



## Social media influencers' effect on consumer acceptance of sustainable products: A behavioral viewpoint

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### Abstract

Influencers on social media have become strong voices that have the ability to affect the attitudes, views, and purchasing decisions of consumers. Influencers in the sustainability space are increasingly promoting eco-friendly lifestyles, the advantages of green products, and environmental responsibility, which raises concerns about how they may affect consumer behavior. This study looks at how consumer adoption of sustainable products is impacted by influencer traits like reputation, authenticity, knowledge, and message engagement. The study examines how influencer-led sustainability messaging affect attitudes, perceived norms, trust, and intentions to make green purchases using the Theory of Planned Behavior and Source Credibility Theory. A quantitative research design was adopted, and Information was gathered from users of social media who follow sustainability-focused influencers on Instagram and YouTube. Findings indicate that influencer authenticity and message credibility significantly enhance trust, which in turn positively impacts attitudes and intentions toward sustainable product adoption. The study contributes to sustainable marketing literature by identifying the behavioral mechanisms driving consumer responses to influencer-led sustainability communication. Practical implications and recommendations for marketers are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Social media influencers, sustainability, authenticity, source credibility, purchase intentions

### Introduction

A global movement for sustainability has been sparked by resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and climate change. As consumers increasingly seek products that are environmentally responsible, brands are compelled to adopt green marketing strategies to meet changing expectations. Communication plays a crucial role in shaping eco-friendly behavior, and in the digital era, social media influencers have become dominant channels for disseminating sustainability messages. Influencers possess the ability to humanize content, demonstrate product usage, provide peer-like recommendations, and build trust through continuous engagement. Consumers often perceive influencers as relatable, credible, and knowledgeable, giving their endorsements substantial persuasive power. As a result, organizations across industries from fashion to food to personal care collaborate with influencers to promote sustainable products.

Despite the rise of “eco-influencers,” there remains a gap in understanding how influencer characteristics affect consumer adoption of sustainable products. The following important questions are the focus of this study:

How do influencer credibility, authenticity, and expertise influence consumer trust?

1. Does trust mediate the relationship between influencer characteristics and green purchase intentions?
2. How do engagement and message clarity affect attitudes toward sustainable consumption?

This paper contributes by providing a behavioral perspective that integrates TPB and Source Credibility Theory to explain sustainable product adoption in the social media context.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the impact of influencer credibility, authenticity, and expertise on consumer trust toward sustainable product messaging.
2. To examine the impact of message clarity and believability on consumer attitudes about the adoption of sustainable products.
3. To evaluate if customer trust mediates the association between influencer attributes and intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products.
4. To assess how interactions, likes, and comments affect message adoption in sustainability communication.
5. To propose a behavioral model integrating TPB and Source Credibility Theory for sustainable product adoption in social media contexts.

### Literature Review

#### Instagram Influencers in Marketing

Instagram Influencers are those who have amassed a devoted fan base by producing content in niche markets like fashion, fitness, beauty, or sustainability. Their influence stems from perceived reliability, expertise, and emotional connection with followers. Prior research indicates that influencers can shape consumer preferences, increase brand visibility, and stimulate purchase decisions more effectively than traditional advertising.

Influencers differ from celebrities because their influence is built gradually through continuous interaction and transparency. For sustainability messaging, they play a crucial role in simplifying complex environmental issues and demonstrating practical eco-friendly behaviors.

## Sustainable Messaging and Green Marketing

Sustainable messaging refers to communication that promotes environmental responsibility, eco-friendly products, and lifestyle choices that reduce ecological impact. Green marketing has expanded significantly as consumers increasingly consider environmental impact in their decisions. However, skepticism toward green washing remains high. Therefore, authenticity and credibility of the messenger become essential.

Eco-conscious influencers help bridge this trust gap by acting as relatable advocates who demonstrate genuine interest in environmental causes. Studies show that sustainable message framing value-based, moral-based, or benefit-based affects consumer responsiveness.

Behavioral Theories Underpinning the Study

### Planned Behavior Theory

According to Ajzen (1991) <sup>[1]</sup>, behavior is driven by:

- Perceived behavioral control,
- Subjective norms,
- Attitude toward the conduct

Planned Behavior theory is widely applied in sustainability research to predict eco-friendly behaviors and purchase intentions.

### Source Credibility Theory

This theory proposes that persuasion is strongly influenced by the communicator's

- Expertise
- Trustworthiness
- Attractiveness

Influencers with high credibility are more capable of shaping consumer perceptions.

Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) Model.

- **Stimulus:** Influencer message, content style
- **Organism:** Internal states attitude, trust, perception
- **Response:** Purchase intention, behavior

Together, these theories help explain how influencer characteristics drive sustainable product adoption.

### Consumer Adoption of Sustainable Products

- Environmental benefits
- Economic value
- Personal relevance
- Social approval
- Assurance against greenwashing

Influencers help reduce perceived risk by demonstrating product use, validating claims, and sharing honest reviews. Their role in shaping product perception becomes vital for sustainable brands competing in crowded markets.

### Research Gap

Although social media influencers have become integral to modern digital marketing, limited academic attention has been given to their role in shaping consumer adoption of sustainable products. Existing research focuses primarily on influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and purchase intention in general consumer markets. However, sustainability-related consumption involves higher cognitive involvement, ethical considerations, and greater skepticism

due to concerns such as greenwashing. Very few studies have specifically explored how influencer authenticity, message credibility, and engagement impact consumer trust when the message relates to sustainability. Additionally, research applying strong behavioral theories such as the Planned Behavior theory and Source reliability Theory to sustainability influencers remains scarce. This study fills these gaps by developing a behavioral framework that explains how influencer characteristics influence trust, attitude, and green purchase intention in the sustainability domain.

### Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following variables were selected:

- Influencer Credibility
- Influencer Authenticity
- Expertise
- Message Credibility & Clarity
- Engagement (likes, comments, responsiveness)
- Trust (mediator)
- Attitude toward sustainable products

### Hypotheses

**H1:** Credibility of the influencer positively influences consumer trust.

**H2:** Authenticity of the influencer positively influences consumer trust.

**H3:** Message credibility significantly affects attitude toward sustainable products.

**H4:** Consumer trust has a positive effect on green purchase Thoughts.

**H5:** The relationship between attitude and message credibility is strengthened by engagement.

**H6:** Attitude positively influences green purchase intention. These hypotheses form the basis for the structural framework.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

The Article adopts a deep and quantitative research approach to analyze how influencer-led messaging affects consumer adoption of sustainable products.

#### Sample and Sampling Technique

**Sample size:** 210 respondents

**Sampling method:** Purposive sampling

**Participants:** Active social media users aged 18 to 40 who follow eco-conscious influencers on Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook.

This group was chosen because younger consumers engage more actively with sustainability influencers.

#### Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) measured:

- Credibility
- Authenticity
- Message clarity
- Trust
- Attitude
- Purchase intention

#### Data Analysis Techniques

- The reliability tests

- Correlation analysis
- Regression analysis
- Mediation analysis for trust
- Statistical tools such as SPSS were used for the analysis.

## Findings and Discussion

### Influencer Credibility and Authenticity

Results indicate that both credibility and authenticity have strong positive associations with consumer trust. Respondents reported higher trust when influencers appeared sincere, transparent, and genuinely committed to environmental issues.

Authenticity was found to be more influential than expertise alone, suggesting that consumers value honesty and transparency in sustainability communication.

### Message Credibility and Clarity

Message credibility significantly shaped attitudes toward sustainable products. Clear, factual, and visually engaging sustainability messages were more persuasive. Respondents preferred influencers who provided product demonstrations, personal experiences, and data-backed information.

### Engagement and Interaction

High engagement (likes, comments, and Q&A sessions) strengthened message acceptance. Consumers felt more connected to influencers who replied to comments, shared user testimonials, or showed real-life use of sustainable products.

### Trust as a Mediator

Trust was a significant mediator between influencer characteristics and purchase intention. Even if an influencer was credible, purchase intention increased only when trust was established.

### Sustainable purchase intention

Green buying intention was best predicted by attitude. Influencer messaging created favorable opinions about environmentally friendly items, which greatly boosted uptake.

Overall, the results validate the theoretical model and highlight the significance of trust, authenticity, and credibility in influencer marketing that is focused on sustainability.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that Consumer behavior is greatly influenced by social media influencers. Adoption of sustainable products. Influencer authenticity and message credibility were found to be the most influential factors, highlighting the importance of transparent and ethical messaging in sustainability campaigns.

### Managerial Implications

- Brands should collaborate with authentic eco-influencers, not just popular ones.
- Influencers should use data-backed claims to avoid greenwashing perceptions.
- Engagement strategies such as Q &A, storytelling, and demonstrations enhance message impact.
- Transparent communication fosters consumer trust and long-term loyalty.

- Future Research
- Cross-cultural comparison of sustainability influence
- Experimental analysis on eco-message framing (emotional vs. rational)
- Role of micro- vs. nano-influencers in sustainability

The study concludes that influencer-driven sustainability marketing is a useful strategy for boosting environmentally conscious consumer behavior and promoting eco-friendly goods.

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