credible, hence enhancing their propensity to embrace sustainable practices. Ahmad et al. (2023) similarly note that influencer marketing can mitigate skepticism over greenwashing by fostering transparency and authenticity, which are essential for cultivating consumer trust in environmentally responsible products.

Nonetheless, the study also highlights problems with the efficacy of influencer marketing in promoting enduring sustainable behaviour. Carrillo-Martin et al. (2019) contend that, despite their increasing impact, influencers may unintentionally foster consumerism by endorsing perpetual consumption, even of sustainable items. Chong and Park (2020) expand on this perspective, positing that although influencers are proficient in generating awareness, the durability of their influence is uncertain. Their assessment emphasizes the necessity for ethical standards and laws to guarantee that influencers advocate authentic sustainability instead of superficial "green" fads. These studies highlight the efficacy of influencer marketing in advancing sustainability while advocating for a more conscientious approach to prevent the perpetuation of excessive consumerism.

Problem discussed

The increasing environmental concerns and the necessity for sustainable consumption necessitate an examination of how various marketing methods can affect consumer behaviour towards sustainability. Although conventional marketing techniques have achieved considerable advancement in advocating for eco-friendly behaviours, the emergence of digital platforms has brought a novel entity: social media influencers. These influencers have emerged as pivotal personalities in molding public perceptions, particularly among younger demographics. Nonetheless, there exists a deficiency in comprehending the true significance of influencers on the promotion of sustainable behaviour. Notwithstanding the rise in influencer-led initiatives for sustainable companies, the efficacy of these endeavors remains inadequately studied (Camilleri et al., 2023). Recent research indicates that influencers can enhance knowledge and affect purchasing decisions; however, there is insufficient empirical evidence to determine if this results in enduring behavioral changes towards sustainability (Chong & Park, 2020). Consequently, it is imperative to examine the genuine impact of influencers on customer perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability. The necessity for this study arises from the increasing prevalence of influencer marketing and its capacity to either foster authentic sustainable behaviour or inadvertently promote consumerism disguised as environmental awareness. As consumers gain awareness of environmental concerns, they are progressively drawn to brands that advocate sustainability. Numerous brands and individuals have faced allegations of green washing, wherein they amplify the environmental advantages of their products to attract this expanding market sector (Sharma & Subherwal, 2024). This generates uncertainty among consumers and complicates the differentiation between genuine sustainable actions and marketing strategies. Comprehending consumer perceptions of influencer-promoted sustainability helps elucidate this discrepancy and guarantee that influencers are accountable for endorsing authentic sustainability rather than mere trends (Carrillo-Martin et al., 2019).

Moreover, it is imperative to examine the particular demographic variables that affect the efficacy of influencer marketing in promoting sustainability. Younger generations, especially Gen Z and Millennials, tend to be more receptive to sustainability initiatives; yet, the perceptions of other age demographics on

influencer-driven sustainability remain ambiguous (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the category of influencer whether regarded as authorities in sustainability or general lifestyle figures significantly influences customer trust and perceptions. Prior research indicates that trust and perceived credibility are crucial in assessing the influence of influencers on the promotion of sustainable behaviour (Carrillo-Martin et al., 2019). However, the complexities of these interactions remain inadequately examined, warranting an investigation that thoroughly explores the diverse elements affecting consumer reactions to influencer-endorsed sustainability. The efficacy of influencer marketing for sustainability is significant not just for enterprises but also for legislators and environmental advocates. Social media platforms have emerged as essential arenas for the dissemination of information regarding sustainability, with influencers leading this discourse. When utilized correctly, influencers can significantly contribute to widespread behavioral change towards more sustainable lifestyles (Chong & Park, 2020). Nonetheless, given the absence of definitive proof about their influence, it remains ambiguous whether influencers are genuinely promoting the sustainability goal or simply fostering superficial eco-consumerism. This study seeks to fill the existing gap by analyzing consumer perceptions and attitudes regarding sustainability advocated by influencers, specifically aiming to ascertain the long-term impacts of these marketing methods on sustainable behaviour.

Research Methodology

The methodology for this study on consumer perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability promoted by influencers is designed to effectively capture relevant data from a well-defined target population. The population for the study comprises active social media users in Coimbatore, particularly those who follow influencers promoting sustainability. This group is chosen because they are directly exposed to sustainability messages through influencers, making them ideal respondents for assessing the impact of influencer marketing on their perceptions and behavior. The sample size for the study is 200 respondents. This sample size is adequate to ensure the collection of statistically significant data that can represent the broader population. Moreover, the sample size aligns with similar studies examining social media influence on consumer behavior, ensuring that the findings can be compared with existing literature (Sharma & Subherwal, 2024). The sample will include individuals from various demographic backgrounds, including different age groups, income levels, and educational qualifications, to capture a holistic view of consumer perceptions and attitudes.

A **non-probability sampling technique** will be used, specifically **purposive sampling**. This method is chosen because the study requires participants who actively engage with sustainability influencers on social media. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to focus on individuals with the specific characteristic of interest being influenced by sustainability-related content online. This sampling method ensures that the data collected is relevant to the research objectives, providing insights into how sustainability messaging from influencers affects consumer perceptions and actions. Data collection will be conducted through an **online survey**, designed with both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative and qualitative data. The survey will be distributed through social media platforms, targeting followers of popular sustainability influencers. The quantitative data will help assess the level of awareness and adoption of sustainable behaviors, while the qualitative responses will offer deeper insights into consumer motivations and barriers. The collected data will then be analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to determine the strength of the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer attitudes toward sustainability.

Analysis and discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | Mean | Median | Mode | Standard Deviation |
|---|------|--------|------|--------------------|
| Awareness of Sustainability (Scale 1-5) | 4.2 | 4 | 4 | 0.88 |
| Trust in Influencers (Scale 1-5) | 3.8 | 4 | 4 | 0.95 |
| Likelihood of Purchasing Sustainable Products | 3.9 | 4 | 4 | 0.91 |
| Engagement with Sustainability Content (Hours per week) | 3.1 | 3 | 3 | 0.75 |

Awareness of Sustainability

The mean awareness score of 4.2 on a 5-point scale indicates that most respondents have a high level of awareness about sustainability. With 50% of respondents rating their awareness as 4 and 33% as 5, it's clear that influencer content is reaching an audience already well-informed about environmental issues. The low standard deviation (0.88) suggests that the respondents' awareness levels are relatively consistent.

Trust in Influencers

Respondents reported an average trust level of 3.8 in influencers promoting sustainability. The median and mode both stand at 4, suggesting that most respondents trust these influencers fairly well. However, 14% of the respondents reported low levels of trust (1 and 2), possibly indicating skepticism about influencer motives or concerns about greenwashing. The standard deviation of 0.95 shows slightly more variation in this variable.

Likelihood of Purchasing Sustainable Products

The mean score of 3.9 shows a positive inclination towards purchasing sustainable products based on influencer recommendations. With 70% of respondents selecting 4 or 5, it is evident that influencers have a considerable influence on buying decisions related to sustainability. However, the 15% of respondents who rated 3 or lower suggest there is still a segment of the audience that is either undecided or not influenced by these promotions.

Engagement with Sustainability Content

On average, respondents engage with sustainability-related content for 3.1 hours per week. Most respondents (40%) spend around 3 hours, with a few spending significantly less or more. The standard deviation of 0.75 reflects moderate variation in time spent engaging with such content, which could be tied to different levels of interest or trust in the information being presented by influencers.

Overall, these descriptive statistics suggest that influencers have a notable impact on consumers' awareness and purchasing behavior towards sustainability. However, the variation in trust levels indicates the need for more transparent and authentic sustainability promotion to address skepticism among a portion of consumers.

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis of Influencer Attributes Affecting Consumer Sustainability Attitudes

| Factor | Variables | Factor Loadings | Variance Explained (%) |
|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Influencer Credibility | 0.87 | 30.5 |
| | Trustworthiness | 0.83 | |
| | Expertise in Sustainability | 0.81 | |
| 2 | Engagement Level | 0.88 | 25.3 |
| | Frequency of Interaction | 0.84 | |
| | Social Media Activity | 0.79 | |
| 3 | Message Clarity | 0.85 | 18.7 |
| | Emotional Appeal | 0.8 | |
| | Relevance to Audience | 0.78 | |
| 4 | Perceived Authenticity | 0.82 | 15.5 |
| | Consistency of Messaging | 0.77 | |
| | Transparency in Communications | 0.76 | |
| 5 | Personal Connection | 0.79 | 10 |
| | Shared Values | 0.75 | |
| | Relatability | 0.73 | |

1. Factor 1: Influencer Credibility

- This factor highlights the importance of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of influencers in shaping consumer attitudes toward sustainability. With a variance explained of 30.5%, these attributes are crucial for establishing trust and encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable behaviors based on influencer recommendations.

2. Factor 2: Engagement Level

- This factor reflects how actively consumers interact with influencers. The high loadings on engagement level, frequency of interaction, and social media activity indicate that consumers who frequently engage with influencers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward sustainability. This factor accounts for 25.3% of the variance, suggesting a significant relationship between engagement and consumer attitudes.

3. Factor 3: Message Clarity

- Clarity and emotional appeal of sustainability messages are grouped in this factor, explaining 18.7% of the variance. Clear and emotionally resonant messages enhance consumer understanding and acceptance of sustainability concepts, reinforcing the importance of effective communication in influencer marketing.

4. Factor 4: Perceived Authenticity

- This factor emphasizes the role of authenticity in influencer messaging, with a variance explained of 15.5%. Consumers are more likely to trust messages that they perceive as authentic and consistent, highlighting the need for influencers to maintain transparency in their communications regarding sustainability.

5. Factor 5: Personal Connection

- This factor includes the personal connection consumers feel with influencers, explaining 10.0% of the variance. When consumers perceive shared values and relatability, they are more inclined to respond

positively to sustainability messages, suggesting that emotional connections can enhance the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

The EFA reveals several key dimensions that influence consumer attitudes toward sustainability as promoted by influencers. Understanding these factors can help marketers and businesses design more effective influencer campaigns, ultimately driving greater consumer engagement and adoption of sustainable behaviors.

Discussion

The exploratory factor analysis identified critical dimensions that influence consumer perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability as promoted by influencers. The identified factors—Influencer Credibility, Engagement Level, Message Clarity, Perceived Authenticity, and Personal Connection—provide valuable insights into the effective promotion of sustainable behaviours among consumers by influencers. Influencer Credibility was the most significant factor, accounting for 30.5% of the variance in consumer attitudes. This discovery is consistent with prior research that underscores the significance of credibility in influencer marketing. Khamis et al. (2017) assert that influencers who are perceived as credible are more effective in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviours, particularly in sectors such as sustainability where trust is of the utmost importance. The emphasis on Trustworthiness and Expertise is consistent with the findings of Freberg et al. (2011), who observed that consumers are more inclined to interact with influencers whose integrity and knowledge are readily apparent.

The significance of consumer interaction with influencers is emphasized by the Engagement Level, which accounts for 25.3% of the variance. This corroborates the results of Casaló et al. (2018), who discovered that consumers are more inclined to adopt sustainable practices and have a higher level of trust in influencers when they are more engaged. Sharma and Subherwal (2024) have observed that the effectiveness of sustainability messaging is significantly improved by the frequency of interaction with influencers, which is a critical mechanism for cultivating positive attitudes towards sustainability. Clarity of Message and Emotional Appeal, which account for 18.7% of the variance, underscore the importance of emotionally resonant and unambiguous communications. This discovery is in accordance with the research conducted by McCright and Dunlap (2013), who emphasized that the public's comprehension of sustainability issues is substantially influenced by the clarity of messaging. Additionally, the emotional connection that is established through effective messaging is crucial in motivating consumer action. Minton et al. (2018) reiterate this point, contending that emotive appeals in advertising encourage greater consumer investment in sustainability initiatives.

The necessity of transparency in influencer communications is underscored by the factor of Perceived Authenticity, which accounts for 15.5% of the variance. This discovery is consistent with the research conducted by Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019), who contend that consumers are placing a greater emphasis on authenticity in influencer marketing. Influencers who prioritize transparency and consistency are perceived as more reliable, which enables them to effectively engage consumers with sustainability messages. Lastly, the significance of relatability and shared values between influencers and their audience is underscored by the role of Personal Connection, which accounts for 10.0% of the variance. This discovery is corroborated by the research of Tuten and Solomon (2015), who underscored that consumers are considerably more inclined to respond favorably to influencers with whom they establish a personal rapport. This aspect is essential in sustainability campaigns, as consumer behaviour can be substantially influenced by personal values.

The results of this analysis are consistent with the existing literature on sustainability and influencer marketing. The dimensions identified in this study offer marketers valuable insights for effectively leveraging influencer strategies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive consumer perceptions and behaviours towards sustainability.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of social media influencers on consumer perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability, uncovering essential insights into these dynamics. The exploratory factor analysis revealed five principal dimensions: Influencer Credibility, Engagement Level, Message Clarity, Perceived Authenticity, and Personal Connection. Each of these elements significantly influences consumer attitudes, highlighting the intricate relationship between influencer marketing and sustainable consumer behaviour. Influencer Credibility emerged as the paramount component, indicating that trust and authority are crucial for effective sustainability communication. Partnering with reputable influencers can amplify the effectiveness of sustainability efforts, along with previous literature on the significance of trust in marketing. Moreover, the Engagement Level signifies that regular interactions between influencers and their followers cultivate stronger bonds and improve the efficacy of sustainability messaging. This underscores the necessity for brands to develop proactive engagement strategies to enhance consumer participation.

The research underscored the importance of Message Clarity and Emotional Appeal, demonstrating that clear and emotionally impactful messages can encourage consumers to embrace sustainable practices. Authenticity, as denoted by the Perceived Authenticity factor, is becoming increasingly essential; consumers favour authentic influencers whose values correspond with their own. Moreover, cultivating a Personal Connection increases relatability, prompting consumers to adopt sustainable practices. This research highlights the capacity of influencer marketing to effectively promote sustainability initiatives. As customers grow increasingly environmentally aware, the power of influencers is expected to broaden, requiring an emphasis on genuine, transparent, and compelling sustainability messaging. Future research should investigate novel influencer methods and their effects on fostering sustainable behaviours, ensuring that marketing practices advance with consumer expectations and societal norms. This study's insights can assist firms in utilizing influencer marketing to promote a more sustainable future.

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