IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Amidst growing environmental consciousness, businesses are progressively embracing sustainable practices, with social media emerging as a pivotal instrument for fostering eco-friendly consumer behaviours. This study delves into the impact of social media on sustainable consumption from a marketing perspective. Leveraging social media analytics, the research scrutinizes the impact of sustainability campaigns, pinpointing key performance indicators for successful engagement. The paper confronts challenges related to sustaining authentic sustainability narratives on social media and suggests strategies to fortify brand credibility. Cross-cultural perspectives are explored, shedding light on how social media shapes sustainable consumption behaviours globally.

Focusing on the attitudes and behaviours of young consumers in the realm of sustainable consumption, this study employs a quantitative and descriptive methodology through an online survey with 159 respondents. The results underscore that millennials exhibit genuine environmental concern and display a readiness to invest more in environmentally friendly products, notably in segments like clothing, fashion, food, and personal care items. These findings hold substantial implications for marketers, underscoring the imperative to devise refined communication strategies via social media platforms to stimulate heightened adoption of sustainable products among the younger demographic.

In essence, as environmental awareness burgeons, this research underscores the increasing role of social media in steering sustainable practices within businesses. Moreover, it provides nuanced insights into the attitudes of younger generations towards sustainable consumption, offering valuable guidance for marketers navigating the landscape of eco-conscious consumerism. As industries evolve toward greater sustainability, understanding the dynamic interplay between social media, marketing strategies, and consumer behaviour becomes indispensable for fostering a more environmentally conscious marketplace.

Key Words: Social Media, Marketing, Sustainable, Consumption.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in global consciousness towards the impact of human activities on the environment. This heightened awareness is driven by various factors, including the escalating threats of climate change, deforestation, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources.

Individuals are becoming more cognizant of their ecological footprint and the consequences of unsustainable practices. Educational initiatives, widespread access to information through digital media, and the advocacy efforts of environmental organizations contribute to this awareness. As people witness the tangible effects of environmental degradation, such as extreme weather events and biodiversity loss, a sense of urgency has emerged, compelling individuals to reconsider their consumption patterns and lifestyle choices.

Governments, businesses, and communities are also responding to this heightened awareness by implementing policies, adopting sustainable practices, and promoting eco-friendly initiatives. The growing environmental awareness serves as a catalyst for collective action, encouraging a shift towards more sustainable and responsible behaviours that aim to mitigate the negative impacts on the planet. Ultimately, this awareness plays a crucial role in fostering a global commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.
Adoption of sustainable practices by businesses

The adoption of sustainable practices by businesses reflects a strategic shift towards environmentally conscious and socially responsible operations. Recognizing the long-term impacts of industrial activities on the planet and society, businesses are increasingly integrating sustainability into their core practices. This involves incorporating eco-friendly technologies, reducing carbon footprints, implementing ethical supply chain practices, and prioritizing social responsibility. Sustainable business practices not only contribute to mitigating environmental degradation but also address the growing expectations of consumers who seek products and services aligned with ecological values.

Businesses adopting sustainability are often driven by a combination of ethical considerations, regulatory requirements, and the realization that sustainable practices can enhance long-term profitability and resilience. The transition to sustainability is a multifaceted approach that embraces ecological, social, and economic dimensions, demonstrating a commitment to a harmonious coexistence between business operations and the broader environment. This evolution reflects a paradigm shift where businesses recognize their role as stewards of the planet and catalysts for positive societal change.

Significance of social media in promoting eco-friendly behaviours

The significance of social media in promoting eco-friendly behaviours lies in its unparalleled reach, influence, and ability to shape public attitudes towards sustainability. Social media platforms serve as dynamic channels for disseminating information, fostering community engagement, and catalysing collective action. They provide a real-time, global platform for individuals, organizations, and businesses to share and amplify messages related to environmental conservation, climate action, and sustainable living.

Through visually compelling content, campaigns, and viral challenges, social media effectively raises awareness about pressing environmental issues. It empowers individuals to adopt eco-friendly practices by providing accessible information, tips, and success stories. The interactive nature of social media encourages dialogue, creating virtual communities dedicated to environmental causes.

Furthermore, social media platforms amplify the impact of environmental initiatives, allowing them to transcend geographical boundaries. Sustainable businesses leverage these platforms to showcase their eco-friendly products and practices, influencing consumer choices. The ability to share experiences, opinions, and testimonials on social media fosters a sense of environmental responsibility and accountability.

In essence, social media acts as a catalyst for a global eco-conscious movement, connecting diverse individuals and communities under a shared commitment to sustainable living. Its significance lies in its capacity to transform environmental awareness into tangible, widespread behavioural change, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and resilient future.

Importance of sustainable consumption

The importance of sustainable consumption cannot be overstated in the current global context. Here are key reasons highlighting its significance:

- **Environmental Preservation:** Sustainable consumption minimizes the environmental impact of human activities. It reduces resource depletion, lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and helps preserve biodiversity. By choosing eco-friendly products and adopting responsible consumption habits, individuals contribute to a healthier planet.

- **Mitigating Climate Change:** Climate change avoidance depends greatly on sustainable consumption behaviours. Reducing carbon footprints, fostering renewable energy, and selecting energy-efficient products ultimately lead to a more environmentally friendly and resilient world.
Resource Conservation: Sustainable consumption promotes responsible resource use. By opting for products with longer lifespans, recycling, and minimizing waste generation, individuals contribute to the conservation of finite resources and reduce the overall environmental burden.

Social and Economic Equity: Sustainable consumption often involves supporting fair trade practices and ethical production methods. This promotes social justice by making sure that workers obtain fair pay and work in safe conditions. Additionally, sustainable practices might help local economies and communities.

Health and Well-being: Many sustainable products prioritize health and well-being. Choosing organic and locally sourced foods, as well as products free from harmful chemicals, can have positive effects on individual health. Sustainable consumption aligns with a holistic approach to personal well-being.

Long-Term Economic Stability: Sustainable consumption contributes to long-term economic stability by fostering industries that prioritize environmental and social responsibility. It encourages innovation in green technologies and promotes the development of sustainable business models, ultimately creating a more resilient economy.

Educational Value: Embracing sustainable consumption involves learning about the environmental and social implications of consumer choices. This increased awareness fosters a sense of responsibility and encourages a more informed and conscious approach to decision-making.

Global Collaboration: Sustainable consumption is a shared responsibility on a global scale. By adopting eco-friendly practices, individuals contribute to a collective effort to address global challenges. It encourages collaboration between individuals, communities, businesses, and governments towards common sustainability goals.

Problem Statement

1. Need to understand the impact of social media on sustainable consumption
2. Importance for marketers to develop effective strategies

Objectives

1. Explore the influence of social media on sustainable consumption
2. Analyse social media analytics and its influence on sustainability campaigns

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social media in promoting sustainable concepts and attitudes is still in its early stages of development (McKeown and Shearer, 2019). McKeown and Shearer (2019) noted that Kapoor et al.'s (2018) review of social media research did not provide insights into its impact on consumers' sustainable perceptions and behaviours. Scholars emphasize that a lack of information can hinder consumers from purchasing sustainable products, affecting individuals at various psychological levels (Cerri et al., 2018; Testa et al., 2015). Achieving sustainability requires education, necessitating the collective efforts of diverse social actors (Sahakian and Seyfang, 2018; Xu et al., 2018). Chen et al. (2019) highlighted the limited investigation into media's role in various sustainable actions. Understanding the dynamic forces for an effective campaign promoting socially responsible behaviour is crucial (Nguyen et al., 2016, 2017). Exploring new determinants for provoking a sustainable purchasing attitude seems imperative.

To address this research gap, this study aims to uncover factors influencing sustainable purchasing attitudes within the context of social media. It examines the role of psychological aspects (e.g., drive for environmental responsibility, perceived trust in social media, and perceived environmental effectiveness) as underlying mechanisms and boundary factors. The study builds upon social learning theory, suggesting that exposure to environmental information on social media enhances users' concern and reliance, leading to a drive for environmental responsibility and sustainable purchasing attitudes. Focusing explicitly on sustainable purchasing attitudes driven by environmental responsibility, this study
employs predictors such as usage, browsing, and trust to unveil the role of social media. Incorporating perceived environmental effectiveness addresses the under-considered phenomenon for deeper insights (Joshi and Rahman, 2019).

The importance of social media's influence on consumer behaviour was highlighted by Wang, Y., & Zhang, L. (2012), who highlighted how user-generated content and peer recommendations on sites like Facebook and Twitter influence consumers' decisions to buy. They stress the value of social media in promoting engagement with sustainable consumption behaviours and knowledge dissemination.

Social media marketing methods for sustainable consumption were highlighted by Pomering, A., and Dolnicar, S. (2009). These strategies examine social media marketing approaches for encouraging sustainable consumption. They talk about using user-generated content, influencer relationships, and content marketing to spread the word about eco-friendly products and sustainability challenges. The writers stress the importance of narrative in promoting customer interaction and brand values.

Developing Brand Authenticity and Trust: Hajli, N. (2014) looked at how social media may help develop brand authenticity and trust, especially when it comes to sustainability. In order to effectively communicate sustainability initiatives and corporate social responsibility efforts to consumers, the study highlights the significance of authenticity and openness. Hajli talks on the ways in which social media platforms help businesses interact with customers in a genuine way and build trust by having deep conversations.

Leveraging Peer Influence and User Engagement: Voyer, B. G., & Koles, B. (2018) investigate how social media peer influence and user engagement contribute to sustainable consumption. They draw attention to how peer recommendations and user-generated content affect customer attitudes and behaviours around sustainability. The study talks about how social media platforms encourage communication and social engagement, which in turn spurs group action and behavioural change.

From a marketing standpoint, this assessment of the research emphasizes the important role that social media plays in encouraging sustainable consumption. Marketers may interact with customers, establish brand credibility, encourage peer influence, and promote positive behaviour change toward more sustainable lives by utilizing social media platforms successfully. However, in order to guarantee the legitimacy and efficacy of sustainability-related marketing initiatives on social media, it is imperative to address issues like greenwashing and information overload.

The Function of Influencers in Encouraging Sustainable Consumption: In Karami, A., Brandtzæg, P. B., & Seeberg, A. H. (2020), the authors investigate how influencers use social media to encourage sustainable consumption. They examine how well influencer marketing initiatives educate followers about environmental issues and motivate them to adopt eco-friendly practices. The study investigates the ways in which influencers might use their platforms to promote sustainable lifestyles and companies, thereby generating favourable social and environmental effects.

According to Lazaroiu, G. (2019), co-creation and consumer engagement on social media platforms In order to encourage sustainable consumption, Lazaroiu looks into co-creation and consumer involvement potential on social media platforms. The study investigates how participatory marketing strategies can be used by firms and customers to develop and promote sustainable products and projects. Lazaroiu highlights how crucial it is to give customers the tools they need to co-create value and influence sustainability agendas via social media interactions.

The purpose of Jahdi, K. S., & Acik, R. (2017) was measuring the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Sustainable Consumption: Acik and Jahdi talk about approaches to gauge how social media marketing affects the results of sustainable consumption. They offer criteria and methods for evaluating the success of marketing efforts linked to sustainability on social media. In order to assess the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives, the study emphasizes the significance of monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs) such as consumer awareness, engagement, and behaviour change.
They are Addressing Greenwashing and Increasing Consumer Trust, Per Belz, F.-M., & Peattie, S. (2009). Belz and Peattie investigate methods for dealing with greenwashing and boosting consumer trust in sustainability communications on social media. They talk about how transparency policies, eco-labels, and certification programs can prevent greenwashing and increase customer trust in sustainable businesses. The study highlights how important it is to have transparent and trustworthy communication methods in order to build consumer credibility and confidence.

With all references of above mentioned all literature reviews authors add up Research Implications and Future Directions: Lee, S. H., & Lee, S. Y. (2021). From a marketing standpoint, Lee & Lee suggest potential avenues for further research as well as implications for the study of social media's role in encouraging sustainable consumption. They point to new trends as opportunities to improve consumer engagement and encourage sustainable behavior changes, like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and immersive storytelling. The study highlights the value of multidisciplinary strategies and cooperative research projects in tackling intricate sustainability issues in the digital era.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The survey comprises four main sections. The initial section focuses on gathering demographic information from respondents, including details such as gender, age, education level, and income. The second section explores the knowledge and attitudes of young consumers toward environmental and sustainable consumption. Moving to the third section, it delves into the social media habits of young individuals, examining the frequency with which they encounter content related to sustainable consumption across various product categories.

The fourth section prompts respondents to express the extent to which social media content influences their considerations when making sustainable purchases within specific product categories. The study encompasses eight selected goods and service categories: foodstuffs, clothing and fashion, mobile phones and other electronics, and personal care products. The selection aims to include items regularly used by younger consumers, offering a comprehensive exploration of different product characteristics, such as durability, cost, and other factors expected to influence young consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption.

**Data collection and sample**

Data was gathered through convenience sampling, focusing solely on the respondents' year of birth (between 1980 and 2010 to align with Gen Y and Gen Z segments). Invitations to participate were extended through online questionnaire. After excluding incomplete questionnaires and respondents born outside the specified years, 159 cases remained for subsequent analysis. The sample exhibits a skew toward female respondents, constituting 67.92% of the total sample. A majority of participants (55.35%) identify as students and a significant proportion (51.57%) fall within the 18-30 age range.

**RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

Discussion-I

Table 1 shows young consumers' attitudes on four assertions that indicate their environmental worries, desire to pay more for environmentally friendly items, climate scepticism, and perceived consumer efficacy. The data reveals that a substantial proportion of consumers 86.1% agree or completely agree with the first statement, indicating their genuine care for the environment, however their readiness to invest extra for eco-friendly products is little less i.e. 43.4%. In the third question 51.57% respondents are aware and accept the reality of climate change, however 27.67% are neutral about that. Ironically 62.89% of the total respondents are hesitant to make personal efforts as they are either neutral or they are pessimistic about the success of individual efforts in the sustainable consumption.
Table 1: Attitude towards and knowledge of sustainable consumption (N=159)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about the environment?</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>29.56</td>
<td>46.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you prepared to spend a bit more for a product or service that is more ecologically friendly than the cheaper option?</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>15.72</td>
<td>33.96</td>
<td>23.27</td>
<td>20.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you sure if climate change is really happening?</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>27.67</td>
<td>35.22</td>
<td>16.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It matters what you purchase or consume individually even if you can't have an influence on pollution or natural resource issues all alone?</td>
<td><strong>8.81</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.72</strong></td>
<td><strong>38.36</strong></td>
<td>15.72</td>
<td>21.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion-II

Table 2 indicates the self-perceived level of understanding among young consumers regarding sustainable consumption. It reveals that 63 of respondents claim to possess little knowledge, while 56 and 8 states they have sufficient or complete knowledge, respectively.

Table 2: Knowledge of sustainable consumption? (N=159)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows almost everything about this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion-III

Table 3 validates the extensive use of social media among young consumers. 125 of them devote at least one hour daily to social media, while 51 spend at least three hours or more each day on these platforms. Only 34 out of 159 are less friendly to social media platforms.

Table 3: How much of your time do you spend each day on social media? (N=159)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Than An Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 5 Hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion-IV

In Table 4, the first two columns illustrate the mean and SD of frequency with which young consumers encounter sustainable content on social media across various product categories. Apparels, food items, and personal care products emerge as the top product categories in terms of exposure to sustainability-related content, ranked in descending order (mean = 3.27, standard deviation = 1.16; mean = 3.13, standard deviation = 1.09). Conversely, mobile phones, electronics items represent the product categories with the least exposure to sustainability-related content (mean = 1.66, S.D. = 0.95).

Third and fourth columns represent the importance to sustainability placed by the respondents while making purchases. Data show highest mean value of 3.19 to the apparels and fashion items while the lowest to electronics items.

Fifth and sixth columns are about the degree of impact that social media played on practising sustainability in relation to purchase of the specified products. On studying the data, we find personal care products with highest mean value of 2.95, and electronics items again with the lowest mean value of 1.79.

Table 4: Sustainable content on social media platforms and its association with sustainability in buying (N=159)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product/services</th>
<th>Mean¹</th>
<th>SD¹</th>
<th>Mean²</th>
<th>SD²</th>
<th>Mean³</th>
<th>SD³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparels and fashion</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food items</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care products</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics Items such as mobiles</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How frequently do you encounter sustainability-related content on social media in relation to...?
2. How much importance do you place on sustainability when making purchases...?
3. To what degree has content on social media impacted your thoughts on practicing sustainability in relation to...?

[Scale (For first question): 1=Never, 2=rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Very often] [Scale (For second and third question): 1=Not at all, 2=To a minor degree, 3=To some degree, 4=To a high degree, and 5=To a very high degree]

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Recommendations for marketers

In leveraging social media to promote sustainable consumption, marketers can employ several strategies to maximize their impact:

- They must craft authentic and compelling narratives that highlight the environmental benefits and ethical considerations of sustainable products and practices. Share stories, testimonials, and behind-the-scenes content to engage audiences and build trust.
- Collaborate with influencers who have a genuine passion for sustainability and a loyal following. Influencers can effectively amplify messages about sustainable products and lifestyles, reaching diverse audiences and driving engagement.
- Provide informative and educational content about sustainable consumption, including tips for eco-friendly living and insights into the environmental impact of consumer choices. Empowering consumers with knowledge can inspire behaviour change and foster a sense of responsibility.
- Be transparent about your brand's sustainability efforts, including sourcing, production processes, and environmental initiatives. Demonstrating accountability and commitment to sustainability can enhance brand credibility and resonate with socially conscious consumers.
Partner with like-minded brands, organizations, and influencers to amplify sustainability messaging and reach new audiences. Collaborative initiatives can broaden reach, enhance credibility, and drive collective action towards sustainability goals.

2. Future directions for research

Future research in the domain of social media's impact on sustainable consumption offers several promising directions. Longitudinal studies can track changes in consumer behaviours over time, while cross-cultural comparisons can unveil cultural nuances. Exploring the effectiveness of different social media platforms and the influence of algorithmic recommendations is crucial. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies like augmented reality and virtual reality warrants investigation. Additionally, understanding the dynamics of online communities and peer interactions can inform community-based interventions, while behavioural interventions and measurement tools can be developed and evaluated. Ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and misinformation need addressing, alongside exploring policy implications. By delving into these areas, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of social media's role in fostering sustainable consumption behaviours and inform evidence-based interventions for a more sustainable future.

CONCLUSION

It’s evident that social media plays a significant role in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions related to sustainable consumption. The research highlights the increasing awareness among young consumers regarding environmental issues and their willingness to embrace sustainable practices. Social media platforms serve as powerful tools for disseminating information, fostering engagement, and influencing consumer choices.

Through authentic storytelling, educational content, and user-generated campaigns, marketers can effectively leverage social media to promote sustainable consumption. Collaborative efforts with influencers, brands, and online communities further amplify sustainability messaging and drive collective action. However, challenges such as algorithmic biases, ethical considerations, and misinformation underscore the need for careful navigation and responsible marketing practices.

Future research directions emphasize the importance of longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and exploring the impact of emerging technologies on sustainable consumption behaviours. Additionally, addressing ethical concerns and policy implications will be crucial in ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives on social media platforms.

REFERENCES

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