

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

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Abstract. This research seeks to establish the role of social media in changing consumers' buying behaviour and their motivations for purchasing sustainable products and their attitude towards sustainability. The researcher uses in-depth interviews in order to get detailed answers and then uses thematic analysis in order to analyse the data. The sampling technique that was applied in the study was purposive sampling where the participants involved were those that engaged with sustainable content in the social media platforms. The findings pointed out that Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are strong channels that shape the consumers' attitude and behavioural motivations toward sustainable products. The results of this study will contribute to the knowledge of the impacts of social media messages on consumers' attitudes towards sustainability. It is seen that various types of sustainable content are needed on social media and these findings are beneficial for the brands and everyone especially those who want to spread sustainability through social media. These are findings that are useful to both brands and people interested in sustainable development. The research also reveals that social media plays a significant part in the participant's information and social influence to make them purchase sustainable products.

Keywords: *sustainability, social media, consumers' attitude, purchasing motivation*

Introduction

The imbalance in the ecological environment and overconsumption of natural resources has been aggravated by rapid economic growth. This has led to significant environmental concerns such as ozone depletion, global warming, and pollution of water and air (Baloch et al., 2023). According to a study conducted by Miroshnychenko et al. (2019), organisations are implicated in climate change due to their continuous release of carbon dioxide and toxic substances into the air and water. Environmental scientists and activists are urging organisations and individuals to adopt environmentally friendly and sustainable consumption practices. Sustainable consumption practices refer to purchasing and consuming products in an eco-friendly manner and are recognised as a crucial aspect of sustainable development (De Oliveira et al., 2022). Sustainable consumption, identified as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), encompasses the objectives of reducing detrimental environmental and health effects while encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly lifestyles (UN, 2015; Weaver and Lawton, 2004). The selection of goods and services by consumers has both immediate and indirect adverse effects on the environment (Nath and Agrawal, 2023; Gruber and Schlegelmilch, 2014). As a result, it remains essential for businesses to comprehend consumers' motivations regarding the purchase of sustainable products. In recent years, sustainability has become an increasingly significant concern for both consumers and businesses. With growing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of consumerism, there has been a surge in the demand for sustainable products (De Oliveira et al., 2022). This shift in consumer behaviour presented a unique opportunity for businesses to align their offerings with sustainability

principles and cater to the emerging market segment. As a result, understanding what influences consumers' motivation to purchase sustainable products and their overall attitude towards sustainability has become a crucial area of research.

To achieve long-term business goals and profitability, businesses and marketers employ diverse marketing strategies and policies to encourage consumer adoption of environmentally friendly products. Additionally, the influence of environmental movements has had a significant impact on consumer behaviour, environmental concerns, and the purchase of green products (Okadiani et al., 2019). Many companies now utilise various media platforms to attract untapped customers and invest more in green marketing efforts (Liu and Li, 2022), including print media, television, and social media. Among these platforms, social media stands out as a particularly versatile tool for promoting sustainable products compared to others, owing to its combination of individual and mass media attributes (Zafar et al., 2021; Dragomirov, 2020; Shukla et al., 2019). One important feature that has gained prominence in recent years is the role of social media in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviours (Chowdhury et al., 2024). Social media platforms have transformed the way individuals interact, share information, and make purchasing decisions. These platforms provide a virtual space for consumers to connect, express their opinions, and engage in discussions on various topics, including sustainability. Consequently, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for disseminating information, influencing consumers, and driving sustainable consumption.

Malaysia has seen significant growth in social media usage, which amplifies the importance of understanding the role of social media in transforming consumers' motivation to purchase sustainable products. In this regard, consumers' attitude towards sustainability is particularly relevant. Notably, Malaysia is a rapidly developing nation with a diverse consumer base and a burgeoning interest in sustainability. According to a study by Moorthy et al. (2023), Malaysian consumers have shown an increasing preference for sustainable products and a willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly options. This provides a favourable environment for examining the influence of social media on consumers' sustainable purchasing behaviours in the Malaysian context. Despite the increasing interest in sustainable consumption, many consumers struggle to align their environmental concerns with their purchasing behaviour (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Social media has emerged as a powerful platform for promoting sustainability awareness and influencing attitudes. It provides a virtual space for consumers to connect, share information, and engage in discussions on various topics, including sustainability (Zafar et al., 2021). However, the specific role of social media in shaping purchase motivations for sustainable products needs to be better understood (Johnstone and Lindh, 2018). Previous research has mainly focused on quantitative metrics such as reach, likes, and shares, overlooking the impact of different content types on consumer attitudes towards sustainability, such as visual posts, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content. Understanding these qualitative aspects is crucial as they provide deeper insights into how consumers emotionally and cognitively process sustainability messages on social media (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Additionally, the role of social proof and peer influence in motivating sustainable purchases through social media interactions, such as likes, shares, and comments, has yet to be thoroughly explored (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to fill these research gaps by exploring how different types of social media content influence consumer attitudes towards sustainability and their

motivation to purchase sustainable products. By addressing this gap, this research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how social media can be leveraged to promote sustainable consumption and bridge the attitude-behaviour gap in sustainability.

Literature review

The role of social media in transforming attitude on sustainability

The transformative power of social media in shaping attitudes towards sustainability has been increasingly recognised in recent years. Social media platforms have been shown to significantly impact sustainable purchasing attitudes by promoting environmental responsibility. Zafar et al. (2021) argued that social media usage and browsing positively influence sustainable purchasing attitudes through mechanisms like trust in social media and perceived environmental effectiveness. This influence is further moderated by users' trust in the platforms and their perception of environmental benefits, emphasising the role of social media as a crucial tool in fostering environmental awareness and behaviour change. Social media also plays a crucial role in corporate sustainability strategies. According to Al Adwan and Altrjman (2023), businesses increasingly use social media to engage with stakeholders, gather feedback, and develop sustainability strategies. The research indicates that effective social media marketing can enhance brand sustainability by fostering stakeholder engagement and collecting valuable insights for strategy development. This highlights the dual role of social media in both promoting sustainability and driving corporate sustainability initiatives. Finally, social media's impact on sustainability is reflected in its ability to create environmental awareness and influence public attitudes. Studies like those by Simeone and Scarpato (2020) showed that social media can both positively and negatively affect sustainable consumption behaviours, with the potential to homogenise consumption patterns in ways that may not always be environmentally beneficial. However, the overall trend suggests that social media remains a powerful medium for promoting sustainability and driving positive environmental behaviours. Therefore, social media significantly influences attitudes and behaviours towards corporate strategy development, and public awareness. Its role in transforming sustainable attitudes highlights its importance as a tool for fostering a more environmentally conscious society.

Sustainable products

Next, Sustainable products are those designed, sourced, manufactured, and distributed in a manner that minimises their negative environmental and social impacts across the product life cycle while also maximising their positive contributions to people and the planet (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014). They are produced and consumed in a manner that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. They are environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable (Karabulut, 2019). They are ecologically friendly, made from renewable or recyclable materials, have low energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and are manufactured using environmentally responsible practices (Truong and Pinkse, 2016). They are characterised by their reduced environmental impact, resource efficiency, recyclability, use of renewable materials, energy efficiency, and contribution to social well-being

throughout the product life cycle (Taghian and D'Souza, 2007). In this research, sustainable products are defined as goods or services that are designed, produced, and consumed in a manner that minimises negative environmental impacts, promotes social responsibility, and contributes to sustainable development. These products include clothing, furniture, electronics, cleaning products and sustainable transport options.

Customers purchase motivation

Customer purchase motivation is another significant area of research in the field of consumer behaviour. It refers to the factors influencing consumers' decisions to buy products or services. Understanding these motivations is crucial for businesses to effectively market their products and meet consumer needs (Srivastava and Thaichon, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2021). Customer purchase motivation is a complex concept that involves exploring the factors influencing consumer buying decisions. Factors such as perceived value, social influence, and individual psychological states influence customer purchase intention. These factors are categorised into widely accepted ones (e.g., perceived value and satisfaction) and more debatable ones (e.g., cultural influences). Understanding these factors helps businesses customise their marketing strategies to effectively meet consumer needs (Aiswarya and Krishnan, 2022). Furthermore, customer purchase motivation encompasses the various drivers that compel consumers to make buying decisions. The influence of social identity on customer engagement and subsequent purchase intentions has been examined in online communities, showing that both person-to-person and person-to-community identifications significantly impact engagement levels, which, in turn, enhance purchase intentions (Prentice et al., 2019). This aligns with findings in social commerce platforms where both hedonic (emotional) and utilitarian (rational) motivations positively affect online purchase intentions. The role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social values as moderators, as well as customer engagement as a mediator, further highlight the complex interplay of factors driving online purchasing behaviour (Akram et al., 2021). In addition, social media, sustainable products, and consumer purchase motivation are intricately linked. Social media catalyses transforming attitudes toward sustainability, which in turn drives the demand for sustainable products and influences consumer purchase motivations. Understanding this concept is crucial for businesses and marketers aiming to promote sustainable practices and products effectively.

Materials and Methods

This study uses qualitative research methodology to capture the richness and depth of participants' experiences and perceptions. In-depth interviews will be conducted to gather data, allowing participants to express their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes towards social media and sustainable consumption. Specifically, in-depth interviews are well-suited for capturing the richness and depth of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding sustainable social media content. It allows for a deeper exploration of complex phenomena, a participant-centred approach, and the generation of comprehensive and contextually rich insights that contribute to a more profound understanding of consumers' behaviours, attitudes, and intentions in the context of sustainability and social media. This method enables the exploration of participants' narratives, enabling a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). In this study, the phenomenology approach was applied to gain a deep

understanding of participants' lived experiences with sustainable social media content. To apply phenomenology, researcher conducted in-depth interviews with participants, allowing them to share their experiences freely and in detail. During the interviews, the researcher utilized open-ended questions to encourage participants to describe their encounters with sustainable social media content and how it influenced their behaviour, attitudes, and motivations. For this study, researcher utilizes purposive sampling with a sample size of 10 to 15 to reach data saturation. Based on the defined research objectives, researcher identified the relevant criteria for participants. Participants were recruited through physical interaction and required to meet the following inclusion criteria: (i). Regular social media users, (ii). 18 and above, and (iii). Have purchased or intend to purchase sustainable products, and this study take places in Kuala Lumpur and utilizes an online platform for conducting in-depth interviews. The online platform chosen for the interviews are Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. These platforms allow researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews virtually, ensuring visual and verbal communication between the interviewer and the participant. The use of an online setting eliminates geographical constraints, enabling researcher to reach a wider range of participants from different locations within Kuala Lumpur.

For this research, researcher adopts Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach for data analysis. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. In the context of this study on consumers' experiences with sustainable social media content, the data saturation is number 12, where is there's no new theme emerged.

Results and Discussion

The participants in this research study were carefully selected based on specific criteria. One crucial characteristic of the participants is their wide understanding of social media. These individuals are knowledgeable and familiar with various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. They also have a significant level of engagement with these platforms, either as regular users or as individuals with a deep understanding of their functionalities and impact on society. The participants' wide understanding of both social media and sustainability is instrumental in exploring the intersection between these two domains. Their diverse perspectives and insights provided valuable input into the research study, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how social media influences and contributes to sustainable practices, behaviours, and awareness (*Table 1*).

Table 1. List of participants.

No	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Career	Timr spent
1	Participant 1	35	Male	Degree in Civil Engineering	Oil & Gas Business	4 hours a day, every day
2	Participant 2	37	Female	Degree in Mass Communications	Media Comms Executive	4 hours a day, every day
3	Participant 3	35	Male	Master in International Relations	Human Resource, Government Affairs, Strategy & Planning, Reputation Management.	4 hours a day, every day
4	Participant 4	35	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science, Master in Counselling	Communicator in the Energy Industry & a Certified Counsellor	3 to 5 hours in a day, everyday
5	Participant 5	35	Male	Master in Engineering	Oil & Gas Engineer	4-5 hours a day, everyday
6	Participant 6	45	Female	Degree in Business	Marketer and Communicator in	4 hours a day,

7	Participant 7	40	Female	Admin, majoring in Marketing Bachelor's Degree (Hons.) TESL	the Energy Industry Media Comms Executive in the Energy Industry	every day 4 hours in a day, every day
8	Participant 8	32	Male	Master in Science (Managerial Communications), Bachelor of Accountancy (Hons)	Business and News Journalist and Communication Executive	3-4 hours a day, everyday
9	Participant 9	59	Male	Master of Science (Political Science)	Business Journalist and Corporate Communications Practitioner	4 hours a day
10	Participant 10	41	Female	Degree in Mass Communications	Public Relations Practitioner	4-6 Hours a Day
11	Participant 11	30	Male	Bachelor in Mass Communications	Digital Marketer and Consultant	5-10 hours a day
12	Participant 12	49	Female	Degree in Communications Studies	Former Broadcast Journalist, News Anchor. Now a Media Communications Practitioner	Throughout the day, daily

Types of social media content that affect attitudes on sustainability

Research Question 1 (RQ1) in this study aimed to investigate the sustainable social media content types that affect participants' attitudes towards sustainability. The study focused on three specific content types which are educational content, user-generated content (UGC), and marketing content. By examining these content types, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of how different types of content shape consumers' attitudes related to sustainability. *Table 2* shows the themes obtained from in-depth interviews with participants regarding the types of social media content affecting participants' attitudes towards sustainability.

Table 2. Themes obtained from in-depth interviews with participants regarding the types of social media content affecting participants' attitudes towards sustainability.

Item	Theme derived
1	Educational content
2	Environment and nature
3	Renewable energy
4	Climate change
5	User generated content
6	Sustainable lifestyle
7	Sustainable food
8	Marketing content
9	Sustainable fashion
10	Eco-friendly products

Environment and nature

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that environment and nature content have a significant attitude change among participants. Participants expressed a deep appreciation for content that reminds them of the importance of protecting the environment and preserving the Earth's natural wonders. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, as outlined below:

“I follow accounts that post breathtaking photos of nature and wildlife to remind me of the beauty we need to protect.” (Participant 2)

“I love seeing sustainable travel content that promotes eco-friendly destinations and activities. It inspires me to be part of the movement.” (Participant 9)

The first theme, environment and nature content was found to prompt participants to recognise the importance of environmental preservation and develop a strong appreciation for nature. This aligns with the idea of using social media to foster environmental awareness, as mentioned in the literature review by Kim (2012).

Renewable energy

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that content on renewable energy has a positive attitude change towards participants. Participants expressed a genuine interest in learning about different forms of renewable energy, such as solar power, wind energy, hydropower, and electric vehicles. They sought out content that provided insights into the benefits, feasibility, and practical applications of these renewable energy sources. The credibility and reliability of these findings are substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“I follow accounts that highlight innovative green technologies and inventions that contribute to a more sustainable future.” (Participant 8)

“I find YouTube videos about EV cars to be extremely helpful in creating awareness and understanding the pros and cons of electric vehicles.” (Participant 5)

Similarly, the second theme, renewable energy content piqued participants' interest in learning about different forms of renewable energy and how they can be applied practically. This corresponds to the educational content mentioned in the literature review by Kapoor et al. (2021), where informative posts, articles, and videos on social media were found to effectively educate users about sustainability issues.

Climate change

The findings from the thematic analysis demonstrate that content centred around climate change has a profound impact on participants' attitudes, leading to meaningful change in their perspectives. Participants reported an increased awareness of the issue and a greater sense of urgency to take action. This suggests that climate change content on social media has the potential to positively influence attitudes. The credibility and reliability of these findings are substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“Through the educational content, I learned about the causes and consequences of climate change. I now understand how greenhouse gas emissions contribute to global warming and the need for sustainable solutions to mitigate its effects.” (Participant 5)

“I became more aware of climate change and the need for environmental protection. The educational content made me realise the urgency of addressing the issue.” (Participant 10)

Furthermore, the third theme, climate change content raised participants' awareness and motivated them to act. This aligns with the idea of using social media as a platform for disseminating information about sustainability and encouraging positive behavioural changes, as mentioned in the literature review by Kim (2012).

Sustainable lifestyle

The findings from the thematic analysis unveiled that content pertaining to sustainable lifestyle has a substantial influence on attitudes among participants, resulting in significant attitude change. Participants expressed a strong desire to learn practical tips for minimising waste in their daily lives, as well as finding inspiration from others who have successfully adopted a zero-waste lifestyle. Participants actively sought out accounts and content that provided them with valuable insights and guidance on reducing waste. The credibility and reliability of these findings are substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“I follow accounts that provide tips on reducing waste and living a zero-waste lifestyle. It's helpful for incorporating eco-friendly habits into my routine.” (Participant 5)

“Kebun Urai and Mewalik's YouTube videos on sustainable farming and permaculture have opened my eyes to the importance of regenerative agriculture. It has influenced my perspective on food and sustainability.” (Participant 2)

Moreover, the fourth theme, sustainable lifestyle content in the findings influenced participants to adopt practical tips and strategies for reducing waste in their daily lives. This is consistent with the role of educational content in raising awareness and disseminating information about sustainability, as highlighted in the literature review by Naidoo et al. (2011).

Sustainable food

The findings from the thematic analysis suggest that social media content on sustainable farming has emerged as a valuable platform for promoting and advocating for environmentally friendly agricultural practices. The findings highlight the effectiveness of social media in raising awareness about sustainable farming and providing individuals with valuable information and resources. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“Smart farming has been a topic that I've been following closely on social media, particularly on YouTube. There are several channels dedicated to showcasing innovative technologies and practices in agriculture.” (Participant 9)

“Kebun Urai and Mewalik's YouTube videos on sustainable farming and permaculture have opened my eyes to the importance of regenerative agriculture. It has influenced my perspective on food and sustainability.” (Participant 2)

Similarly, the fifth theme, sustainable food content raised awareness about eco-friendly farming practices, which aligns with the notion of user-generated content providing valuable information and learning about sustainability, as mentioned in the literature review by Naidoo et al. (2011).

Sustainable fashion

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that sustainable fashion content led to significant changes in attitudes among participants. Participants expressed a desire to align their fashion choices with their values and actively sought out information and recommendations for brands that prioritise sustainability in their production processes and supply chains. They appreciated content that showcased ethical and sustainable fashion brands, including their practices, materials, and social impact. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“I find inspiration from fashion influencers who show that sustainable fashion is not only responsible but also stylish.” (Participant 8)

“A lot of social media content on sustainability promotes eco-friendly products such as Uniqlo and their recycling campaign.” (Participant 1)

Participants in the study demonstrated a clear preference for fashion that aligns with their ethical values, highlighting the influence of sustainable fashion content in shaping these attitudes. The role of social media and influencers in promoting sustainable fashion is a critical factor in this attitudinal shift. Participants specifically mentioned the impact of social media content in raising awareness about eco-friendly brands and their practices.

Eco-friendly products

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that eco-friendly products are one of the social media contents that have a significant change in attitudes among participants. They mentioned that seeing brands actively promoting eco-friendly options inspired them to seek out sustainable alternatives in their daily lives. The content highlighted the positive impact of sustainable choices and has the potential to positively influence attitudes. The credibility and reliability of these findings are substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“Marketing content on sustainability motivates me to make more sustainable choices. Seeing brands actively promoting eco-friendly options inspires me to seek out sustainable alternatives in my daily life.” (Participant 5)

“I find green products content empowering when it highlights the positive impact of sustainable choices. It reminds me that my individual actions contribute to a larger movement towards a more sustainable future.” (Participant 3)

Participants indicated that social media content promoting eco-friendly products influenced their attitudes and behaviours significantly. The promotional content not

only raised awareness but also inspired actionable changes in their daily lives. The study also reveals that content highlighting the positive impact of sustainable choices plays a crucial role in reinforcing these attitudes.

Role of social media in influencing attitudes towards sustainability

Research question two delves into the exploration of the role of social media in influencing consumer attitudes towards sustainability. The findings shed light on the various ways in which social media shapes and impacts individuals' beliefs, and behaviours related to sustainability. By examining the responses of participants, five themes emerge regarding the role of social media in influencing consumers' attitudes towards sustainability (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes obtained from in-depth interviews with participants regarding the role of social media in influencing participants' attitudes towards sustainability.

Item	Theme derived
1	Create awareness
2	Platform for engagement
3	Social pressure and norms
4	Access to information
5	Platform for education

Create awareness

The finding from the thematic analysis shows that social media serves as a platform for awareness and education on sustainability. Participants acknowledged the role of social media in providing valuable information and raising awareness about sustainability issues. They mentioned learning about products and practices through influencers and environmental organisations on platforms like Instagram. In this regard social media has ease access to content on sustainability with videos and articles on environmental issues and helping users understand the importance of making sustainable choices. The credibility and reliability of these findings are substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“Seeing posts about climate change and sustainability on social media has made me more conscious of my environmental impact. It has encouraged me to make more sustainable choices in my daily life.” (Participant 6)

“Social media has played a crucial role in educating me about sustainable alternatives. I follow eco-bloggers who share tips and resources on reducing waste and adopting greener habits.” (Participant 10)

The first theme that emerged from the research highlights how social media serves as a platform for creating awareness about sustainability issues. The easy sharing of information on social media enables the dissemination of sustainable content to a vast audience, effectively raising awareness and educating consumers about environmental challenges and sustainable practices. This aligns with previous studies by Prakash et al. (2021) which emphasised the significance of social media as an educational platform for sustainability.

Platform for engagement

The findings from the thematic analysis showed that that social media serves as a platform for engagement on sustainability. Participants expressed how social media connects them with individuals and communities who are passionate about sustainability. This sense of connection empowers participants to act towards a greener future. They discover local sustainability initiatives, participate in clean-up drives, and collaborate with others to contribute to a larger cause. The reliability of these findings is substantiated by the following excerpts from participants' responses:

“Social media connects me with like-minded individuals and communities who are passionate about sustainability. It gives me a sense of belonging and inspires me to take action towards a greener future.” (Participant 5)

“Through social media, I've discovered local sustainability events and initiatives. It has empowered me to participate in clean-up drives, plant trees, and collaborate with others to make a tangible impact.” (Participant 9)

Another theme that became apparent from the findings is the role of social media in facilitating engaging discussions and enabling individuals to express their opinions on sustainability topics. The interactive nature of social media platforms allows consumers to participate in conversations, share experiences, and exchange ideas, fostering a sense of community and collective action towards sustainability. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also highlighted the sense of community that social media platforms create, fostering the development of like-minded individuals striving towards sustainability.

Social pressure and norms

The findings from the thematic analysis showed that social pressure and norms on social media play a significant role in shaping participants' attitudes towards sustainability. Participants mentioned feeling social pressure to conform to sustainable trends showcased on social media. Seeing peers promoting eco-friendly brands or participating in environmental initiatives influences their behaviour and encourages them to follow suit. The perceived norms and expectations on social media shape participants' attitudes towards sustainability and influence their decision-making processes. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“I feel pressure to conform to sustainable trends showcased on social media. When I see my peers promoting eco-friendly brands or participating in environmental initiatives, it influences me to do the same.” (Participant 9)

“Social media has created a sense of accountability. I don't want to be seen as environmentally irresponsible, so I try to align my behaviour with the sustainable practices promoted on these platforms.” (Participant 2)

The third prevailing theme that emerged from the research is the influence of social media in shaping social norms and exerting social pressure. By observing others' sustainable behaviours and choices on social media, consumers are more likely to

perceive sustainability as a desirable and socially acceptable norm, which positively influences their own attitudes and behaviours. This aligns with the work of Bhattacharya et al. (2009) as well as Denegri-Knott et al. (2006) on the impact of peer influence and social comparison in driving sustainable behaviours.

Access to information

The findings from the thematic analysis showed that access to information through social media plays a significant role in shaping participants' attitudes towards sustainability. Social media connects participants to rich information and resources related to sustainability. They can find tips, guides, and tutorials on sustainable living, eco-friendly products, and recycling practices. This accessibility helps consumers make informed choices and empowers them to lead more sustainable lifestyles. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“Social media has made me more aware and conscious of the environmental impact of my choices. I regularly come across posts and articles on the effects of certain industries or practices on the planet.” (Participant 3)

“Through their posts, I've learned about eco-friendly materials, and it has motivated me to explore second-hand shopping and support sustainable fashion brands.” (Participant 2)

Another key theme highlighted in the findings is social media serves as a valuable educational platform, providing consumers with easy access to a wealth of sustainability-related information. The convenience of accessing content anytime and anywhere enhances consumers' exposure to sustainable practices and solutions, leading to increased knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues. This finding is consistent with the research by Prakash et al. (2021) and Denegri-Knott et al. (2006) on the educational role of social media in shaping sustainable attitudes.

Platform for education

The findings from the thematic analysis showed that social media plays a significant role as a platform of education in shaping participants' attitudes towards sustainability. Participants stated through social media, they can easily access information about sustainability issues. Other users can share information, articles, videos, and graphics related to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This helps educate and inform consumers about the importance of sustainable practices. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“Petronas' social media content has really opened my eyes to the importance of sustainable energy.” (Participant 5)

“Social media content has educated me about the environmental impact of the energy sector and the importance of transitioning towards renewable sources.” (Participant 4)

Another prominent theme in the research is social media’s role as a platform of education. It enables consumers to witness the collective impact of sustainable actions. When consumers observe others making sustainable choices and contributing to positive environmental change, it strengthens their attitudes towards sustainability by emphasising the broader social impact of their actions. This finding is consistent with the work of Ostic et al. (2021) on the social impact of sustainable behaviours observed on social media.

Consumers’ motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media

Research question three explored the intention of participants to purchase sustainable products through social media. The findings contribute to the understanding of how social media affects what people think and feel about sustainable products and whether they want to buy them. Understanding customers’ motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media is beneficial for both brands and consumers. Brands can create better strategies for connecting with their customers. They can tailor their content to resonate with consumers' values, aspirations, and desires for a positive impact (Table 4).

Table 4. Themes obtained from in-depth interviews with participants on their motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media.

Item	Theme derived
1	Social influence
2	Credibility and trust
3	Emotional appeal
4	Support for small business
5	Convenient and accessibility

Social influence

The findings from the thematic analysis showed that participants emphasised the importance of reviews and experiences from others when deciding to purchase sustainable products. They rely on the feedback and testimonials shared by others to gain insights into the product's performance, quality, and sustainability claims. The following responses from the participants support this theme:

“I rely heavily on reviews and experiences shared by others. Social media platforms provide a wealth of information, and I take into account the opinions and feedback of others before making my decision.” (Participant 5)

“I'm cautious about paid promotional content on social media. I'm more likely to trust testimonial reviews from influencers who have genuinely tested the product before recommending it.” (Participant 8)

The first theme that emerged from the research is that social media serves as a social cue, and peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping consumers’ perceptions and intentions to purchase sustainable products, as highlighted in the research by Bhattacharya et al. (2008). Observing and engaging with peers’ sustainable consumption behaviours on social media can create a positive social influence, leading consumers to adopt sustainable practices.

Credibility and trust

The findings from the thematic analysis also reveal that creativity causes participants' motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media and the trust they have towards the source of information. The credibility and trustworthiness of the information shared on social media play a crucial role in their decision-making processes. Thus, if consumers perceive the information to be reliable and trustworthy, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards sustainable products and, consequently, have a higher intention to purchase them. The following responses from the participants support this theme:

“I find social media to be a great platform for discovering sustainable products. I trust the information and recommendations I find there, especially from reputable sources.” (Participant 4)

“Yes, I generally trust the information and recommendations related to sustainable products on social media. I believe that influencers and content creators who specialise in sustainability are knowledgeable and provide valuable insights.” (Participant 7)

The third theme that emerged from the research highlighted the importance of trustworthiness towards information shared on social media is vital in influencing consumers' perceptions and motivations to purchase sustainable products, as stated by Husnain and Toor (2017). Consumers perceive content from reputable influencers, brands, and expert reviews on social media as trustworthy and credible, enhancing their confidence in making sustainable purchases.

Emotional appeal

The findings from the thematic analysis also reveal that participants' motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media is due to emotional appeals, such as inspiring stories, impactful visuals, and personal narratives. They evoke positive emotions towards sustainable products which can influence consumers' intention to make sustainable purchases. The following responses from the participants support this theme:

“When I see others sharing their experiences with sustainable products on social media, it gives me a sense of belonging and encourages me to join the movement.” (Participant 5)

“I feel a sense of pride when I purchase sustainable products that are featured on social media. It's like contributing to a greater cause.” (Participant 8)

Another notable theme in the research is, social media content often employs emotional appeals to evoke positive emotions related to sustainable products, as highlighted by Geuens et al. (2011). Emotional engagement through social media creates a personal connection with consumers, motivating their intentions to purchase sustainable products.

Support for small business

The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that participants are motivated to purchase sustainable products through social media to show support for local and independent business that sells sustainable products such as cosmetic or cleaning products. They value supporting these businesses to contribute to the growth of these businesses. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“Social media allows me to engage directly with sustainable brands and ask questions about their products.” (Participant 10)

“Social media is where I find out about new sustainable cosmetic brands. I love supporting independent businesses that use natural ingredients and have a positive impact on the environment.” (Participant 6)

Participants expressed that supporting small businesses through their purchases is not just about acquiring products but also about contributing to the growth of these businesses. This support is viewed to foster economic development within local communities and promote sustainable practices. By choosing to buy from small, independent businesses, consumers feel they are making a positive impact, both environmentally and economically.

Convenience and accessibility

The findings from the thematic analysis reveal that participants' motivation to purchase sustainable products on social media because it offers convenient and accessible shopping experiences. They can browse and purchase sustainable products directly through social media posts, links, or integrated online shops, saving them time and effort compared to traditional retail channels. The validity of these findings is supported by specific responses from the participants, which are outlined below:

“Social media transformed my shopping experience when it comes to sustainability. With just a few clicks, I can explore their offerings and make a purchase. It's so accessible and hassle-free.” (Participant 5)

“Social media acts as a one-stop shop for sustainable products.” (Participant 2)

Participants highlighted how social media has revolutionised their shopping experiences, particularly concerning sustainability. The ability to quickly access a variety of sustainable products without the need to visit multiple physical stores or navigate numerous websites enhances the overall shopping experience. It centralises access and simplifies the search process for consumers, making it easier to find and compare sustainable options. By curating and showcasing sustainable products from different brands, social media platforms streamline the decision-making process for consumers.

Conclusion

The discussion integrates the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences participants' attitudes towards sustainability and their motivations to purchase sustainable products. Social media emerges as a powerful platform that informs, influences, and empowers consumers in their pursuit of sustainability. Brands and organisations can leverage the insights from this study to develop effective social media strategies that inspire and empower consumers to make sustainable choices. Likewise, consumers can utilise social media as a platform to discover reliable information, engage with like-minded communities, and align their behaviours with sustainable practices. Overall, the study contributes valuable knowledge to the growing body of research on the role of social media in promoting sustainability and encouraging positive behavioural changes among individuals. As social media continues to evolve and play an increasingly significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours, it becomes imperative for businesses, individuals, and policymakers to harness its potential for driving positive change towards a more sustainable future. In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes participants' attitudes towards sustainability. The findings emphasise the importance of tailoring content to meet customers' preferences and expectations. Social media serves as a powerful platform for raising awareness, fostering engagement, and influencing attitudes towards sustainability. Brands can leverage these insights to develop effective social media strategies that inspire and empower consumers to make sustainable choices. Likewise, consumers can utilise social media as a platform to discover reliable information, engage with like-minded communities, and align their behaviours with sustainable practices.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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