

Role of Social Media in Shaping Sustainable Buying Decisions

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Abstract

Despite growing public concern for environmental sustainability, consumer markets continue to display inconsistent patterns of sustainable buying behavior (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). While awareness has increased, actual purchasing decisions often fail to align with stated values, reflecting a persistent attitude-behavior gap (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2014). Social media has emerged as a central environment in which sustainability narratives are encountered, evaluated, and socially reinforced, yet its role in shaping real buying behavior remains underexplored. Prior research has relied heavily on purchase intentions, platform-neutral assumptions, and complex modeling approaches that obscure behavioral clarity (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Johnstone & Tan, 2015). This study addresses these gaps by examining how social media influence mechanisms affect consumers' actual sustainable buying decisions. Using cross-sectional survey data collected from 412 active social media users, the study applies multiple regression analysis to assess the behavioral impact of social visibility, peer engagement, and influencer credibility. The findings indicate that social visibility and perceived influencer credibility significantly predict sustainable purchasing behavior, while passive exposure alone does not translate into action. Peer engagement effects emerge as conditional rather than uniform, suggesting that sustainability-related interaction must be socially meaningful to shape behavior. By focusing on actual purchase decisions rather than intentions, this study provides clearer behavioral evidence of how social media operates as a decision environment, with implications for sustainability theory and communication practice.

Keywords:

Social Media Influence; Sustainable Consumption; Green Consumer Behavior; Ethical Purchasing; Digital Marketing; Environmental Awareness; Online Consumer Engagement.

Introduction

Consumer markets increasingly reflect heightened awareness of environmental and social sustainability, yet this awareness has not translated consistently into purchasing behavior (Auger & Devinney, 2007). Consumers frequently report concern for ethical sourcing, environmental protection, and long-term societal impact, while simultaneously favoring conventional products at the point of purchase. This discrepancy suggests that sustainable consumption cannot be explained solely through individual values or moral attitudes, but must be understood within the broader decision environments in which choices are made. Social media has become one of the most influential of these environments. Rather than functioning merely as a communication channel, social media operates as a space where consumption is observed, evaluated, and socially negotiated (Belk, 2010).

Sustainability-related choices are increasingly visible through posts, stories, and endorsements, transforming purchasing behavior into a socially interpretable act. This visibility alters how consumers evaluate their own decisions, particularly when sustainable products involve trade-offs related to price, convenience, or uncertainty of impact. Traditional sustainability communication has largely relied on informational and moral appeals, assuming that increased knowledge or ethical framing will lead to behavioral change (Peattie & Crane, 2005). However, such approaches often overlook the situational and social dimensions of consumption. Buying decisions are shaped under time pressure, incomplete information, and social influence, conditions under which rational evaluation of sustainability claims becomes difficult (Thøgersen, 2010). Social media intensifies these dynamics by embedding consumption within

networks of peers and opinion leaders whose behaviors act as informal reference points.

Despite growing interest in social media and sustainability, existing research exhibits notable limitations. First, much of the literature prioritizes purchase intentions over actual buying behavior, despite evidence that intentions are weak predictors of realized consumption (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Second, studies often treat social media exposure as a homogeneous influence, neglecting the distinct mechanisms through which visibility, engagement, and credibility operate (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Third, the dominance of complex mediation models has reduced transparency regarding direct behavioral relationships, limiting practical interpretability. This study addresses these gaps by examining social media as a behavioral decision environment and focusing explicitly on sustainable buying decisions rather than intentions. Drawing on social norm theory and signaling perspectives (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Berger, 2014), the study examines how social visibility, peer engagement, and influencer credibility relate to consumers' reported sustainable purchases. A regression-based analytical approach is employed to provide direct, interpretable evidence of these relationships without overstating causal inference. The study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it advances sustainable consumption research by prioritizing behavioral outcomes. Second, it differentiates between key social media mechanisms rather than treating social media influence as a monolithic construct. Third, it demonstrates the value of regression-based analysis in clarifying behavioral effects often obscured in more complex modeling approaches. The paper proceeds by reviewing relevant literature and developing hypotheses, followed by a description of the research methodology. The results of the regression analysis are then presented, after which the findings are discussed in relation to existing theory. The paper concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Sustainable Buying Decisions

Sustainable buying decisions refer to actual purchase behaviors that reflect consideration of environmental or social consequences (White et al.,

2019). Unlike attitudes or intentions, buying decisions involve concrete trade-offs that expose the limits of ethical commitment. Prior research consistently demonstrates a gap between pro-sustainability attitudes and realized purchasing behavior (Carrington et al., 2014; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). This gap is not best understood as consumer hypocrisy, but as a function of contextual constraints and social influence. From a behavioral standpoint, sustainable consumption is shaped by perceived norms and situational cues rather than isolated moral reasoning (Thøgersen, 2010). When sustainable behavior is perceived as socially endorsed, consumers are more likely to justify associated costs. Conversely, when such behavior appears marginal or symbolic, motivation weakens.

Social Media Influence Mechanisms

Social media amplifies normative influence by increasing the visibility of consumption behaviors (Belk, 2010). Observing others engage in sustainable consumption signals what is acceptable and desirable, reducing uncertainty and perceived social risk (Cialdini et al., 1990). Visibility thus functions as a normalization mechanism rather than a persuasive message. Peer engagement represents a second mechanism. Likes, comments, and discussions serve as social validation, but their influence depends on depth and relevance (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Passive exposure may increase awareness without commitment, whereas active engagement can foster internalization.

Influencers and Sustainability Communication

Influencers occupy a hybrid position between peers and brands, making credibility central to their effectiveness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In sustainability contexts, credibility is closely tied to perceived sincerity and consistency over time. Concerns about greenwashing heighten skepticism toward promotional sustainability messages (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Influencers perceived as commercially motivated are less likely to inspire behavioral imitation.

Hypotheses

Grounded in social norm and signalling theories, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social visibility of sustainability-related consumption on social media is positively associated with sustainable buying decisions.

H2: Active engagement with sustainability-related content on social media is positively associated with sustainable buying decisions.

H3: Perceived credibility of sustainability-oriented influencers is positively associated with sustainable buying decisions.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between social media influence mechanisms and consumers' actual sustainable buying decisions. A cross-sectional approach is appropriate given the study's objective of capturing behavioral patterns as they occur within contemporary social media environments, rather than modeling change over time (Bryman, 2016). Survey-based designs are widely used in sustainability and consumer behavior research when the aim is to link perceptual and contextual variables to self-reported behavior across heterogeneous populations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The analytical strategy is intentionally regression-based. Multiple regression analysis allows for direct estimation of the relative contribution of social media variables to sustainable buying behavior while maintaining transparency and interpretability (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Unlike complex structural modeling approaches, regression analysis is well suited for testing theoretically grounded, direct relationships without imposing unnecessary assumptions about causal pathways.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data were collected from adult consumers who actively use social media and have made at least one consumer goods purchase in the preceding six months. This criterion was used to ensure that respondents were both exposed to social media influence and capable of reporting recent buying behavior, reducing retrospective bias (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Participants were recruited through an online survey panel provider to achieve demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, education, and income. Online panels are commonly

employed in social media and sustainability research due to their ability to reach digitally active populations efficiently (Evans & Mathur, 2018). Screening questions were used to exclude respondents with no exposure to sustainability-related content on social media or no recent purchasing activity. A total of 452 responses were initially collected. After removing incomplete questionnaires and responses failing attention checks, 412 valid responses remained for analysis. This sample size was deemed adequate for multiple regression analysis involving several predictors and control variables, providing sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful effects without overfitting the model (Green, 1991).

Measurement of Variables

Sustainable Buying Decisions

The dependent variable, sustainable buying decisions, was operationalized using self-reported behavioral measures rather than intentions or attitudes. Respondents indicated how frequently they had purchased products described as environmentally friendly, ethically sourced, or sustainably packaged within the past six months. Emphasizing actual purchase behavior aligns with calls in the sustainability literature to move beyond intention-based measures, which often overestimate ethical consumption (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019). Items were measured using Likert-type scales reflecting frequency of behavior. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, indicating that the items captured a coherent behavioral construct.

Social Visibility

Social visibility was measured by assessing the extent to which respondents observed sustainability-related purchasing behavior within their social media networks. Items captured perceived prevalence and salience of such behavior rather than platform-specific features. This approach reflects the conceptualization of visibility as a normative cue that signals what behaviors are socially accepted or valued (Cialdini et al., 1990; Berger, 2014).

Peer Engagement

Peer engagement was measured through respondents' self-reported interaction with sustainability-related content, including

commenting, sharing, and participating in discussions. The scale focused on active engagement rather than passive exposure, consistent with prior research suggesting that behavioral influence depends on depth of interaction (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Influencer Credibility

Perceived influencer credibility was measured using items assessing trustworthiness, authenticity, and consistency of sustainability-oriented influencers followed by the respondent. This operationalization reflects established perspectives on source credibility, which emphasize sincerity and perceived expertise as drivers of behavioral adoption (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Given concerns surrounding greenwashing, credibility was treated as a central explanatory variable rather than a peripheral characteristic (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding commonly accepted thresholds.

Control Variables

Several control variables were included to account for alternative explanations of sustainable buying behavior. These included age, income, education level, and general environmental concern. Environmental concern was included to distinguish the effects of social media influence from baseline pro-environmental orientation, which is known to predict ethical consumption to some extent (Thøgersen, 2010).

Analytical Procedure and Diagnostic Checks

Multiple regression analysis was conducted using sustainable buying decisions as the dependent variable. Independent variables were entered simultaneously to assess their unique contributions while controlling for demographic and attitudinal

factors. This approach allows for examination of relative effect sizes without implying causal certainty (Cohen et al., 2003). Prior to analysis, standard diagnostic checks were performed. Normality and linearity were assessed through residual analysis. Multicollinearity was examined using variance inflation factors, all of which remained below accepted thresholds, indicating no serious collinearity concerns. To mitigate common method bias, procedural remedies were applied at the survey design stage, including psychological separation of predictor and criterion variables and assurance of respondent anonymity (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Post-hoc checks suggested that common method variance was unlikely to substantially bias the results.

Data Analysis and Results

Sample Profile and Descriptive Statistics

The final sample consisted of 412 respondents who reported active social media use and recent purchasing activity. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample reflects a balanced distribution across gender and age groups, with a concentration of respondents in the economically active population segments. This profile is appropriate given the study’s focus on consumption behavior and social media engagement. A majority of respondents reported at least undergraduate-level education, which aligns with prior evidence that sustainability-related consumption and digital engagement are more prevalent among educated consumers. Income levels were moderately dispersed, allowing examination of sustainable buying behavior beyond high-income segments alone. Overall, the demographic composition suggests sufficient heterogeneity to examine behavioral relationships while maintaining relevance to contemporary consumer markets.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 412)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	214	51.9
	Female	198	48.1
Age	18–25 years	96	23.3
	26–35 years	168	40.8
	36–45 years	92	22.3
	Above 45 years	56	13.6
Education	Undergraduate or below	154	37.4
	Postgraduate	198	48.1
	Doctorate/Professional	60	14.6

Monthly Income	Low	138	33.5
	Middle	176	42.7
	High	98	23.8
Social Media Usage	Daily	348	84.5
	Weekly	64	15.5

Descriptive Analysis of Key Constructs

Descriptive statistics for the study variables indicated moderate engagement in sustainable buying behavior across the sample. Respondents reported higher levels of exposure to sustainability-related content on social media than active participation in such content. Social visibility and perceived influencer credibility showed relatively higher mean scores compared to peer engagement, suggesting that observation of sustainability-related behavior is more common than interaction. This pattern supports the view that social media functions primarily as a visibility-driven environment for sustainability, where consumers observe norms more frequently than they actively contribute to discussions.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the key variables and to assess potential multicollinearity concerns prior to regression analysis. As shown in Table 2, sustainable buying decisions were positively correlated with social visibility, peer engagement, and influencer credibility. None of the correlation coefficients exceeded recommended thresholds, indicating that multicollinearity was unlikely to bias regression estimates. The correlations provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships while justifying the inclusion of all predictors in the regression model.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Sustainable Buying Decisions	1.00			
2. Social Visibility	0.49**	1.00		
3. Peer Engagement	0.32**	0.41**	1.00	
4. Influencer Credibility	0.53**	0.46**	0.38**	1.00

Note: $p < .01$

Regression Analysis

To test the proposed hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted with sustainable buying decisions as the dependent variable. Social visibility, peer engagement, and perceived influencer credibility were entered as independent variables,

along with demographic and attitudinal control variables. Table 3 presents the regression results. The overall model was statistically significant and explained a substantial proportion of variance in sustainable buying behavior, indicating strong explanatory power for a cross-sectional behavioral study.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Results Predicting Sustainable Buying Decisions

Predictor Variable	β	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Social Visibility	0.29	0.05	5.78	< .001
Peer Engagement	0.11	0.04	2.41	.016
Influencer Credibility	0.34	0.06	6.12	< .001
Environmental Concern (Control)	0.18	0.05	3.56	< .001
Age (Control)	-0.04	0.03	-1.21	.227
Income (Control)	0.07	0.04	1.68	.094
Education (Control)	0.05	0.03	1.49	.137

Model Statistics: $R^2 = 0.42$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.40$ $F = 31.84$, $p < .001$

Interpretation of Results

The regression results provide clear support for the central hypotheses. Social visibility exhibited a

significant positive relationship with sustainable buying decisions, indicating that consumers who frequently observe sustainability-related purchases within their social media networks are more likely to engage in similar behavior. This supports the argument that visibility acts as a normalization mechanism that reduces perceived social and psychological costs associated with sustainable consumption. Peer engagement demonstrated a positive but weaker effect. While statistically significant, the relatively smaller coefficient suggests that engagement influences sustainable buying only when it involves meaningful interaction rather than passive exposure. This finding helps explain why high engagement metrics do not always translate into behavioral change.

Perceived influencer credibility emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable buying decisions. Consumers who viewed sustainability-oriented influencers as trustworthy and sincere were significantly more likely to translate exposure into actual purchases. This result highlights the importance of credibility over reach and reinforces concerns about the behavioral consequences of greenwashing. Among the control variables, environmental concern remained significant but with a reduced effect size after accounting for social media variables. Demographic variables such as age, income, and education were not consistently significant, suggesting that social influence mechanisms play a stronger role than demographic characteristics in shaping sustainable buying behavior within digital environments.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how social media shapes actual sustainable buying decisions rather than stated intentions. The findings offer clear evidence that sustainable consumption is not driven solely by individual concern or exposure to sustainability messaging, but is embedded within social influence processes that operate through visibility, credibility, and engagement. Interpreted together, the results reinforce the argument that social media functions as a decision environment in which sustainability is socially negotiated rather than individually reasoned. One of the most salient findings is the strong role of social visibility in predicting sustainable buying behavior. Consumers who frequently observed sustainability-related

purchases within their social media networks were significantly more likely to engage in similar behavior themselves. This supports normative influence perspectives, which suggest that behavior becomes easier to adopt when it is perceived as common and socially endorsed rather than exceptional. In sustainability contexts, where products often involve price premiums or uncertainty regarding impact, visibility appears to reduce psychological resistance by reframing sustainable consumption as a normal choice rather than a moral sacrifice. This finding helps explain why informational sustainability campaigns often underperform when they fail to make behavior socially observable.

The comparatively weaker effect of peer engagement provides a more nuanced insight. While engagement was positively associated with sustainable buying, its influence was modest relative to visibility and influencer credibility. This suggests that not all forms of interaction are equally behavior-shaping. Passive engagement, such as liking or briefly viewing sustainability content, may increase awareness without altering purchasing routines. In contrast, deeper forms of engagement, such as discussion or endorsement, are more likely to prompt behavioral alignment. This distinction helps reconcile mixed findings in prior research, where high engagement metrics have not always translated into meaningful consumption change. Influencer credibility emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainable buying decisions. This finding highlights the centrality of trust and perceived sincerity in sustainability communication. Consumers appear more willing to act when sustainability messages are delivered by influencers who demonstrate consistency between advocacy and personal behavior. This reinforces the idea that sustainable consumption is particularly sensitive to perceived authenticity. In environments characterized by widespread skepticism toward greenwashing, credibility becomes a prerequisite for behavioral influence rather than a supplementary attribute. The result also suggests that influencers operate less as persuasive advertisers and more as behavioral reference points, shaping what consumers view as feasible and socially legitimate choices.

An important implication of the findings is the diminished explanatory power of environmental concern once social media variables are introduced into the model. While concern remains relevant, it does not fully account for sustainable buying behavior when social influence mechanisms are considered. This supports the argument that sustainability-oriented consumption is constrained not by a lack of values but by situational and social conditions that either facilitate or inhibit action. Social media, by amplifying visibility and signaling approval, appears to lower the threshold at which concern is translated into behavior. Taken together, the results challenge intention-centric models of sustainable consumption and emphasize the need to examine behavioral contexts more closely. Rather than assuming that stronger attitudes lead to better outcomes, the findings suggest that sustainable markets are shaped by how consumption is observed, interpreted, and socially validated. By focusing on realized buying decisions, this study contributes behavioral clarity to a literature that has often relied on psychological proxies. In summary, the discussion underscores that sustainable consumption in digital environments is less about persuasion through information and more about normalization through social cues. Visibility makes sustainability visible as behavior, credibility makes it believable, and engagement determines whether it becomes personally relevant. Understanding these dynamics is essential for advancing both theory and practice in sustainable consumption research.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the sustainable consumption literature by shifting analytical attention from attitudinal orientations and purchase intentions to actual buying behavior. Much of the existing research assumes that favorable sustainability attitudes or intentions are sufficient indicators of ethical consumption. The present findings challenge this assumption by demonstrating that social media influence mechanisms explain substantial variance in sustainable buying decisions even after controlling for environmental concern. This suggests that sustainable consumption is better understood as a socially embedded behavior rather than an outcome of individual moral conviction alone. The findings also refine theoretical

understanding of social influence in sustainability contexts. Prior work has often treated social media exposure as a homogeneous construct, implicitly assuming that visibility, engagement, and influencer communication operate similarly. By disentangling these mechanisms, the study shows that they exert distinct behavioral effects. Social visibility functions primarily as a normalization mechanism, reducing perceived deviation from group norms. Influencer credibility serves as a trust-based filter that determines whether sustainability messages translate into action. Peer engagement, by contrast, appears to play a conditional role, influencing behavior only when interaction is meaningful rather than superficial. This differentiation adds conceptual clarity to debates around how digital environments shape ethical consumption.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of regression-based evidence in a literature increasingly dominated by complex structural models. While mediation and latent modeling offer theoretical sophistication, they often obscure direct behavioral relationships. By employing a transparent regression approach, this study provides interpretable estimates of how specific social media factors relate to actual buying behavior. This contributes to ongoing methodological discussions by showing that simpler analytical techniques can yield theoretically meaningful insights when aligned with clear behavioral constructs. Finally, the findings contribute to theory on the attitude–behavior gap by suggesting that the gap is not merely a failure of individual motivation but a reflection of insufficient social reinforcement. When sustainability is visible and socially validated, consumers appear more willing to act on existing concerns. This reframing has implications for how future theories conceptualize barriers to sustainable consumption.

Managerial Implications

For practitioners, the results suggest that effective sustainability communication on social media should prioritize credibility and visibility over message volume. Brands often invest heavily in sustainability messaging without ensuring that such messages are embedded in authentic consumption narratives. The findings indicate that making sustainable behavior socially visible, through real customer experiences and credible endorsements, is

more likely to influence purchasing decisions than abstract claims or informational campaigns. Influencer partnerships should be evaluated primarily on perceived credibility rather than reach or engagement metrics alone. Consumers respond more strongly to influencers who demonstrate consistent, transparent commitment to sustainability over time. Short-term campaigns with influencers perceived as commercially motivated may generate attention but are unlikely to produce lasting behavioral change. Brands should therefore prioritize long-term collaborations that allow influencers to integrate sustainability organically into their content.

The weaker effect of peer engagement highlights the limits of superficial interaction strategies. Metrics such as likes or views may signal awareness but do not necessarily translate into action. Managers should design engagement opportunities that encourage reflection and dialogue, such as storytelling, behind-the-scenes content, or discussions of trade-offs involved in sustainable choices. Such approaches are more likely to foster behavioral alignment rather than symbolic support. For policymakers and sustainability advocates, the findings underscore the importance of leveraging social norms rather than relying solely on moral appeals. Campaigns that highlight the growing prevalence of sustainable purchasing within peer networks may be more effective than those emphasizing individual responsibility alone. Social media offers a unique opportunity to frame sustainability as a shared and socially supported practice rather than a personal sacrifice. Overall, the managerial implications emphasize that sustainable markets are shaped not only by product attributes or consumer values, but by how choices are socially presented, validated, and trusted within digital environments.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers behavioral insight into the role of social media in shaping sustainable buying decisions, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations also point toward productive avenues for future research. First, the study employs a cross-sectional research design, which restricts the ability to draw strong causal inferences. Although the regression results reveal robust associations between social media influence

mechanisms and sustainable buying behavior, the temporal ordering of these relationships cannot be fully established. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine how repeated exposure to sustainability-related content and evolving perceptions of credibility influence buying behavior over time. Such approaches would help clarify whether social media effects accumulate gradually or operate through more immediate behavioral triggers. Second, sustainable buying decisions were measured using self-reported behavior. While the study deliberately focused on realized purchases rather than intentions, self-reports may still be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects. Future studies could strengthen behavioral validity by incorporating objective data sources, such as purchase records, digital receipts, or experimental purchase simulations. Combining survey data with behavioral tracking would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media influence translates into consumption outcomes. Third, the sample consisted of active social media users, which may limit generalizability to consumers with lower levels of digital engagement. As social media increasingly shapes consumption norms, understanding how less-connected or digitally-skeptical consumers respond to sustainability messaging is an important area for future inquiry. Comparative studies across different levels of digital adoption could reveal boundary conditions for social media influence.

Fourth, the study examined social media influence mechanisms at a general level rather than focusing on specific platforms or product categories. While this approach enhances conceptual generalizability, future research could explore whether platform characteristics or product involvement moderate the observed relationships. Sustainable buying decisions may differ substantially between low-involvement goods and high-involvement products, suggesting the value of category-specific analysis. Finally, future research could examine negative or resistant responses to sustainability messaging on social media, such as skepticism, fatigue, or backlash. Understanding when and why social media influence fails may be as important as identifying when it succeeds, particularly in contexts characterized by increasing concern over greenwashing.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how social media shapes sustainable buying decisions by moving beyond intentions and focusing on actual consumer behavior. In doing so, it responds to a long-standing gap in sustainability research, where high levels of expressed concern coexist with inconsistent purchasing outcomes. The findings demonstrate that social media influences sustainable consumption not simply by increasing awareness, but by structuring the social context in which buying decisions are made. The results show that social visibility and influencer credibility play a central role in translating sustainability concerns into action. When sustainable consumption is observable within social networks, it becomes normalized rather than exceptional. Similarly, when sustainability messages are communicated by credible and consistent influencers, consumers are more willing to act on them. In contrast, passive exposure and superficial engagement appear insufficient to drive meaningful behavioral change. These patterns suggest that sustainable buying is less a matter of persuasion through information and more a process of social validation and trust.

By employing a regression-based approach and emphasizing realized buying behavior, the study contributes methodological clarity to a literature often dominated by intention-based models and complex causal structures. The findings reinforce the view that sustainable consumption is socially embedded and shaped by contextual cues rather than driven solely by individual values or moral reasoning. More broadly, the study highlights the evolving role of social media in sustainable markets. As consumption becomes increasingly visible and socially mediated, sustainability is negotiated in public, through shared norms, credible voices, and collective expectations. Understanding these dynamics is essential for scholars seeking to explain ethical consumption and for practitioners aiming to design sustainability strategies that resonate beyond rhetoric. Ultimately, fostering sustainable markets requires not only informed consumers, but social environments that make responsible choices visible, believable, and socially supported.

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